PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY

CHELSEA COON

ENDURAMORPHOSIS

PERFORMANCE AS TRANSFORMATION THROUGH ENDURANCE

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Enduramorphosis

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Enduramorphosis

Performance as Transformation through Endurance

Chelsea Coon

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@all_anything

A Foreword

Jörg Sternagel

Admittedly, I have never met the performer Chelsea Coon in person, face to face. Therefore, I have never seen her performances live, somewhere on location. Instead, I got to know her and her work virtually via Instagram, where once a picture of one of her performances from her account "all_anything" appeared in my timeline, presumably by chance, but apparently by algorithmic calculation via my academic interest in performances. The picture that occurred to me and that I immediately liked with a double tap of my thumb was a still of her performance *strangeness* that was streamed live for one hour during the 24-hour Virtual Performance Festival "Routine Maintenance" at the University of North Florida Gallery of Art, curated by Jessica Borusky in 2021.

In the picture, we see Chelsea Coon dressed in black, balancing on a foam block. She performs on her knees and does not touch the ground around her, which is likely covered with a gray carpet with small sparkling pieces all over it (which it actually is not as it appears, as it is a dense accumulation of mirror glass, which I learned in an email from the performer later). What immediately struck me was her act of balancing on this tiny foam block and with it her bodily ability to endure such an act. From there, with my liking of the post, I continued to be interested in this performance, and not only read the caption of the post, but started to search for more information on it. After having taken a closer look at her Instagram account, having followed her and being in touch with her via messenger and email, I logged into another online platform, Vimeo, and watched an extract of the performance online. I finally arrived at the point where movement and time came into the image, and Chelsea Coon's act of balancing continued in space, watchable but also audible since we, as online viewers and listeners, hear her move around and listen to her breathing, which becomes partly heavier through her exercise in endurance. I call it exercise because what she is showing us here is a possibility of what a body can do and, to be more

precise, in her case, *must* do within the project of this performance: as we learn from the accompanying text describing her performance, the small sparkling pieces around her are from a broken mirror. This adds another dimension to what Chelsea Coon endures here: it is not only the act of balancing on a foam block that has to be considered in its endurance but also the threat of the shattered mirror glass around her that contributes to this endurance because it opens up the possibility of hurting herself. This is why we might also hear ourselves breathing more heavily during her performance, being worried because there are moments when she has to put her hand on the ground and therefore interrupts her act of balancing, where she then touches the broken mirror glass and even seemingly cuts one of her hands—a moment in which we hope that we subsequently do not see her blood on the assumed carpet, but just the red-colored backside of the broken mirror glass that has fallen off her hands when she resumes her act of balancing (it is, I learn via email from the performer later, indeed her blood).

This is all quite challenging and adds more layers to my initial interest in this performance and Chelsea Coon's performances in general: what I describe here, in my experience of watching her performance online, added by similar responses of students with whom I shared the video of it in a class on media aesthetics, is already foreshadowed in the title of the performance: "strangeness." There is indeed something strange, inside and outside of myself, belonging and not belonging to me (or even something uncanny) when seeing a still of this performance, or watching an extract of this performance online because it draws your attention to the performer's act of balancing on a foam block while being surrounded by flesh cutting pieces of glass, but it also draws your attention to yourself watching this performer's act of balancing on a foam block while being surrounded by flesh cutting pieces of glass. Consider that this performance was initially streamed live from a webcam for one hour, enabling us as viewers and listeners to take part in it from our laptops, tablets, or smartphones at home or elsewhere, watching Chelsea Coon enduring this situation she performs. The "strangeness" of that performance occurs successively from multiple angles, all centered around her balancing body on the foam block, with her repetitive shifting postures and gestures, with her moving, breathing, and enduring. The performing situation she creates here appears to be alien to us, at least in such a setting. We might not be able to even imagine enduring such a situation, but the implication of this strangeness is far more complicated than this immediate mimetic affect seems to be. Given the year of its livestream and the way the

performance is developing, we do share the space and the time with her nevertheless because what is rendered visible and hearable here is a state of vulnerability where not only the setting plays its part, but where especially the performing body acts out what is hurtful and hard to endure. This is emphasized by Chelsea Coon's repetitive postures and gestures when she lets her head slowly sink between her arms or cautiously moves around looking down, for example. Note that she barely addresses us as viewers and listeners at all. She rarely looks into the webcam and at us. From here, the state of vulnerability is even more pronounced than initially experienced. Consider the possible voyeuristic implications of watching someone, here a woman, specifically in the realm of a male gaze toward the female body, moving around live and in front of a webcam. From there, the state of vulnerability is far more pronounced than originally experienced because it also renders a state of loneliness which is a particularly common state during the time the performance took place: the time of the coronavirus pandemic.

From the text accompanying the performance, we further learn that this performance was prepared during one of the longest and very strict lockdowns in the performer's apartment in Melbourne. It was a means for her to continue to perform and to address the issue at hand, namely the state of temporal suspension she lives in and the rather extreme circumstances she endures. And this is where Chelsea Coon's concept of *enduramorphosis* becomes crucial: We arrive at a point of emergence within which a particular strangeness occurs, be it for Coon and her performing body on the foam block in front of a webcam, be it for us and our watching bodies on a couch or elsewhere behind the webcam in front of a screen, and be it for all of us during a strict lockdown during a life-threatening pandemic where the air we share and breathe has become contaminated. And this is where Chelsea Coon's book on *enduramorphosis* becomes crucial for Performance Philosophy in its reflection on dynamic, responsive, multisensorial, and queer sets of processes of the performing body: It highlights *transformative* experiences from the point of view and practice of the performer during her performance where she might act differently than she initially planned to do which is not visible or hearable to us, the viewers, and listeners of the performance. Phenomenologically speaking, in writing, she reveals the inalienable *pathic* dimension of bodily experience. She draws upon corporeal experiences that befall her, touch her, preempt her, that she is subjected to and challenged by. Ethical dimensions unfold by way of the receptiveness and attentiveness of the senses, by way of corporeal capacities in mobility and fragility;

they come to pass where presence and absence are constantly enmeshing in each other, and where alienness to one's own body is experienced in a challenging and incalculable way. In different words and brought back to the implications of Chelsea Coon's performance on "strangeness" and other performances as well, transformative experiences render visible and hearable the creativity and ability, but also the limitation of one's lived body. This is especially valid during the pandemic that illustrates the factuality of our lives, our physical vulnerability, the fragility of our ways of life that we take for granted, the precarious state of the world in which we live. This is difficult to accept because it requires an understanding of our existence as fragile and contingent.

Jörg Sternagel is a scholar in media philosophy at Universität Passau. He is the author of Ethics of Alterity: Aisthetics of Existence *(Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).*

Introduction

In the Body

A Primary Experiential Account of the Phenomenon

The first time I experienced what I now understand to have been a unique aspect of a small, yet present, instance of *enduramorphosis* was during my performance *Particle Accumulation (Reversing Velocities)* in 2012. Looking back in time, this performance marks a starting point for what would develop into a decade-long investigation of my body and its experiences as a critical part of my art practice. Through an embodied approach, I wanted to form a better understanding of the ways that endurance can take form in performance works to a point where it leads to an impactful, transformative moment because this point of a marked shift is where I had felt myself, as the performer, change within the work because of the effects that arose from realizing the performance. The experience was marked by a high degree of strangeness and was complicated in that it was difficult to communicate. For several years, this experiential phenomenon was elusive to my attempts to translate it into words; despite this incapacity, I understood with a degree of certainty that something important was happening. The felt impacts were undeniable because, with each performance in remarkably different ways, there was an emergence of a sensation that altered my perspective in the moment while also having enduring effects on my body long after the performance had ended.

Several factors informed my curiosity on the accounts of firsthand experiences in performance. Foremost, my desire to feel through my process while performing solo, one-off performance art compositional frameworks provided a unique opportunity to compare differences and commonalities within the works. In the studio, while developing new works and testing processes, I was curious to find a way to artistically convey concepts regarding how situations or stressors I experienced in life could be utilized more meaningfully as abstractions that enabled these to become forms and motifs that informed the structural

aspects of my work both formally and conceptually. It was through my ongoing experience of performing endurance works that I realized my motivations were becoming clearer. The media philosopher Jörg Sternagel has reflected on the interrelation of affects between doing and thinking, which has useful application in the instance of performance art as "*The first model or nearest object you can observe is you yourself*."[1]

Artistically I was always seeking a new challenge to push myself and to raise the bar higher in each performance. I wanted to challenge not only the limits of my body, but the limits of my mind, the frame, installation, and attention of audiences. To do this I found critical ways to "observe" myself as the "first model" and "nearest object" in the performance art compositions, and in doing so learned to sustain my focus, which was integrated into the performance structure both aesthetically and conceptually. For instance, through repetition, paced breathing, counterbalance strategies, calculated movements, and the discrete preparatory aspects of pre-performance regimens, including stretches, well-calculated intake of food, fluids, and medications 24–72 hours before performing, are important. Time and time again, I experienced failure; that is, the works did not go according to plan, or unanticipated shifts occurred that I was unable to adapt into the performance, and so on. Through my failures, I learned to cultivate strategies to control my mind and body in these rigorous performance frameworks that required so much of me physically and emotionally. This "control" I learned was always to a degree, and never in totality, and was only ever able to be maintained to a point before I would have to let go and submit to the performance. Put simply, to be in control means relinquishing control.

Each performance presented a new opportunity to learn another dynamic, critical aspect of the variability of endurance performance art and its interconnection to a practice of discipline on mental and physical levels. This said "discipline" is indeed put to the test each time I perform because the practice of performance has, and continues to, teach me that *endurance requires discipline, and reciprocally that discipline requires endurance*. Endurance performance has positioned me to understand circumstance-specific ways during a work to achieve a focused state of mind, including strategies such as maintaining attention toward a single thought, controlling my breath to alleviate pain, and incorporating new gestures to allow my body to move and keep my blood circulating, among others. I set the tone of each performance with my energy, which determines my anticipated capacity, and speed of my pace moving

through sequences of images and informs the overall feeling that emanates from the work. Additionally, the process has taught me that on the other side of the performance (and often during the process of the thing itself unfolding), despite something being painful and gut-wrenching, there is still a possibility for beauty. Transformation always holds a possibility of this beauty. In getting to the other side of imposed or self-constructed hells in performance, one can see and feel more clearly the limited, expansive, perception-bending, extremely precious resource we all have—*time*.

Particle Accumulation (Reversing Velocities) (2012)

Particle Accumulation (Reversing Velocities) was a 45-minute performance where I attempted to articulate concepts of irreversible endings producing new forms for another possible beginning. My slow-paced, highly repetitive acts proceeded within an intricately designed installation of a large circular ring, comprising broken glass, which I was in the center of. The work focused on the complexities of time, the laws of physics, and the limits of the human body. This performance took place at a university in the United States, where the site-specific context came with a strict set of rules to deter all performance art students hoping to showcase their boldness and fearlessness in their works, with one of the more heavily enforced rules being "no bleeding." I had every intention of being as careful as possible, handling the glass shards with care and precision. Despite being interested in pushing the limits of the body, I wanted to respect the no flesh-breaking rule in this context. I had this preconceived expectation that while creating a work, I would be in control, the material would function in accordance with my plan, I would be completely aware of time, and the experience of performing this work would produce a calm, contemplative, and reflective space for me as well as my audience while sustaining this repetitious composition.

As this was one of my first performances, I was shocked to discover I was wrong about all my preconceived expectations. Within the first five minutes of my performance, I accidentally deeply cut the inside of my hand open and began profusely bleeding. At the first sight of the blood, I felt panic and then shame for failing to be in control of the situation. The strongest emotion was a wave of dread curling up from the bottom of my stomach into my throat. I had put so much time and thought into this performance composition, including

the extensive effort that went into setting up the installation of the glass ring shards and sketches of my design. It was my first public performance, and I did not want to end the performance or get penalized for breaking the strictest rule in place. I decided to keep performing despite the bleeding in the hopes that I could conceal it from the audience for the full duration. I was not sure this was the best idea, but I was in-the-moment making this decision, and it felt like the only way to move forward. To adapt to the circumstance, I repeatedly wiped the blood off every few seconds onto the side of my black dress to conceal the blood as best I could. Thankfully, no one was sitting behind me. Over time, the right side near my upper thigh became too saturated, so I began to use the fabric tucked between my legs while I maintained a kneeling position. Reflecting on this work and process, it is helpful to consider the insights of art historian Amelia Jones on the de-manifesting of art in performance as "most effectively and consistently taken place through performance and bodily strategies, which have the potential to de-contain (to release explosions of that which cannot be contained): smells, durational temporalities, blood, boredom, affect, and more."[2]

The decontaining that occurred in this performance was through the materials puncturing my body, which resulted in the releasing of "explosions of that which cannot be contained." In the instance of this work was the presence of "affect," "durational temporalities," and, notably, "blood." The action of wiping and concealing the blood in the creases of my clothing between wrapping the individual fragments of glass in the thread was so frequently repeated that it became a gesture integral to the work. In retrospect, where I am at a distance, I can reflect on the gesture with the insights gained from it. The gesture could have been interpreted as a symbolic, repetitive gesture about the reconnection of the body to that time and space—a gesture for grounding and presence that was almost desperate in its need to grasp, feel, and understand something. Every glass shard I picked up off the floor, I clasped between my tender fingertips and began wrapping in my spool of thread; after completing this phase, I would lower my hands to my waist and clench the side of my black dress to encourage the fabric to absorb my blood.

Repetition was a critical element of *Particle Accumulation* as well as my other performance compositions, where I later came to anticipate the possibility of enduramorphosis due to the conditions of the work. The onset of enduramorphosis alters the temporal experience of the work, time, and space. Each iteration of the phenomenon of enduramorphosis is distinct, regardless of repeating frameworks of previous performances or exhausting the body through

labor and repetition, and so on. Even in instances of repeated performances of the same artwork, it never occurs the same way twice. A proposed unifying factor is that it can be characterized by its consistent manifestation as an elusive, experiential strangeness marked by dynamic aspects of space, time, and the body, which are in continuous flux. Importantly, enduramorphosis is an experience that culminates from a processual unfolding of accumulated endurance over time in the performance composition. A strategy that I use as a performance artist is creating frameworks for the performance that will challenge me with compositional elements including high levels of repetition, prolonged duration, forms, props, and more. A useful insight into repetition as a significant component in work is explained by philosopher Sara Ahmed: "The works of repetition is not neutral work; it orients the body in some ways rather than others."[3]

The processes in *Particle Accumulation* included repeatedly stringing the glass particles and wiping my hands to conceal my bleeding body, which was ultimately sustained for the entire duration of the performance. At the end of the performance, I removed all the glass shards from the ring structure I made and wrapped each one in blue thread, pulling them back into the center situated by my knees, where it formed an imperfect pile of glass shard pieces suggesting the potential of a possible re-accumulation of parts. After everyone clapped, I opened my palms and faced them outwards to reveal that they were saturated in blood. Immediately, I was taken to have my hands sterilized and bandaged. While this happened, the audience reported the work was meditative, allowing them to focus on deep thoughts for the concentrated duration of my performance. Despite the end of the work feeling jarring, some audience members reported the predominant experience of peace and calm while witnessing the work, which I believe was in part because they were so stunned that they could miss such an obvious event unfolding in front of them. Learning their impressions was strange to me because, while it was my intention for these experiences to occur, my own experience as the performer was from the onset stressful and forced me into a state of heightened focus that eventually turned into a state of acceptance as the work went on. I learned in this instance about the profound difference in audience perception versus the experience the performer can have. As the artist Marina Abramović reminds us, "Art serves to make the invisible visible."[4] Through my art, I learned it is possible and often necessary to make certain aspects of the "invisible" experience "visible" by continuing the performance through what is often an intense range of emotions and challenging

circumstances. Additionally, I learned something that seems as visually intense and painful as a cut that causes profuse bleeding can be concealed in plain sight, and that art can poetically communicate dynamic, acute aspects through visual forms, gestures, and metaphors. This instance marked the first time I was opened to the magic inherent in the complexities and experiences of performance.[5]

A Brief Introduction to the Phenomenon, Processes, and Transformations

Enduramorphosis is a phenomenon that addresses an important, experiential aspect of a dynamic process that arises *in the body* while realizing an endurance performance artwork and is the theory comprising this book's primary focus. "In the body" precisely describes the location where the phenomenon of enduramorphosis occurs and indicates where I have been able to observe a marked sensation of change that is often marked by a felt shift within my body that is transformational. By "transformational," I mean that the experience of enduramorphosis produces a critical perspectival alteration that profoundly changes my focus and attention while I am performing and can, in turn, also affect the experience of the performance and can, in certain instances, affect the aesthetics of the unfolding work in responsive interrelations of the body's shifting experiences of time and space. Endurance performance dynamically produces the means through which its elemental components affect one another, producing shifts throughout the work. Select methods include acts of endurance, insofar as endurance is something done, whereas enduramorphosis is something that opens through *experience*. Due to the importance of felt impacts that arise in the process while undertaking a performance art piece, I argue that it is within the process, that is, being amid performing, that an important aspect of the method is indeed in the artist's positioning of ideal circumstances that can lead to enduramorphosis. It is important to also consider ever-present factors from the onset of the performance because "[p]erhaps 'performance art' can more effectively be understood as a nexus of the messy, unruly contingencies of which it takes form—which I propose as: space-time-body [. . .] to expand the possibilities of the way [. . .] endurance performance, as a medium, endures."[6]

While enduramorphosis is a complicated phenomenon to articulate in concrete terms because it is elusive to defining parameters, fluid, experiential, unpredictable, and never occurs the same way twice—what I can offer in clear

terms is that the embodied experience of enduramorphosis is intrinsically related to a felt state of presence, that is, being in-the-moment, at such a pronounced degree that perspectival shifts are possible. This results from the body being positioned to receive a change in this vulnerable and highly present state of undertaking a performance artwork. I have come to understand more about the peculiar aspects of this dynamic phenomenon through my direct experiences, which have revealed that enduramorphosis occurs in unique, case-by-case ways specific to the circumstances informing individual experience. Enduramorphosis is largely contingent on my performing body, as well as the range of conditions both in and around the production of the performance itself, including contingencies with the "messy, unruly" nexus that I call "space-time-body."[7]

Direct experience is an important way to unpack the nuances of the importance of enduramorphosis in endurance performance artworks, as it provides insight into the firsthand knowledges of practitioner insights.[8] In my production process, I consider how to best design immersive frameworks to create different experiences for myself and the audience. There is a great deal of variation that is possible when working with elements of space, time, gestures, sculptures, sound, lenses, new technologies, and props. Performing in numerous endurance performance frameworks, including ones with variant forms or installation sculptural components, has required responsive, adaptive gestures improvised in-the-moment into my original scores. This responsiveness to changes that can arise at the moment while performing does force a particular movement of my body in ways that are suited to *survive* the performance. I could not have anticipated that I would come to learn that enduramorphosis cannot be anticipated from the onset of planned work; instead, its unfolding differs each time, and sometimes it cannot be perceived by audiences.

There is a bind between the elusiveness of enduramorphosis and its potential to manifest in forms. It is a significant phenomenon in performance philosophy in terms of the experience felt within the composition and the resultant theory around practice. These factors have motivated my writing on the phenomenon of enduramorphosis; I attempt to reveal unique facts about it through sharing aspects of my direct experience within the process of performing and the instance where a distinct shift was marked by the presence of the phenomenon of enduramorphosis. For instance, enduramorphosis arises in the body. While the body reaches its physical and/or psychological *limit* while performing, enduramorphosis can have a higher degree of occurring in the performance

depending on a range of factors regarding the body, its relationship to time, and the impacts of space. The word "limit" is strategically used as a descriptor of effective relations, excess, and duress. My intended use of "limit" is to direct focus on a reconsideration of the term with a focus on the fluidity of possibilities when considering "limits" as more synonymous with being over the threshold of one's limits, that is, *limitless*. Rather than suggesting a fixed position, which is implied with the historical use of the word "limits," it is useful with endurance to consider the non-linear and different outcomes that limitless experiences, expressions, and forms can take. In experimental art practice and endurance performance frameworks, it is critical to consider possibilities beyond categorized, preconceived, or demarcated "limits" of the body, time, and space. While the term limit is questionable as it implies the existence of something that is nevertheless negated through the emergence of that about which I am trying to write, it is useful to redeploy the word "limit" in this context to extend beyond the perceived idea of limits, that is, into the phenomenological traces and reorientation possibilities of enduramorphosis.

Reflecting on enduramorphosis as a boundary-defying phenomenon that redefines and pre-positions perspectives of semantics, structures, and forms in this way has led to the realization that this phenomenon is thoroughly enmeshed in my own body's abilities to withstand the extreme, constructed environments of my performance designs, that is, the installation, gestures, and time parameters of the work. The work adapts to a point where I am also challenged to bend, shift, and move responsively with the changing forces and directions that the work inevitably takes, which are a direct result of what can happen in a live, responsive/reactive work of performance art when the artist is deliberately pushing the limits of their endurance. Importantly, the emotional and physical effects felt during the process are critical components of endurance performance designs, opening the possibility of a reorientative perspectival shift for the performer. Philosopher Sara Ahmed offers a useful explanation of the complexity between emotions, that is, experience, and the effects of orientations, that is, understood here as the result of pushing against limits as "[e]motions involve such affective forms of (re)orientation. [. . .] affecting relations of proximity and distance between bodies [. . .] Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but [. . .] 'who' or 'what' we direct our energy and attention toward."[9]

With this in mind, the contextual suggestion of "limits" in endurance performance practice is importantly interconnected to the body's unique

orientations (to time and space) which are shaped and affected by the "relations of proximity and distance" through different ways of considering the relationship between "proximity" and toward "who" and "what we direct our energy and attention toward."[10] Importantly, "what" and where I "direct" my "energy and attention toward" affects the way my attention, focus, and potential to exceed my limits can open the possibility for enduramorphosis to occur. When the earliest instances of experiential shifts were felt while performing, I did not have the language to articulate the nuance of what I was feeling inside my body. While I was performing, I was certainly aware of the transformation that I felt in-the-moment creating the work. Additionally, I was motivated conceptually and aesthetically to continue to create endurance performance frameworks to keep pushing myself into spaces, scenarios, and situations where the chance to experience what I now call enduramorphosis was possible.

It is difficult to speak of something elusive, nebulous, felt within the body, and processual in that it unfolds in the present with focus and clarity. To even try to put into words a feeling that is felt differently in each instance it occurs is daunting and educes a disorienting sensation, in that I am at once tongue-tied and perceiving a rupture in my sense of orientation, that is, my immediate situatedness and relationality. This strangeness of trying to grasp that which does not present itself in a form that is easily graspable is an enduring reminder that orientations we experience, and as Ahmed proposed, "shape not only how we inhabit space" but also how we understand "this world of shared inhabitance."[11] It becomes a significant way to understand the interconnected facets of spatial impacts on perception and sensation. As I have come to learn through time, practice, and immersion in the performance process, it is critical to have distance to see things with more nuanced depth and clarity, and even hone an appreciation for the capacity to consider it from several different perspectives. "Distance," that is, the amount of time and space that has advanced from the performance event itself, can provide the necessary circumstance to digest experiences and the opportunity to make sense of them—to draw connections, observe nuances, and see it from different angles and perspectives. It is really through such intense reflection and the ongoing building of what later becomes an archive of artistic works over a substantial period that one can begin to observe key aspects of the similarities, differences, and motivations that underlie the work cohesively.

While retroactive accounts of performances, including ephemera and documentation such as images, relics, and written or oral histories, can provide precise narratives, artistically I experience a tension with this fact. The process

of trying to make sense does feel this way, in that the process is rarely, in my experience, neat or containable. What I mean is that the messiness of the feelings and experiences that I had in the studio while developing my artworks was more pronounced in their felt effects on the actual performance works. The messiness of being in a human body that is vulnerable, fierce, feeling, thinking, breathing, bleeding, exhausted, enduring—it does not match up experientially with a brief, clinical statement assigned to the work retroactively. Indeed, the disconnect between the "making of the performance" and "the writing on the performance" became an undeniable space of such tension that it pushed me toward wanting to write—to learn aspects of what can be translated, and through pushing against limits of understanding, to see and know what defies translation from art to text and instead remains elusive (and felt).

Art and experiences often defy the neat constraints of a well-packaged text. While language descriptors of the work in visual and performing art contexts tend to remove the ambiguity, strangeness, and parts that cannot be easily qualified, I feel it is precisely within the space where words begin to fail to describe aspects of feelings that important conceptual aspects resultant of the design of the work are occurring. Importantly, a feeling is happening because something has been provoked inside the body. Similarly, the intensity and peculiar strangeness of the experiential transformation felt in an endurance performance manifest within my performing body.

It may seem obvious that the type of reflection, that is, a consideration of the work that benefits from the clarity of retroactively being able to look back at it, is not desirable nor foregrounded in the production of the performance itself. As an artist, I have come to know through my experience in the production and creation of performances that it is important in endurance performance compositions to immerse myself in the creative process fully despite not knowing the precise direction the work may need to adaptively take for any myriad of reasons. This means that I always aim to reach acceptance of this fact before I start each work. I know that the consequences of the nature of my compositions and the high level of physical and emotional demands of the work will require me to push myself up to and beyond my limits. At that particular point, I will not know exactly how the work will go. I can hypothesize trajectories and develop ideas for numerous alternative ways that the performance can adapt, shift, and pivot. But it is important to note that specific predictions on the anticipated experience of the work are at best guesswork and can come close to a trajectory chosen in the shifting

performance, though experience has made evident time and time again that no outcome that relies on a performer pushing beyond their limits can fully be predicted from the onset of a performance. Informative to my thinking on this process relative to performance are the insights of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who importantly described how hypotheses can be important in gauging what can withstand the test, as, "[t]o say that perception is and has always been an 'introspection of the mind' is to define it not by what it gives us [. . .] it withstands the hypothesis of non-existence; it is to identify from the first the positive with a negation of negation."[12]

While I know the above to be true through experience, I still struggle with this unknown factor of the work while simultaneously understanding that it is precisely the tension that comes from not knowing that is intrinsic to the performance process of endurance works that motivates me to continue working in this way. First, because outcomes of the performance, including the significantly felt impacts within the body, cannot be predetermined from the onset of the work—*I am not in control.* This consideration matters because it acknowledges that one's physical and emotional state is pushing the degree of safety a body may or may not already feel before the onset of performance, and often does push against vulnerable points of tension, energy, thinking, and more. These insights detail integral components of my thinking and processual development of my performance frameworks, as well as the core issue that accompanies the writing of this text: What is the experiential phenomenon enduramorphosis and why does it matter for performance practice, performance philosophy, and what is gained from theoretically knowing more about this? To address these questions, it is important to provide some further context to explain some distinct qualities and characteristics of the phenomenon in relation and its manifestation as,

> [e]nduramorphosis is a point that doubles and reveals complexities within the work through its interplay with the non-neutral elements of space-time-body which are unruly and messy. The experience of undergoing enduramorphosis as a performer, and the possibility of bearing witness to this phenomenon as an audience, can feed back into itself in the process [. . .] Here, importantly, my perspective is informed by experience, for this transformation occurs in the body, but is not always perceived by an audience [. . .] When my performances get closer to enduramorphosis, I begin to feel unsure if sustaining the work is possible and begin to question if I should end the work, or embrace the unknown, and the potential of failure by carrying on [. . .] developing performance structures requires constant reorientating, fluidity, and adaptability to change,

> and [. . .] shift in response to the body's evolving condition over time and are always in response to space.[13]

This is complex work that requires "constant reorientating, fluidity, and adaptability to change" and a great deal of vulnerability coupled with the ability to withstand seeing artworks through, especially when control must be relinquished to do so. Failure is a complicated consideration and a question that I certainly confront in nearly every performance work I make, as the structure gets more physically and/or mentally exhausting. This failure forces me to consider my options, including "the potential of failure by carrying on," that is, not only ending the performance before any meaningful concept was transmitted to my audience but on a personal level, I contemplate the failure of ending the performance before it had the opportunity to undergo a transformative shift of enduramorphosis. Questions such as: how and for what reasons can or ought I move back and forth from, on the one hand, descriptions of the bodily and aesthetic qualities of my performance works to, on the other hand, analysis of the peculiar phenomenon of strangeness that is enduramorphosis that, in many ways, endures as a focal concern and key interest in my art. Turning to my early works and process provides key insights into how this thinking by way of the multidisciplinary artistic process and the thematics that underpin my conceptual works came to take form. The artist-philosopher Tōmei June Bacon reflects on the persistence of themes in my practice regarding body-space interrelationship, offering a glimpse into motivations as "Coon's practice wrestles with the astronomical universe to create a phenomenological World in which her work encounters the experiential. She uses her practice as a microscope to focus upon the intangible, the ephemeral and the matter that links us."[14]

In my early body of performance works, Tōmei June Bacon observed firsthand instances of my capacity to communicate aspects of these large concepts through performance to "create a phenomenological World" and to communicate the dynamic factors of experience to address "the ephemeral and the matter that links us." This approach in my live practice was always considered from my perspective as a visual artist, in that it went hand in hand with my experiences as a painter and in my lens-based practices, that is, photography, video, and new media extensions. It is, therefore, apt to locate such referential points at the forefront of my explanation to inform the portfolio of work examples this book addresses in-depth. Visual arts conceptual trends and methods are an important position to take; it makes clear the starting point for my artistic inquiry and

informs the resultant concepts and forms that comprise each art piece. Each of these explores thematics of ephemerality, erasure, disappearance, minimalism, traces, and expand to its opposite themes of lasting forms in my works, including steels, plastics, concrete, architectures, as well as gendered and sociopolitical orderings on the body that are beyond its control.

Momentum in vision and communicating themes important to me came from understanding that nothing is neutral, including the vast depths of the night sky, which have comprised a core theme in my painting and photographic works from 2010 to the present. For instance, skyscapes such as the limits of outer space, instead of being a "neutral space," are better understood as a loaded site in that it is not only sacred to nearly every culture globally but is also importantly understood through the current way that the sky, airspace, and our solar system are governed, ruled, and ordered by powerful international government bodies as well as private entities. To talk about space, the reality of space needs to be acknowledged, and from here, the effects space has on the body become more acute. With these rare insights gained from experience as a performer and visual artist, I have developed and tested numerous performance designs and frameworks, which have in turn positioned my understanding that it is *through the process* of creating works that challenge me beyond my preconceived "limits" and thresholds physically and/or psychologically that the felt transformation of enduramorphosis is more likely to occur.

As a performer, I push and challenge myself to find new ways to consider the interrelated elements of space, time, and the body—by "consider" I mean to actively consider and present the interrelation of these elements aesthetically and conceptually to and for myself and the audience. Enduramorphosis is an experiential phenomenon that occurs in a performance artwork that produces a marked transformative impression within the body that is often experienced by the performer in the unfolding of the work as a dynamic strangeness that is profoundly shifting one's perspective in-the-moment and strangely while this profound feeling is happening, it is not always visually indicated to an audience. As I explained, I came to performance by way of painting and photography. In my art to date, I have been interested in star systems, star clusters, supernovas, nebulas, and the outermost limits of the universe. The aim of my art was to create compositions depicting vast spaces and particle dispersions or accumulations to think about the ways that these outer spaces inform understanding of our own body, as the elements in stars consist of similar elements that comprise the body. In my mind, this makes the interconnection not only compelling material

for conceptual art practice but also an undeniable fact that more holistically tethers us to a picture that is bigger than ourselves. To provide the reader with further insight into my perspective as a multidisciplinary artist working in performance art from a visual arts background, I seek to share where the conceptual concerns originated to move my artistic works quite literally from 2D and traditional 3D artistic practice into a more immersive performance art-focused expression. As I explained in an interview on this shift, a core motivating factor was that "I am interested in making people *feel* what I'm feeling."[15]

The transmission of emotional and empathetic interconnection between my body, concepts, and an audience has been a consistent and present element in my work. It took years of making visual art to realize that there was a link to the audience more directly when making performance artworks that I felt was not as readily available through painting and photography. In 2008, I began my artistic practice as a painter, and incrementally over time, my vision and ability to communicate concepts through generating abstract compositions developed. Later, my paintings became more expressive and incorporated my entire body to create gestured marks in these compositions. In 2012, I changed my process and began a series of works where I projected photographs of my space paintings onto my body, then printed and painted another layer on the photographs. This resulted in my photographic series entitled *body-space* (2012) that comprised ten single-edition prints where compositionally my body was suspended in my star formations, particle accumulations, and/or stellar nurseries and obliterated by an acrylic layer of particle dots.

Labor, that is, specifically the immense duration of time it would take to realize these works, was an important part of the process. With great precision, my process comprised the following repetitious steps: I would paint, photograph myself covered in a projection of the painting, print the image, and paint dense and detailed layers of dots/points on top of the photographs (with a cosmetic injection needle) outlining the frame of my body before filling it in, annihilating the key defining features of my face and body through this repetitive and laborious painting process. Sara Ahmed offers insights on the importance of repetitive acts, happenstance, and ephemera as "[. . .] the labor of such repetition disappears through labor: if we work hard at something, then it seems "effortless." This paradox—with effort it becomes effortless—is precisely what makes history disappear in the moment of its enactment. The repetition of the work is what makes the work disappear."[16]