The PhotoPerformer
The Performance of Photography as an Act of Precarious Interdependency

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Abstract

This PhD by Publication explores Manuel Vason’s art practice at the intersections of photography and performance culminating in his development of the *PhotoPerformer*. Vason formulates the interdependency between the two art forms as a reflexive collaboration with the Other and as an evolving methodology which leads to a collaborative transformation of photography through performance. Vason questions the fixity of photography – symbolized by ‘the frame’ – as an ideological dispositive of power and control that distances subject and object and enforces a unique, absolute and finished perspective.

Considering photography in relationship to performance allows him to comprehend the medium through theories of differentiation. He conceives the medium not as a practice of reproduction that treats images as copies of reality but rather as a process of alteration that takes place when the live image is transformed into a photographic image. Photography constantly produces new documentation of performances intending to give a stable identity to ephemeral actions. Yet, Vason’s performative practice questions the authority of those documents. While photography offers to performance a decisive time through which to record and identify the flux of its actions, performance encourages a focus on the photographic action to overcome the fixity of the photograph. Vason posits a methodological approach that allows both art forms to be in constant dialogue and confrontation, transforming their limitations into potentiality for creative expansion. In particular, Vason examines how *collaboration* between photographer and performer and between the two media can allow photography to become more processual, discursive and ethical.

Finally, what this thesis reveals is that rethinking and practicing photography through the lens of performance galvanizes a deeper sense of responsibility toward others and exposes the photographer and his actions which normally are overlooked. Such interdependency of photography and performance is propelled and characterized by *precariousness*, a human condition that has been revisited in its positive connotation and that Vason identifies as a
creative dependency on each other and a force of survival and resistance against the constraints of neoliberal individualism.

Figure 1. The PhotoPerformer Lives Behind a Thin Layer of Glass, São Paulo 2015
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This thesis is dedicated to Tian.

Figure 2. My son Tian and his first camera, Folkestone 2018
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Preface

‘I am somewhere between myself and otherness.’

The PhotoPerformer, London 2017

Since I first encountered photography in the early 1990s, I have understood
the art form as a relational activity between the subject(s) in front and the
person behind the camera, between time and light, memory and imagination,
decision and intuition, reality and its representation.

![Image](image-url)

Figure 3. *The Art of Looking, London 2014.*

I understood my identity as an image-maker\(^1\) not as a single (fixed) image but
a variation of images in constant redefinition. That sensation of perpetual flux,
documented in all my photographs, exposed that my relationship with
photography was precarious.

I trained through practice, assisting hundreds of fashion photographers. For
several years, I disseminated my own images through fashion magazines,
excited by the communicative power of photography and its capacity to

\(^1\) I purposely defined myself as an image-maker rather than a photographer as I have
chosen to make images not only behind but also in front of the camera.
introduce new trends and behavioural patterns. Simultaneously, in the commercial field in which I was operating, content was predetermined, and form, aesthetic and style were all I could creatively play with. Then I stumbled across the world of Live Art in London in late ’90s and was fascinated by the ways artists expressed themselves freely, with integrity and urgency in a variety of media.²

I started to use photography to get in proximity to, and participate in the process of interpretation, documentation and dissemination of live performances. The urge to proximity was driven by a sense of attraction toward artists and practices that not only expressed integrity but also showed unconventional perspectives and approaches to art making. By collaborating with some of the most prolific performance artists in the UK and abroad my photography became contaminated, destabilized and transformed.

² ‘Live Art is now recognised as one of the most vital and instrumental creative spaces in the UK. Live Art is a research engine, driven by artists who are working across forms, contexts and spaces to open up new artistic models, new languages for the representation of ideas and identities, and new strategies for intervening in the public sphere.’
Definition of Live Art found on the Live Art Development Agency website: http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/about/what-is-live-art/.
Keywords

These keywords with the following personal definitions are used throughout this thesis.

Collaboration: a frictional con-fusion with others.$^3$

Interdependency: a creative process through which fixity is transformed into fluidity.$^4$

Otherness: a force that attracts me toward the Other.$^5$

Precariousness: a vital and ethical dependency on each other.$^6$

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$^3$ I elaborate my definition of collaboration on chapter 3, page 31.
$^4$ I elaborate my definition of interdependency on chapter 1, page 21.
$^5$ I elaborate my definition of otherness (and Other) on chapter 3, page 34.
$^6$ I elaborate my definition of precariousness on chapter 3, page 36.
Introduction

This PhD by Publication demonstrates how photography can be investigated through the prism of performance studies and practiced as a perpetual act of re-framing, re-configuring and re-questioning the medium. My visual practice has allowed me not only to expose the potentiality of photography’s interdependency with performance but has led me to identify otherness and precariousness as creative forces that keep it unfixed, unresolved and a-live.

For decades photography has been studied as the art of arresting time and celebrated for its capacity to document, map, order, prove and control (Flusser, 2000:41). Through my artistic practice, I reveal how the photograph is not autonomous but always dependent on the time and actions from which it originates. I expose how the seeming authority of the photograph over its reality, conventionally accepted as truthful, has functioned as the ideological construction through which we (photographers) separate subject and object, us and others, thereby perpetuating an exasperated sense of individualism.
In chapter one, I establish how the act of framing is central to my research, and how artists, theorists and curators are strategically utilising it to historicize performance. I argue how examining the interdependency of the two art forms has allowed me to focus on their actions and processes, recognise their affinity and overcome the conventions (fixity) that keep them apart.

In chapter two, I outline how my encounter with Live Art has shaped the context in which I developed a new understanding of the *interconnectedness* between photography and performance, which is characterized by the in-between. I place my own practice in relation to this by considering the work of three artists whose practices inhabit the in-between and have influenced my artistic development.

In chapter three, I analyse my methodology based on *collaboration* between photographer and performer and between the two art forms (performance and photography) as a procedure of constant alteration and adjustment, which is characterized by an inherent tension. My view on *collaboration* differs from a neoliberal attitude of working together to maximise profits. Rather, it proposes failure, contamination and trust as engines of a process of deconstruction, negotiation and reconfiguration. In the same chapter, I posit *otherness* and *precariousness* as coexisting forces that have stimulated and conditioned all my collaborations to date. The sense of attraction toward the Other expressed by the unconventional (*otherness*) in connection to a sense of dependency on other artists and art practices (*precariousness*) has led me to discover the power of divergence between myself and others.

In chapter four, I adopt the terms and concepts of *interdependency*, *collaboration*, *otherness* and *precariousness*, elaborated in previous chapters, to analyze eight of my projects submitted for this thesis. I demonstrate how the nineteen years of artistic research they represent, contribute new knowledge by stimulating a more ethical approach to photography.
Chapter 1 - The Performance of Photography

‘I’m taking photographs in the hope of un-framing the world.’

The PhotoPerformer, London 2016

The Act of Framing

I begin this chapter by introducing Amelia Jones' and Eduardo Viveiros De Castro's perspectives as I recognise the issue of framing as a central enquiry of my investigation and I consider my current point of view as 'provisional' and 'equivocal'.

In her book titled Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts, performance scholar Amelia Jones suggests that framing is
‘problematical’ and ‘ultimately, this problem cannot be solved because the framing process is both necessary and impossible’ (Jones, 2012:2). She proposes to look at difference not as a disorienting experience but as a positive condition of perpetual flux and redefinition, which she calls ‘durability’ (Jones, 2012:236).

Viveiros De Castro describes anthropology as ‘the translatable comparison between different cultures and perspectives’ (Viveiros De Castro, 2004:1). Influenced by his studies on Amerindian tribes, he introduces a different perspective, an indigenous one, which he calls perspectivism: ‘Indigenous perspectivism is a theory of the equivocation, that is, of the referential alterity between homonymic concepts. Equivocation appears here as the mode of communication par excellence between different perspectival positions’ (Viveiros De Castro, 2004:1). This definition of perspectivism has helped me to reconsider the act of framing as a process of critical inquiring. In photography the act of framing is intrinsic to the medium, to its capacity to ‘fix the frame’ as an autonomous spatial/temporal dimension. Through objectification it creates a permanent separation between subject and object, which, for decades, has sustained an unequivocal dominance of the trace of the performance over its action itself.

The subject of my photographs is performance. The close proximity to the actions of the performance artists I have been collaborating with, have galvanized a process of self-inquiry about the validity of photographic documentation, the authority of the trace over the action and invited me to reconsider the act of framing as an act of questioning.

Following the work of Peggy Phelan, Richard Schechner and Diana Taylor I understand performance not only as an art form in constant tension with traditions of representation but also as a way of thinking (an attitude), which subverts and challenges the ‘fixity of the frame’ by replacing static artefacts (traces) with actions in flux (Phelan 1993, Schechner 1985, Taylor 2003).

7 I draw my understanding of the term performance under the influence of a number of artists and theorists of performance studies like Alastair MacLennan, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Diana Taylor and Amelia Jones, not only as defining an art form (inclusive of body art, performance art and live art) but also as an attitude of resistance against stereotypes, normativity and representation.
Influenced by Annalaura Alifuoco’s essay ‘Alive Performance: toward an immersive activist philosophy’, I also acknowledge that performance resists any attempt to be framed outside the specific special/temporal dimension in which it is actualised (the present). ‘Any efforts to document/frame a performance ends up altering it’ (Alifuoco, 2017:128).

Figure 6. Collective Tropical Shower with Frames, work created during the Becoming an Image Workshop in Campinas, São Paulo 2014.

Since its origin photography has been understood in relationship to painting and theories of representation based on the photograph as a copy (simulacrum) of an original (reality) and the action of photographing has been conceptualised as a process of objectification (Barthes 1993, Benjamin 2008, Sontag 1979). Looking at photography in relationship to performance, however, has allowed me to re-think photography as an act of transfer\(^8\) (from the action to the image) and as an alteration of the original, motivated by our desire to cut, define, and control the flow of reality.

Instead of looking at the photographic documentation of a live performance as a truthful document of the event, I have formed an understanding of the photographic document as an alternative space in which a diversified image of the ‘live’ performance is brought to existence. I have chosen to associate this photographic alteration with the adjective ‘diversified’ to describe its multiple qualities of capturing, intensifying, compressing, echoing, disseminating, encapsulating, focusing, etc.

Many live performances are remembered, archived and identified by the single ‘iconic’ image as a strategy applied (by the artist, curator or gallerist) to emphasise their uniqueness and commercialise it. For François Laruelle ‘every photo is a photo-ID’ alluding to the capacity of photography to give identity by suspending and flattening differences. In his book Concept of Non-Photography, he writes: ‘Being-in-photo is, qua Being, the most direct manifestation possible of Identity, and also the least objectivating’ (Laruelle, 2011:48).

In light of Laruelle’s proposition, we can contemplate photography in relation to performance not only as a process of diversification (documentation as alteration) but, at the same time, as a process of identification. Photography
can provide performance with a technology through which its actions perform within an apparatus of perspectival looking and give life to an ‘unfixed’ performance of identification with interpretation and reconstruction taking place in the future encounters of the image and its viewers.

At the same time, performance can assist photography to escape the ‘fixity of the frame’ and overcome the partiality of its perspective by dislocating its focus from the object – the photograph – and its definitive arrest of time (locus of the widely accepted theories of representation) toward a more fluid photographic gesture (re-framing).

![Figure 8. The PhotoPerformer is Performing Photography as a Sport, São Paulo 2015.](image)

It is by acknowledging the photographic act of framing as a performative gesture of interpretation that the image, as an alternative space of the performance, enhances itself as provisional, equivocal, personal, multiple and unfixed. In the next part of this chapter I will consider how the collaboration between photography and performance, sustained by their differences, can be explained as an interdependency.

**The Interdependency between Photography and Performance**

Since they have been invented, photography and performance have been in conversation with each other. Early experiments by the Gutai Group, Happenings, Fluxus events and Action Painting have all been documented and preserved through photography and, arguably, the first photographic
exposures demanded performances of endurance in stillness under the (burning) sunlight. Although, as introduced in the previous part of this chapter, both performance and photography can be considered as framing devices with different temporalities the two art forms have been mostly kept apart by the binary logic of presence and absence.

In an essay titled ‘Photography and Fetish’ Christian Metz observes that photography is ‘stubbornly pointing to the print of what was, but no longer is’ (Metz, 1985:81). In his view, the process of substitution of an original with a copy (or alias) is an act of fetishism; an activity marked by an anxiety over a real or perceived loss, or in response to an ever-present death.

Figure 9. Photography is Breathing Its Own Air. The PhotoPerformer in action, Mexico City 2016.

In *Matter and Memory*, Henry Bergson argues that the past and the present are not necessarily successive but simultaneously produced: each past is contemporaneous with the present, so that all of the past coexists with the new present in relation to which it is now past (Bergson, 1986). Performance

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and photography coexist in a represented present, in the temporal dimension of memory. The live performance and the photographic document in fact incorporate the two aspects of memory: storing and remembering. Each action/photograph is destined to disappear into the past. Each photograph, like performance, intertwines imagination and memory.

It is far more productive not to set a performance and its photographic documentation in opposition to one another but, instead, to view them as working in tandem. To quote Amelia Jones, ‘despite its immediacy and liveness, performance relies on documentation to complete it and to attain its symbolic status within the realm of culture’ ¹⁰ (Jones, 1997:13). In opposition to this theory of reciprocal complementarity, Peggy Phelan contended in her now classic book Unmarked: The Politics of Performance, that ‘[p]erformance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representation: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. Performance’s being [...] becomes itself through disappearance’ (Phelan, 1993:146).

Focusing on the disappearance of performance could be a curatorial strategy to dictate a history of its remains. Rebecca Schneider replied to Phelan’s definition by saying, ‘if we think of performance as of ‘disappearance’, if we think ephemerality as ‘vanishing’, and if we think of performance as the antithesis of ‘saving’, do we limit ourselves to an understanding of performance predetermined by a cultural habituation to the [traditional] logic of the archive?’ (Schneider, 2011:138). For the purpose of my argument, I propose to substitute the term ‘live’ with ‘alive’ or (a)live so as to emphasize the continuity of performance’s vitality outside and beyond the frame of a specific temporal scale, since we cannot acknowledge presence without representation and ‘[e]xperience can not be detached from thought’ (Heathfield, 2012:32). Furthermore, I suggest to focus on the (a)liveness of both performance and photography not only as a new approach to overcome the mythology of disappearance or the authority of the document over the

¹⁰ In a book titled Reactivations, Philip Auslander stretched their interdependency further proposing the documentation of a live performance as a necessary agent for the sustainability of its future existence: ‘Only through its documentation a live performance can be reactivated and experience in the future’ (Auslander, 2018:17).
action but as a way to reconsider both art forms united in the act of re-framing, re-interpreting and re-questioning.

In the next chapter, I will show how the interdependency of the two art forms has been the theme of a number of recent exhibitions and has stimulated influential artists to engage in new experiments.

Figure 10. The PhotoPerformer Becoming a Temporary Installation, Hangzhou 2015.
Chapter 2 - The Space In-Between and Hybrid Practices

‘Between the subject of the click and the subject grasped, there is a coexistence without coincidence, or there is a coincidence without contact, or a contact without union’.

Jean Luc Nancy ¹¹

Figure 11. The PhotoPerformer is Using Photography to Trace a Map so to Get Lost, Newcastle 2016.

The relationship between the two art forms, the use of photographs as a (alternative) space for performance and the act of photography as performance have been the focus of various exhibitions, symposium, anthologies and articles. Over the years exhibitions like: Proof: ten photographers on performance at New Langton Arts, California in 1984 – A Short History of Performance Art at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in

¹¹ (Nancy, 2005:106)

![Figure 12. Exposures and Encounters Display Cabinets Part of ‘Live Art on Camera’ exhibition at the John Hansard Gallery, Southampton in 2007.](image)

In the catalogue of the recent exhibition at the Tate Modern the curator Simon Baker stated: ‘the real shift in performing for the camera, however, occurs not only in the elevation of performance documentation toward a discrete artistic practice in its own right but with the implicit realization of a deep interconnectedness between performance and photography at many levels’ (Baker, 2016:17). It is this *interconnectedness* or *interdependency* or *space in-between* that has been the locus of my artistic investigation.

My photographs, my actions and my methodology to date have contributed to
shaping and expanding an area of practice named, specifically in the UK, Live Art. In an essay title ‘Manuel Vason – Framing Live Art’ Lois Keidan\textsuperscript{12} writes: ‘The collaborative process, and compelling and uncanny visual language, pioneered by Manuel Vason have contributed to these expanded possibilities for Live Art. He has opened up a new kind of space for artists to inhabit and ideas to incubate, where anything seems possible. His work has been critical to the emergence of the new forms of visual representation that so many artists now consider central to their practice. His role in the increasingly pervasive and provocative presence of Live Art in the public imagination is immeasurable, and is on full, exquisite display in Double Exposures’ (Keidan, 2015:20).

While the Live Art scene has functioned as a fertile ground for my artistic development the artwork of three artists has had a particular influence on my practice.

In 1969, Vito Acconci created \textit{Blinks} a performance in which the act of photography was generating, at the same time, the performance and its documentation. ‘Holding the camera, aimed away from me and ready to shoot, while walking a continuous line down a city street. Try not to blink. Each time I blink: snap a photo’ (Vito Acconci, 2018). The automatic function of the eye synched with the automatism of the camera produced a set of performative images through which we can accompany Acconci on his walk. Acconci has framed the performance of photography as a conceptual artwork. He actualised the interplay of the two art forms by transforming the act of looking into a triggering device. In chapter four (page 64), I will show how I have been experimenting an equivalent interplay of the two art forms by synchronizing breathing and photographing.

\textsuperscript{12} Lois Keidan is co-director and founder of the Live Art Development Agency, a publicly funded arts organization founded in London in 1999 with the aim to sustain the development of Live Art practices and editor of my first publication (Exposures).
In 1980, Tehching Hsieh punched a time clock and took a single image of himself every hour for an entire year (‘One Year Performance 1980–1981, Time Clock Piece’). In this example, the act of photography dictated Hsieh’s performance and imposed a rigid discipline to his action and his life. Vilém Flusser pointed out in his book Toward a Philosophy of Photography: ‘We observe, all around us, apparatuses of every sort in the process of programming our life through rigid automation’ (Flusser, 2000:79).

If the aim of Tehching Hsieh was to expose the struggle between the human being and the control of the photographic apparatus, as I interpret it, the resultant photographs exposed the ‘program’ and the alienation of daily routine and automation. Tehching Hsieh through this courageous art work has embodied (not escaped) the ‘fixity of the frame’ by going through a durational process of (auto)objectification to expose how the desire (and anxiety) to control the performance of life through photography can end up exasperating it through isolation (individualism). In a similar way, while performing as The PhotoPerformer in front of a live audience, I explored the necessity to display the exhaustion caused by the repetitive act of photography as a way to provoke empathy among the viewers.

Another artist who vitalized the space in-between performance and photography is Ulay. Although much of his best-known work was produced in collaboration with Marina Abramović, Ulay utilizes photography as a devise for self-analysis, in dialogue with his inner gaze. Ulay considers himself a conceptual artist who is fascinated by the phenomenology of the photographic medium. Precisely, his knowledge of the technical potential of photography opened up new perspectives for him on how to use the medium, how to escape it, stretch it or subvert it. In an action realized in 1976 entitled FOTOTOT at the De Appel Gallery in Amsterdam, Ulay attempted an experiment with the aim of dismantling the myth of photographic objectivity.

13 In 2015, an Art Council grant for The PhotoPerformer project, allowed me to have Ulay as a mentor. I recall one of his memorable lines: ‘the battle to transform photography from aesthetic to ethic is hard but worth it’.
14 A 2016 retrospective of Ulay’s work at the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt, focused entirely on the inner gaze. Most of the work was created between 1968 and 1974 using Polaroid film, often presented as montages to indicate that the inner gaze is fragmented and multilayered.
He invited a live audience to witness a series of vanishing photographs exhibited without fixing the photographic emulsion. He presented those temporal images as ‘realities’ and the resultant black rectangle as ‘meditation on what happens inside the Black Box of photography’ (Rus Bojan, 2014:28).

Ulay compares the photographic illusion of framing the world with the impossibility of framing his subjectivity. Photography for Ulay is a system of existential reflection and a tool of self-orientation, with which he constructs a number of personae. A recent retrospective of his photographic work at the Nederland Fotomuseum presented a series of alter egos some of which were half male and half female. The adoption of multiple photographic identities can be considered as a strategy of self-reconstruction, a reflective process of self-discovery instantiating what Amelia Jones calls the ‘dislocation of the Cartesian subject of modernism’ (Jones, 1998:1).

While I consider Ulay’s art practice an inspirational reference and I have adopted the notion of photography as a process of existential reflection through the development of my alter-ego (The Photo-Performer, half human and half camera), my intention is not to expose my nomadic subjectivity but reveal how photography (and the fixity of its frames) is affecting my imagination and stimulating my individualism.

In this chapter, I have analysed how the interdependency of photography and performance has empowered the in-between and exposed the need for more transdisciplinary perspectives. In chapter three, I present and discuss my
methodology, based on *collaboration*, that I have adopted to escape ‘the fixity of the frame’.

\[\text{Figure 14 & 15. The PhotoPerformer is a Creature Among Creatures, Chicago 2015. (right) Poster Image for the Exhibition ‘The PhotoPerformer, Permanent Actions – Disposable Images, Museum of Queretaro (Mexico) 2017.}^{15}\]

\[^{15}\text{Two images of The PhotoPerformer as part of the first solo show in Mexico (Museum of Queretaro) in January 2017. In both images, The PhotoPerformer becomes a playful animal challenging the control expressed by the photographic camera.}\]
Chapter 3 – Collaboration as Methodology

‘Even the least photograph openly holds out a secret, and it does so by
metamorphosing everything into an alterity’
Jean Luc Nancy\textsuperscript{16}

In this chapter, I articulate my understanding and practice of \textit{collaboration} as a fluid mode of creation; a process in constant evolution that has helped me to discover ways of productively inhabiting the gap between performance and photography. I will elaborate on how the encounter with theories of differentiation forms my understanding of \textit{otherness} as the impulse behind \textit{collaboration} and as a force of attraction towards the Other. The vital tension between photography and performance, characteristic of their \textit{collaboration}, is sustained by \textit{precariousness}: a force that I explain as a dependency on each other.

Figure 16. \textit{Becoming an Image Workshop - Documentation, Mexico City, 2016.}

\textsuperscript{16} (Nancy, 2005:106)
In a world shaped by increasingly broad and deep divisions of labour within the economic system, talking of collaboration as methodology might seem counterintuitive. In fact, if we consider collaboration as ‘working with’ others in a contemporary economy based on the parceling out of partial tasks, we could say that we are all working together but ‘working for’ the profit of someone else. Collaboration has become a conditional factor of contemporary modes of production. However, my artistic practice led me to develop a different understanding of collaboration as it was not only a necessity but also a deliberate choice. The necessity of choice was caused by a sense of dissatisfaction with the way I was practicing photography and a felt urgency to disrupt prescribed protocols and normative (fixed frames) characteristic of the commercial photography that I practiced. In fashion photography the ability to master a technique and be able to offer the client a replicable skill, is valued as ‘artistic’ and ‘professional’. Further, the high level of competition among fashion photographers and the prerequisite of a recognisable aesthetic (signature) prompted me to problematize the modern concept of the autonomous artistic genius and propose the process of co-creation instead. I turned to collaboration as a result of my desire to introduce the aesthetic parameters and the critical stance, which I had often observed in the work of many performance and live artists, into my own practice.

The collaborative methodology I developed through my immersion into Live Art is characterized by an inherent tension. As opposed to a more romantic vision of harmonic cooperation, my collaborations to date are marked by a frictional harmony. In an essay included in the Double Exposures publication, Dominic Johnson points out, 'collaboration is a fraught concept [...] it is rarely ‘pure’, [it is] never a relation of sheer equanimity, and always structured to some degree by control, influence, authority, or privilege’ (Johnson, 2015:28). Johnson addresses the fact that alongside its more conventional meaning of ‘working together’, collaboration can be understood and practiced as a frictional con-fusion with others. Likewise, all my collaborations with other artists have been a process of deconstructing my single perspective, a negotiation and reconfiguration of the power structures between photographer and photographed.
In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari discuss the ‘rhizome’\(^1\) as a concept constituted by multiplicity. *Collaboration* can be seen as a (small) rhizome, an *interdependency* of different identities and subjectivities. *Collaboration* functions as a method of becoming, as a procedure of change. In the same publication Deleuze describes this process of change as one of ‘deterritorialization’, in which the properties of the constituent element disappear and are replaced by new properties of ‘assemblage’\(^2\) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:172). With deterritorialization Deleuze describes a process of transformation through dislocation: the same particles or molecules recompose in another form create a new body. For example, a branch of a tree replanted somewhere else produce a different tree. For my practice, I understand *collaboration* as a form of deterritorialization. It pluralises the actors and subjectivities involved in creating the artwork and grants agency to previously disenfranchised

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\(^1\) Deleuze uses the terms ‘rhizome’ and ‘rhizomatic’ to describe theory and research that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:3).

\(^2\) In *A Thousand Plateaus* Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe assemblages like constellation made up of imaginative contingent articulations among myriad heterogeneous elements. A dynamic plurality (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:503).
participants, such as the ‘objects’ of photography. Through deterritorialization I diminish the hierarchy between the photographic subject and object and create an assemblage of co-creators. Utilizing collaboration as methodology and the deterritorialization of my photography allowed me to escape prescribed outcome and aesthetic style. Deterritorializing photography is not without risk: some of my most fruitful collaborations to date have failed, but the experience of failing, has been incredibly enriching. Often failure was a sign that my collaborator and myself were not open enough to accept a reciprocal interference in the other’s practice. Every failed collaboration, however, was a reminder to approach the next one with more receptiveness and open-mindedness. Collaboration has allowed my photography to stay unfixed to a specific style (signature) but itinerant through the creative contamination with other artists and art disciplines. In the next section of this chapter I explain how this creative contamination is triggered and sustained by a force that I defined as otherness.

**Otherness as a Force of Attraction**

I developed my concept of otherness through a theoretical collaboration with Judith Butler and Gilles Deleuze and their theories of differentiation. Butler conceives of differentiation as an ‘affirmation’ of the alterity of becoming against the socially constructed protocols of sexual difference (Butler, 1990:18). In *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* she wrote: ‘[…] we are constituted by virtue of the address, a need and desire for the Other that takes place in language in the broadest sense, one without which we could not be’ (Butler 2004:44). For Butler the constitution and differentiation of the subject is recognized through an ontological and ethical force that addresses us toward the Other and ‘this disposition of ourselves outside ourselves’, paradoxically, implicates the source of our ethical connection with others (Butler 2004:44).

In other words, to be a subject for Butler is to be driven by otherness as a force that disrupts self-sufficiency, sovereign autonomy and normativity and renders us constitutionally relational, incomplete, disoriented and riven by alterity.
While for Butler *otherness* is a movement that takes us outside ourselves so to subvert any determinism and (sexual) categorization, for Deleuze *otherness* is a movement of differentiation in time, a temporal force that acts upon us without any will or intention.

In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze explains how *otherness* can not be identified through opposition but operates as ‘difference and repetition’ through a ‘non-dialectic process in continual variation across time and continual movement of self-differing’ (Deleuze, 2004:28-30). In particular, Todd May in an article titled ‘The System and Its Fractures: Gilles Deleuze on Otherness’ analyses how Deleuze articulates ‘Otherness’ not only as positive movements of ‘deterritorialization’ (which I referred to in the previous section of this chapter) but also ‘as a productive force oriented toward the new, the change, the expansion’ (May, 1993:11). While Butler addresses the Other as the ‘outside ourselves’ toward which we have an obligation to be opened and respectful, for Deleuze the Other manifests itself as a potentiality through the change and its play of difference.

In line with Butler and Deleuze and in relation to my art practice based on collaboration, I recognize the Other as the ‘outside ourselves’, ‘the new’ and ‘the change’ that occurs when exposed to *otherness* as the force that has kept my photography in transformation and in dialogue with (its) performance. My numerous collaborations were motivated and sustained by a force of attraction toward artists and practices that conveyed the Other by expressing the unconventional, a term that, in my view, converges ‘the outside ourselves’, ‘the new’ and ‘the change’. The artists I selected to collaborate with favoured performance over other art forms for its ability to subvert conventions and confront representation. During each collaboration, I was encouraged to expand my view, to open to the diverse and embrace the new. The same force that I also define as ‘a disturbing attraction’ has pushed my photography outside the canons and traditions of the commercial and has motivated me to incorporate the change as a strategy to keep it a-live and unfixed.\(^{19}\)

*Otherness* has forced my practice to become nomadic, in movement between countries, toward different communities of artists, outside the controlled

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\(^{19}\)I refer to *otherness* as a ‘disturbing attraction’ during the description of the Encounters project on page 48.
environment of the photographic studio and in search of alternative and critical perspectives.

Otherness has caused my journey from fashion photographer to *The PhotoPerformer*: a trajectory subjected to the forces of alterity through which my photography has expanded and exposed itself to *precariousness*.

![Figure 18. Performing Photography as the Art of Touching, Hangzhou 2015.](image)

**Precariousness as a Force of Dependency**

I encountered the concept of *precariousness* during the realization of the *STILL_MÓVIL* project, between 2010 and 2013. In South America *precariousness* was not only defining the lack of funding and institutional structures endemic in the local art system but it expressed a strategy of ‘doing more with less’, which, in fact, strengthened cooperation and exchange within the artistic community. I draw my notion of *precariousness* from my theoretical encounter with Isabell Lorey and Judith Butler. In her recent book *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, Lorey differentiates precarity from
precariousness,\textsuperscript{20} according to Lorey the notion of precarity denotes structural inequalities – uncertainties that result from relations of domination along the lines of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality. In this sense, some lives are more precarious than others, because precarity comes from certain structures of domination. At the same time, she denotes precariousness as a socio-ontological dimension. She also writes, ‘[w]e can say that life is always precarious; there is always vulnerability, and someone’s life is never completely autonomous but always demands another’s life for protection’ (Lorey, 2015:13). Such understanding is very close to the notion of precariousness as developed by Butler, who writes about the existential vulnerability as a condition of human life. She says, ‘precariousness is necessary for the protection of other individuals lifestyles or life. So we cannot think about the body without considering the conditions that make it vulnerable to precariousness’ (Butler, 2004:26). A few years later in a publication titled Frames of War: When is Life Grievable she describes precariousness as an ‘obligation that emerges from the fact our bodies cannot be thought without their finitude and they depend on what is outside themselves to grow and sustain’ (Butler, 2009:30).

In virtue of Lorey’s and Butler’s perspectives, I understand precariousness not only as an inescapable condition that characterizes each human being but also as an ethical force that bound each toward others as a counteracting form of dependency and preservation. While I condemn precarity as the consequence of socio-economic inequality that exposes some to more vulnerability than others, I identify precariousness as a valuable condition and as a force of growth and creation.

\textsuperscript{20} In Brazil, two influential artists, Lygia Clark and HÉlio Oiticica, proposed the role of the artist to oppose the imposed economic precarity by transforming it into a creative activity of survival and resistance. While Oiticica with the Tropicalist movement suggested a more confrontational approach against conformism, Clark proposed precariousness as a therapeutic attitude. She proclaimed ‘we propose precariousness as a new idea of existence against stifling order of modernity, as well as, the repression by authoritarian regimes’ (Deuze, 2013:10).
In a similar way, my photography always incorporates the condition of precariousness because it always involves the act of framing, its partiality and its ontological reduction and exclusion. Moreover, the same precariousness, intended as an ethical force of dependency and counteraction, has ‘obliged’ me to reconsider the relationship with the subject of my photography as a more ethical process of reciprocity, target the ‘fixed’ position of the photographer as an issue to overcome and exercise an on-going methodology based on collaboration.

At the same time, the precariousness of performance, exposed in the ephemerality of its actions and thereby the perceived necessity to preserve them, is fostering its documentation as a form of dependency despite its inevitable alteration (differentiation) caused by the act of transfer (from action into image). As Christine Ross stated in the introduction of Precarious Visualities of Contemporary Art and Visual Culture: 'precariousness is, by definition, a state that signals both the difficulty to reconcile and the difficulty to separate two dimensions, realms, or experiences’ and in this case the two art forms and the collaborators and myself (Ross 2008:12).
In a book *L’immagine precaria – Sul dispositivo fotografico* (The precarious image – On the photographic apparatus) Jean-Marie Schaeffer describes photography as ‘una entità dinamica ed ambigua’ (a dynamic and ambiguous entity) (Schaeffer, 2006:9). In his analysis, he identified photography as a constant oscillation of the three main elements of which it is composed: ‘the photographic act’, ‘the object of reflection’ and ‘the sign of reception’ (Schaeffer, 2006:120). Schaeffer offers a theory of photography that expands the field of representational theory. In opposition to a more widespread theory based on the singularity of the index or trace (Krauss 1977, Barthes 1993, Sontag 1979) he proposes a different approach focused on the interpolation, interpretation and the *precariousness* of the photographic elements (Schaeffer, 2006:14). In line with Schaeffer, in my practice, the *collaboration* between performance (‘the photographic act’) and photography (‘the object of reflection’) is triggered and oxygenated at the same time by the force of attraction (*otherness*), and the force of dependency (*precariousness*) between the two art forms, while stimulating a new *collaboration* with the viewer (‘the
sign of reception’).

In the next chapter, I will identify how the same forces have stimulated the development of different mode of collaboration and sustained an evolving interdependency between the two art forms in each of the eight projects analysed here.

Figure 22. The PhotoPerformer life modelling, London 2016. Drawing by Pato Bosich.
Chapter 4 – The Performance of Photography as an Act of Precarious Interdependency

‘While I’m performing, I can not see myself, while I’m photographing, I can not see myself.’

The PhotoPerformer, London 2016


I will now investigate each project through the notions of collaboration as methodology, interdependency of both media, and otherness and precariousness as creative forces. This will identify my contribution to knowledge in the field of photography.


Exposures is the outcome of a collaboration with twenty-one of the most radical British performance artists, invited to execute one of their performances in front of a 10x8 inch Polaroid camera in a specific location of their choice. Exposures became the first book on Live Art published by the Live Art Development Agency. As Lois Keidan (director and co-founder of the

21 Please refer to page 73 for the complete artists’ list.
Live Art Development Agency) stated: ‘Exposures not only brought challenging artists and ideas out from the margins and into a wider public discourse, but did so in a way that asked us to reconsider questions of documentation and representation’ (Keidan, 2015:18). Furthermore, the multiple dissemination of the resultant images by the Live Art Development Agency, various other institutions, venues and artists helped to transform some of those Polaroids into iconic images of Live Art.

The site-specificity of Exposures demanded improvisation, adaptation and a new approach to photographic actions and decisions. Together photographer and performance artist established the parameters of their ‘collaboration as dialogue’. Our time was spent mostly in conversation instead in front or behind the camera. The large Polaroids were proposed as an alternative space for my collaborators to re-interpret and re-frame their practices. The use of a large format Polaroid equipment and a maximum of ten sheets of film per session, reinforced the collaborative and performative methodology and established with each collaborator a precarious sense of transparency, complicity and trust conducive to a fruitful process of co-creation away from a live audience. To resolve potential authorship conflict, a contract that would stipulate equal copyright for each image was signed with each artist.
Each Polaroid image oscillates between a document, an artwork in its own right and a performative space: the precarious materiality inbuilt in the surface of the sensitive polaroid film echoed and emulated the precariousness and instability of the live act, lending those images a magical ‘aura’. Walter Benjamin, describes the ‘aura’ as something in which ‘[u]niqueness and duration are intimately intertwined’ (Benjamin, 1999:519).

With *Exposures*, the act of photography, synchronised with the actions of each performer, generated an *interdependency* between the two art-forms, based on co-construction and a precarious sense of trust. The ‘collaboration as dialogue’, stimulated by our shared desire to experiment and stretch our art practices towards each other (*otherness*), provoked a process of alteration: on one hand, my conventional approach based on the commercial photography tradition characterized by control over the result was destabilized, on the other hand, a lot of the artists/collaborators identified those Polaroids as an afterlife of their actions and adopted them to reach new audiences. *Exposures* marked the beginning of a series of experiments, in which I problematize the fixity and authority of the photographic document by considering it active, inventive, collaborative, performative and interdependent to the a-live performance.
Oh Lover Boy (1999 - 2001) - Collaboration as Extended Dialogue

For Oh Lover Boy, I followed performance artist Franko B for two years (2000-2001) and photographed every single public performance he presented internationally in that period of time. Oh Lover Boy was the first monograph on Franko B’s artwork printed in colour and internationally distributed. Franko B played an important role in the development of my concept of collaboration. In a text included in the same publication, he writes, ‘our collaboration was not going to be that of the usual model/photographer relationship… we wanted to grow through working closely together’ (Franko B, 2001:100).

During the two years, the ‘extended dialogue’ with Franko B gave me the opportunity to access his work not only during the live presentation but also during the invisible and cardinal stages before they were first conceived and after. As a result, I felt the need to echo Franko B risky actions by breaking

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22 A previous monograph photographed by Nicolas Sinclair was printed in black and white. Clearly, a color version was more fitting Franko B’s work involving blood. (Morgan Stuart, Keidan Lois, Sinclair Nicolas, FRANKO B, Black Dog Publishing, 2001)
23 This includes some intimate moments, for example, in the shower after the live performance where Franko B was removing the white make up mixed with his own
photographic conventions (by using out-of-date film, operating more than one camera simultaneously and photographing through a cracked lens) and I developed an understanding of my role as a sort of ‘amplifier’. Through the creation and dissemination of photographs of his work, I could propagate his message and expand his public.

Figure 28. Oh Lover Boy, After I Miss You Performance, Antwerp 2000.

Franko B by cutting his own skin and by bloodletting in front of a live audience composed an ‘a-live’ image overlapping beauty and suffering as fundamental aspects of the human condition. I recognise here the evidence of the interdependency of his actions and my photography. While Franko B was wounding his body, I was cutting, framing and freezing his actions thus securing the longevity of his life-threatening art making.

blood or over dinner at a restaurant where we were sharing our first impressions while analyzing the Polaroids film created a few hours before.
My attraction and admiration toward the unconventional (*otherness*) revealed in Franko B’s daunting actions guided me to reach a level of intimacy and proximity with the artist that granted me a privileged position through which to perceive his live actions. Quoting Kathy O’Dell, ‘the photographer positioned his body in the action space and his gaze inside the image created’ (O’Dell, 1998:59). Furthermore, in *I Miss You* my large Polaroid camera and I became part of the live performance itself. In an essay of the *Oh Lover Boy* publication, Sarah Wilson commented: ‘Franko B placed the embodiment of pain in direct confrontation against the glossiness of haute couture by assuming the likeness of a catwalk show, but with his body naked, abject, monochromatic, bleeding and tracing his presence while walking toward and away to the photographers’ eye’ (Wilson, 2001:84). In *I Miss You* the photographic documentation didn’t contain, describe or explain the event but became part of it. My role as a live performing photographer was crucial in my gradual transformation from fashion photographer to photographer/performer and for my understanding of the *interdependency* of the two media.

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*I Miss You* live performance was presented for the first time in Antwerp in July 2000. I was operating multiple cameras and flashes; one was a cumbersome (10x8 inches) large format Polaroid.
Looking back at the photographic material created through the ‘extended collaboration’ with Franko B, I recognize an inherent aspiration to manifest the precariousness of the photographic medium not only as an unavoidable quality, which is due to the partiality of framing, but also as an agent for change in the way I use and understand it. I placed the medium of photography in direct confrontation with Franko B’s body. We (myself and the present audience) witnessed and sensed his vulnerability. Franko B exposed the fragility and precariousness of his bleeding body in pain to affect his audience and generate a sense of empathy and responsibility. At the same time, the photographic documentation, by altering the temporality of the original event and selecting a specific (singular) frame through which to observe it, aimed to re-connect the viewer with the live actions. The awareness of the limits and precariousness of the medium produced more experimentation with my methodology and invested me with a sense of responsibility for my photographic decisions.

**Encounters (2003-2007) – Collaboration as a Partnership**

During my intimate collaboration with Franko B, I invited him to perform in front of my camera a new performance to be accessed by (future) audiences
only through the photographs created. In an essay titled ‘The Document Performance’, Rebecca Schneider described those images as ‘invitation to collaborate by attending the event through the photographs’ (Schneider, 2007:36). Those photographs became part of my next book project which I titled Encounters so as to emphasize the double interaction between the artist (collaborator) and myself and the images and their viewers. As opposed to the Exposures project, where the curatorial selection of the artists was guided by Lois Keidan, I chose forty-two major performance artists whose work ‘attracted and disturbed’ me. I recognise this sense of ‘disturbing attraction’ as a manifestation of otherness and as creative force that pulled me toward the challenging encounter with the unconventional.

The images of Encounters are a testimony to a mutually agreed-upon attempt to inhabit and transform the photographic space into a photo-event. In an article titled ‘Photography as Performative process’, Richard Shusterman reminds us ‘we should consider as event the communicative interaction between photographer and subject in the process of setting up and taking the shot’ (Shusterman, 2012:68). Furthermore, I consider that communicative interaction, central to collaboration, as an act of transfer that transforms the live actions into a script for the photo-event. Johnson described this interaction and form of ‘collaboration as a partnership’: ‘Encounters’s images

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25 Please refer to page 76 for the full list of artist/collaborators.
indicate an evolution from extended dialogue into a partnership with another artist' (Johnson, 2007:11). The real success of the project was the mutual awareness and celebration of our collaborative partnership as a process of transformation from our individual practices into something other.

‘Photography is a monster with two subjects, with a double body (human) and a single, cavernous head whose one eye blinks on and off’, Jean Luc Nancy poetically declared (Nancy, 2005:104). Metaphorically, Nancy created an image that perfectly describes my vision of a collaborative partnership as exemplified by Encounters. The partnership stimulated a reliance between the two art forms of photography and performance, which brought them together in the space of their execution and fostered their coexistence and diversity, in the temporal dimension of a future encounter with the viewer.

Figure 33. Rajni Shah & Lucille Acevedo-Jones and Manuel Vason, Collaboration #1, London 2006.

The *interdependency* of photography and performance in Encounters was confirmed by the fact that ‘we’ devised performances that, in certain cases,
would not work successfully as live action in front of an audience but performed very efficaciously as still images. Analysing the *Encounters* images, I acknowledge their ambiguous, uncertain and hybrid identity as a valuable condition and as a manifestation of their *precariousness*. The tension between their refined aesthetic and iconic composition, remnants of my training as fashion photographer and the rawness and boldness of their content gave them an unsettling quality and generated another type of partnership: a partnership with the viewer, who was called upon to decipher them.

Figure 34. Steven Cohen and Manuel Vason, Collaboration #1, La Rochelle 2006.

**Becoming an Image (2009 – 2016) – Collaboration as Co-Creation**

Through a commission by the Biennale of Contemporary Art of Thessaloniki in 2009, I had the chance to expand my collaborative methodology from a one on one (myself and my chosen performer) to a group of collaborators\(^\text{26}\) and to

\(^{26}\) Please refer to the list and description of published work page 80.
explore the workshop as a site for co-creation. Adapting the notion of the ‘body without organs’ from Deleuze and Guattari, the collaborative process of ‘becoming’ intended to establish a sense of intensified affection among the group to galvanize the differences and compose another conceptual unified body, which we called image (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:256).  

My split role of leader and participant, photographer and performer provoked a situation of dynamic co-responsibility and interdependency among the group that obliterated the distance between photographer and subject.  

For a few days, a group of performance artists and photographers were encouraged to contaminate their individual practices and reverse their respective roles, and disorient rules and hierarchy into a playful multiplicity of cameras, performative actions and acts of co-creation. As Petra Sabisch affirmed: ‘one needs to examine contamination as that which forces the body to open up to other bodies, to enter different relations and to change qualitatively’ (Sabisch, 2011:19).

Figure 35 & 36. (left and right) Collective Actions Created during the Becoming an Image Workshop. Exhibition Documentation at the Biennale of Contemporary Art of Thessaloniki 2013.

27 The image can also be considered as an organ in which all the different elements are in constant interaction. While the photograph/object is still, the interpretations of the same are in constant motion.  

28 I refer here to the distance that the photographic camera requires to place its subject in focus.  

29 The duration of the workshop varied from seven to fifteen days.
The *Becoming an Image* workshop served as a rhizomatic Deleuzian community (introduced in the third chapter), in which we embraced *otherness* as a process of collective ‘becoming’ and individual diversification. We used ‘touching’ as a way of connecting our bodies, our minds and the two art forms. ‘Touching’ stimulated a group of strangers to become intimate, and to make connection between the internal concept of touch and their external physical contact in front of the photographic eye. Jan-Luc Nancy described the photographic click as: ‘a contact and a tack with an instantaneous body, unstable and fixed in its instability’ (Nancy, 2005:107).

The *Becoming an Image* project encapsulated the *interdependency* of performance and photography through a process of deconstructing individual art practices that led to a collective trans-individual practice. Where the distance embedded in the photographic medium became a proximity that
fused the two art forms through touch and intimacy, thus transforming the temporality of our activities into a more durational photographic bond.30

Becoming an Image’s photographs not only evoked the union of photography and performance but also emphasised the precariousness of their interdependency by encapsulating their double status of artwork and documentation, action and image, imprint and reflex, unstable and fixed.31

Becoming an Image offered the opportunity to make a distinction between precariousness and precarity. Working with a total budget of fifty euros, recycled materials and the Biennial’s office printer, the group adopted precariousness as a stimulus and a creative force to imagine, co-create, expand individual practices and counteract the economic precarity, which Greece was enduring in 2009.32 If Schaeffer indicated the condition of ambivalence as constitutive of the vital aspect of precariousness, through Becoming an Image, I exposed its paradoxical condition as catalyst for artistic creation and inventive resilience.

STILL_MÓVIL (2011-2015) – Collaboration as Co-Creation
The Becoming an Image workshop was so effective that the performative images ended up in the Museum of Contemporary Art of Thessaloniki permanent collection and I was commissioned by the Foundation Red Sudamericana to run similar workshops in ten countries in South America.33 I collaborated with a selected group of dancers and choreographers to investigate the relationship between movement and stillness. During the various STILL_MÓVIL workshops, we created new choreographic pieces to be presented to a ‘live’ audience in the form of a single large print. As Natalia Ramirez Püschel, one of the curators of the project, stated in the introductory

30 The distance mentioned here, refers to the photographic camera, which can only focus from a certain distance.
31 Both Schaeffer and myself understand the precariousness of photography as a positive condition.
32 Part of the austerity measures imposed by the European Parliament to the Greek government was a 100% cut in funding for the arts.
33 Please refer to the list and description of published work submitted page 81.
text of the STILL_MÓVIL exhibition: ‘The project attempts to provoke the viewer to observe the practice of contemporary dance through its contamination with photography and to explore the photograph as a dancing experience’ (Püschel, 2013). Alongside the forty-five large prints, the exhibition, which toured for three years (2011-2015) in most South American countries, included a large size montage of smaller photographs taken by each collaborator as an attempt to explore the movement, gestures and choices of the photographer performing photography as a dance piece, whose choreographic score was dictated by the program of the camera.

Figure 38. The Vocabulary of the Pose. Documentation of STILL_MÓVIL Exhibition at Centro Municipal de Arte Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro 2013.

The underscore in the title of the project symbolised otherness as a force of attraction acting in reciprocal directions between stillness and movement, the photographic image and its performative gesture, the photographer and the dancer/performer; a transdisciplinary blend of performative acts and photographic potentiality without a hierarchical division of tasks.

The interdependency of performance and photography manifested itself through two significant processes. Firstly, we subverted the fixity of the single frame by composing, montaging and choreographing a sequence of images. This provoked a never-ending and non-linear motion within the exhibited
photographs, which symbolised the movement both dancer body and camera body. Secondly, each ‘movement expert’ selected a specific combination of gesture, facial expression and body posture from their entire repertoire that they re-enacted for the still camera. Through the pose, movement was transformed into stillness, overlapping image and action into an interdependent union. 34

The STILL_MÓVIL photographs have been exhibited as ‘unfinished dance pieces’ or as unfixed scores, a purposely-fragmented narrative to be recomposed or actualised through the participation of the viewer.

Figure 39 & 40. (left and right) STILL_MÓVIL. Documentation Exhibition at Centro Municipal de Arte Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro in 2013.

Figure 41 & 42. Josie Cáceres and Manuel Vason, Co-creation, Quito 2011. (right) Juliana Moraes and Manuel Vason, Co-creation, São Paulo 2010.

34 For further discussion on the pose as clear evidence of the interdependency between photography and performance, see Rebecca Schneider’s analysis of the pose as simultaneously an arrest, an interval, and a durational action (Schneider, 2011:90).
As Eleonora Fabião argues, ‘[f]ragments challenge totalitarian orders; they resist unification and linearity by affirming themselves as open force fields that attract and repel other fragments composing mobile systems of relational meaning’ (Fabião, 2012:131). She continues: ‘In short, fragmentary order is always provisionary, under construction, in transition, associative, mobile, and open: it is precarious. A fragment is not melancholically searching for a lost completeness but vividly reinforcing its precariousness that is, its relativity and relationality’ (Fabião, 2012:131).

The project questioned the temporal quality of the photograph. Although its existence seems durable and stable – protected by the efficiency of its materials, chemicals and reproducibility – its essence (constitution) ‘appeared’ as provisory stillness. If we think of photography or of our encounter with photographs as ‘apparitions’, we no longer conceive them in antithesis to the ephemeral movement they describe but in a vigorously creative interdependency.

**Double Exposures (2012-15) – Collaboration as Exchange**

In *Double Exposures* I invited forty-four of the most visually provocative live artists working internationally to explore a new form of ‘collaboration as..."
exchange’, which celebrated the *interdependency* of the two media. To subvert the power of the single iconic image, I employed the diptych as a new photographic stage. On one side, I photographed a new performance for camera and, on the other side, the collaborator directed and photographed my performing body.

Figure 45. *Double Exposures* Book Cover.

The title *Double Exposures* denotes a clear link to the first book project *Exposures*, realised twelve years earlier. Although, the body (of the performer and the photographer) stayed at the center of the investigation, this time, there was an intentional departure from the glossiness of my training in high fashion photography. Giving the camera to my collaborators meant to give away the control over the final result.

*Double Exposures* also introduced a new challenge: could a performance artist express their practice through another body and, in particular, through the body of a photographer? Performance is often criticised for being a platform for explicit exhibitionism and an art form celebrating self-centrism, a

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35 Please refer to page 85 for the full list of artist/collaborators and details of the project.
characteristic which is indicative of a neoliberal disposition. The majority of my collaborators managed to find enough elements to express their practice in the photographer’s body.

The ‘Double’ in the title marked the desire to overlap and blur the distinction between photographer and performer. For David Bate, the Double Exposures diptychs recalls a decade of early Surrealist experimentation with collective hypnosis, dream séance, where the goal was to ‘unify one with the other, to see the self in the other, in a collective image’ (Bate, 2015:40).

Figure 46. Nicola Canavan and Manuel Vason, Double Exposures, Newcastle, 2014.

For Joanna Zylinska, ‘more than a mere record of performance, they represented visual tableaux whose complex transactions and exchanges all problematize the notion of the photographer’ (Zylinska, 2015:50). As I highlighted in an interview with art historian Helena Blaker included in the publication, Double Exposures proposed the gap as an ideal space of creative encounter, exchange and confusion. The gap expresses the interstice in

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36 Joanna Zylinska is professor of new media and communications at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is a photomedia artist, curator and author.
37 Helena Blaker is a writer and curator.
which *otherness* as a force of reciprocal attraction between photography and performance, gravitates stimulating potentiality and vital becoming. David Evans, the editor of the *Double Exposures* publication described the project as 'live art or performance in book form' (Evans, 2015:8). The page proved to be a dynamic space where the *interdependency* of performance and photography could be presented. It became an efficient vehicle to establish an intimate *collaboration* with the viewer.

Figure 47. David Hoyle and Manuel Vason, *Double Exposures*, Manchester, 2014.

*Double Exposures* celebrated another type of *precariousness*, namely my own, as a photographer who is not in control. I represented the photographer, giving away the control of the camera, embodying somebody else practice, confronting his inhibitions and limitations when failing to fulfil given instructions. I embraced *precariousness* as a strengthening process and as a drive for transformation from photographer to performer. While I was gaining confidence in using my body creatively, I was exposed to and reminded of my limits, my fragility and of the constructive aspects of my *precariousness*.

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38 David Evans is a writer and editor of a number of publications, one of which *Double Exposures* (2015).
Replay, Rethink, Reframe (2015) - Collaboration as Interplay

Replay, Rethink, Reframe originated in the necessity to consolidate and deepen the exchange with artists I had already collaborated with in past projects. I wanted to collaborate again with those who had particularly helped me to shape my hybrid identity as photographer turned performer. But, this time, through their physical absence. On this occasion otherness manifested itself as an urge to re-connect with the same artists but through other processes. The title chosen in agreement with the artists involved, addresses the continual flux, interdependency and interplay between photography as object and photography as action. The questions driving this project were: can I think of a framed photograph as a body? And how can I collaborate and perform (interplay) with an absent other?

The emulsified surface of the photograph has been compared to the skin of a body. Jean Luc Nancy suggests: ‘in the photo it is a question of the body: it is the body that grasps, and it is the body that is grasped and released. It is the body, its thin surface that is detached and removed by the film’ (Nancy, 2005:107). For Nancy both the human body and the body of photography are like labyrinths; full of directions, differences and endless possibilities. In Replay, Rethink, Reframe Nancy’s labyrinths are identified by the two frames and the two actions juxtaposed in confrontation: the first is the framed action of my collaborator (which I photographed for previous projects), the second is myself interacting with the framed photograph as if it was their body and executing an imagined action/instruction that would connect me with their practice.

The ‘image within the image’ represents ‘the act of re-framing’ and the perpetual process of identification and differentiation my photography searches to activate and perform. Replay, Rethink, Reframe photographs can be defined not only as performative self-portraits but also as an expression of the time-lapse between my collaborators’ actions and mine. A suspension of time and photographic spaces representing a new type of ‘collaboration as interplay’ in which an imaginary dialogue with an ‘absent’ artists activated a photographer to perform.

Figure 50 & 51. La Ribot and Manuel Vason, Replay, Rethink, Reframe. London 2015. (right) Alastair McLennan and Manuel Vason, Replay, Rethink, Reframe. London 2015.
Replay, Rethink, Reframe defines another attempt to destabilize the fixity of the photographic frame through the agency of the ‘double’ and its precariouslyness. The playful interdependency between the two frames and the different bodies (mine, the absent artist and the framed photograph) interconnected within each photograph communicates a resistance to (or subversion of) any singular reading and encourages the viewer to re-frame, re-interpret the performed photographs, which invite an oscillation between perspectives.

Figure 52, 53 & 54. (left and right) Replay, Rethink, Reframe. Documentation Exhibition at Solyanka Gallery as part of the 6th Moscow Biennial of Contemporary Art in 2015.

In an essay titled ‘Precariousness in Play’, Don Handelman describes interplay as ‘a medium in itself conditioned by precariousness and subversive in its effects’ (Handelman, 1998:63). ‘Play’ embodies a double status: on one hand, it embraces a certain frivolity but on the other hand, it encompasses an unpredictability, which could be understood and celebrated as a creative antidote to human obsession with order and control. Replay, Rethink, Reframe invites the viewer into a playful process of double identification with the body of the performance artist and the body of the photographer turned performer, whimsically fusing image and action. Once again, this project reinforces one of the main arguments of this thesis by defining precariousness as a creative force, functioning as agent for

39 Another aspect of the connection between the ‘double’ and precariousness was discussed through the critical analysis of the Becoming and Image project.
engagement (interplay) and, in this case, capable of directing absence and presence in a playful blend.

**The PhotoPerformer (2014 on-going) - Collaboration as Inner Collaboration**

Figure 55. *The PhotoPerformer in Action, London 2015.*

*The PhotoPerformer* is my most recent and on-going project. It grew from my need to develop the ‘collaboration as interplay’ with an absent artist into a form of ‘inner collaboration’ with my alter ego. It gives me the opportunity to explore personal and existential issues as well as interrogate my complex relationship with photography.

I named my alter ego *The PhotoPerformer* as he/they/it\(^\text{40}\) manifests him/them/itself by combining two actions: a poetic/symbolic action and a photographic gesture. While the repetitive action of photographing becomes a vital activity through which *The PhotoPerformer* finds/sustains his/their/its existence, the complementary (poetic/symbolic) actions suggest a critique, a counter-action and a ‘poetic’ remedy against the controlling power of

\(^{40}\) *The PhotoPerformer* is at the same time myself, a conceptual personae and a human machine.
photography. For Vilém Flusser the act of photography is an act of philosophy: ‘by photographing we are not changing the world we are living in but we are changing the way we perceive it and as a consequence we are altering our behaviours’ (Flusser, 2000:25). The PhotoPerformer is seeking to confront his/their/its internal image (the eye of the mind) with his/their/its external one (the eye of the camera) and perform the sense of dependency (precariousness) that he/they/it experiences toward photography. The PhotoPerformer is an active self-reflection, which I describe as an ‘inner collaboration’, and a fusion of the two media in which the focus on the photographic gesture exposes the photographer (usually ignored or invisible) as performer.

In July 2014 during a live presentation titled Metafora (metaphor), The PhotoPerformer appeared in front a live audience with a camera taped to his/their/its face. By performing intense breathing exercises and increasing his/their/its body temperature, The PhotoPerformer aimed to produce drops of sweat and melt his/their/its photographic portrait printed on soluble paper, placed on a small platform where he/they/it was standing. Under the control of the participating audience who were remotely triggering the camera, the action of breathing and the action of photographing synchronized. The synchronism, resembling Vito Acconci’s blinking eye in Blinks, was expressing the fusion (interdependency) of the two media and transforming his/their/its
body into a breathing camera devise. For forty-five minutes the audience was exposed to a process of destruction: each new image projected was deleting the previous one. The camera taped to the face of The PhotoPerformer's didn't have a memory card, so any new image was deleting the previous. Each projected image became an apparition instead of a trace. The image under The PhotoPerformer's feet was melting and his/their/its body betrayed the exhaustion.

Figure 58 & 59. (left and right) Metaphor. Documentation of Live Performance during Verbo Festival of Performance, São Paulo 2014.

Rosi Braidotti describes the posthuman subject as ‘a complex subject which rejects individualism for a nomadic subjectivity through the ethics of becoming. A subject that works across differences and embraces the non-human as a vital force to escape anthropocentrism’ (Braidotti, 2013:191). While posthuman theory is deeply rooted in an ethical concept of otherness as a force of becoming and change in dialogue with technology, The PhotoPerformer questions the program built into this posthuman body/camera and its effects of control and normativity. It does so not by opening up a critique of technology per se, but one of technological determinism. In fact technology, the digitized image and their promise for a better future (progress) can be considered as another framing devise that imposes control over the fluidity of diversity. While exploring the correspondence between my body and my imagination, the camera and its technology, myself and The PhotoPerformer (through ‘inner collaboration’), I came to the conclusion that
individualism is the technology of my (our) photographic imagination and a form of control I (we) crafted and unwittingly accepted.\textsuperscript{41} Moreover, photography stimulates and propels the same individualism (framing devise) that is at core of contemporary neoliberal society. While I acknowledge and resist the precarity\textsuperscript{42} of digital photography, its technology, its partial perspective, its objectification and the growing individualism it cements, I explore the vitality of the medium as a counter force reacting to its fixity by becoming a photographer performer concentrating on the photographic gesture.

The PhotoPerformer becomes a conceptual photographic creature through which I (we) can perpetuate the attraction toward the Other (otherness), model a new imagination infused with poetic actions and performs the precariousness of photography by exposing the photographer, their individualism and their vulnerability. Acknowledging the precariousness of photography can be conceived an expansion of sight and develop an ethical ‘response-ability’ toward others. ‘Response-ability’ in this context is reminiscent of Butler ‘obligation’ (chapter 3) in that it is an attempt to think through an ethical relationality with each other. The process of focusing as embodied by The PhotoPerformer is therefore not an optimisation of the self but rather an undoing of the self in its very indebtedness to others.

In this chapter, I have articulated how my art practice adds to the interplay of performance and photography and how collaboration, otherness and precariousness have helped me un-frame this relationship. I suggested that by engaging with the parameters of Live Art, photographers can come to reflect critically on the power dynamics at work in photography and bring forward new modes of practice that engage collaborators as co-creators and highlight the intersubjectivities of the creative process.

\textsuperscript{41} ‘Individualism as a form of control’ has been exposed and examined extensively by Foucault through the notion of Biopolitics and technology of the self. (Foucault, 1980:55)

\textsuperscript{42} With the transition from analogue to digital technologies, images ‘appear’ more certain as the technological capacities that render them clearly visible increase. They, nevertheless, are also inherently circumscribed or touched by more precarity as their numbers, contingencies, ephemeralities and manipulabilities increase. While we are all relying increasingly on technology, we are anxious about its inescapable precarity. Interruptions in communication, cyber attacks, viruses, etc. are all manifestation of this intensified sense of insecurity.
Figure 60. INSPIRATION. The PhotoPerformer in Action, Mexico City 2016.
Conclusion

My artistic research and practice exemplify a need to resist and overcome the containment of the photographic frame and the power structures it represents. I explore performative interventions as a strategy to subvert these structures and to develop more fluid and inclusive approaches to framing. I initiated collaboration as a methodology through which to renegotiate my position as photographer, escape the fixity and authority of the medium and shape a more open (hybrid) identity as *The PhotoPerformer*. While artistic collaborations are quite common in contemporary art, they are rarely adopted in photography and are rarely used so systematically as an evolving methodology of practice. My contribution offers a way for photographers to conceive a more collaborative and open-ended artistic progress.

Figure 61. *SUBMERSIVE*. Documentation of Live Performance at DARC Studio, London 2017.\(^43\)

\(^{43}\) As the title suggests – a fusion of two words ‘submerse’ and ‘subversive’ – at every shot remotely controlled by the audience *The PhotoPerformer* was crunching the same image. The action lasted over 3 hours.
Each of my collaborations was characterized by a vital tension caused by the interplay of my perspective and the confrontation with the ones of other artists. Each collaboration was sustained by a creative force of attraction toward the Other which I recognised as the unconventional. Otherness manifested itself as a desire to stretch our reciprocal art practices, as a sense of admiration, as a spatial-temporal ecstasy, as a stimulus to touch, as a magnetism, as a gravitation, as an urge to re-connect and as an impulse to keep the art forms a-live and unframed. I conceived of otherness as the force that kept my photography pulling toward performance, with the goal to eventually merge the two media through the practice of The PhotoPerformer. Practicing photography as performance allowed me to experience the interdependency of the two art forms and interpret it as a fruitful process of reconfiguration (re-framing), as a condition for creative expansion (a-liveness) and as space for self-critique. In that process, the photographic document as a document of truth and authority is questioned and the act of photographing becomes the new focus for a practice of (self)reflection.


In collaboration with performance, photography exposes its limits and reveals its precariousness: a force that I describe as an inherent dependency
between the photograph and the act of photographing. In my art practice, it manifests itself through a) the instability of its sensitive emulsion in *Exposures*; b) the partiality of its action of framing in *Oh Lover Boy*; c) its uncertain identity and unsettling quality in *Encounters*; d) its ambivalent and paradoxical constitution in *Becoming an Image*; e) its provisory temporality as ‘apparition’ in *Still_Movil*; f) the loss of control in *Double Exposures*; g) its double status and the interplay of its different connotations in *Replay, Rethink, Reframe*; and h) the inescapable precarity of its technology in *The PhotoPerformer*.

![Figure 63. Exercising Exchange Through the Lens, São Paulo 2016.](image)

I described how an important constituent of this practice was replacing the notion of photographic truth with trust and overcoming the natural distance between subjects (photographer and photographed) through proximity (touch) and intimacy. I have also shown how this practice galvanizes a deeper sense of responsibility toward others, stimulates more ethical awareness and condemns the individualism – so characteristic of our neoliberal society – as a form of (self-)control and normativity. As photography has inserted itself in every aspect of our lives and has become an indispensable component of relating and exchanging with other subjects of the world, it is necessary to re-
constitute our understanding of photography as a relational activity through which we can un-frame the power dynamic and control we created.

Figure 64. The PhotoPerformer is Exposing Photography as a Game of Authority, Hangzhou 2015.
Appendix:

List and Description of Published Work submitted

In support to the critical analysis and to help the reader to gain a better understanding of how and what the eight projects submitted for this PhD by Publication contributed to existing knowledge and practice, I have compiled here full details and descriptions of each project as well as some key quotes from books or reviews.


Published by Black Dog Publishing Ltd. in 2002. Developed in collaboration with the Live Art Development Agency. Financially assisted by the Arts Council of England.

Exposures is Vason’s first collection of collaborative photographs. The book

Please refer to the critical analysis of the project on page 41.
was an unprecedented approach to the documentation and dissemination of work by performance practitioners. Alongside essays by Lois Keidan and Ron Athey, *Exposures* brought together images made with some of the most celebrated performance artists working in the UK. Artists featured in *Exposures* were Aaron Williamson, Doran George, Ernst Fischer, Franko B, Gilles Jobin, Giovanna Maria Casetta, Helena Goldwater, Joshua Sofaer, Kira O’Reilly, DogonEff, La Ribot, Marisa Carnesky, Mat Fraser, Moti Roti, Oreet Ashery, Robert Pacitti, Ronald Fraser Munroe, Stacy Makishi and Susan Carol Lewis.

All the images exist as original 10x8 inches Polaroids. Each collaboration was photographed using a maximum of ten sheets of film, during one day of shooting. The use of Polaroid film enabled a series of discussions that structured each short collaborative process. The instant results allowed a practical framework that has since developed into the more extensively dialogue-based modes of collaboration practiced.

Project web link: [http://manuelvason.com/exposures](http://manuelvason.com/exposures)

> ‘These photographs are neither a record of an event nor a portrait of an artist but something in between, or rather beyond: something more intimate, more authentic and ultimately more meaningful. They signify the work as much as document it’

*Dazed and Confused Magazine*, issue 75, March 2001

> ‘The whole initial project has kick started a large-scale national interest in the documentation of the live. And what began as someone else’s project fueled a concern over my own representation in archive and documentation, as well as the consolidation of the emphasis from textual play and humour in my solo performances to visuality and minimal aesthetics.’

Helena Goldwater,
Performance Artist,
*Exposures* 2002, p 74
Exposures exhibition was first launched at the Bonington Gallery in Nottingham in November 2001 and then presented:

- at the National Review of Live Art Glasgow in February 2002
- at the Tate Liverpool as part of Art Lies and Video Tapes Exhibition in November 2003 (a selection of images).
- at Harsard Gallery in Southampton as part of Live Art on Camera Exhibition in September 2007 (a selection of images).
- at Space Gallery in London as part of Live Art on Camera Exhibition in April 2008 (a selection of images).
- at Golden Thread Gallery in Belfast as part of Belfast Photo Festival in June 2015.

Oh Lover Boy 45 (1999-2001)

Published by Black Dog Publishing Ltd in 2001. Paperback, 102 pages, 86 colour reproductions 22.8x22.8x1.4 cm, ISBN: 978-1901033823, UK.

45 Please refer on the critical analysis of the project on page 44.
Oh Lover Boy is the result of a two years collaboration with performance artist Franko B during which Vason followed him and documented every single live performance in UK and Europe. The project/collaboration was triggered by the necessity to establish a more profound connection with an artist whose work Vason found complex and problematic. It is during this time that Vason understood the potentiality of performances for camera.

The book contains text by Sarah Wilson and an interview between the artist and Gray Watson.

Project web link: http://manuelvason.com/oh-lover-boy

‘It is a cliché to say that artists suffer for their art, but it’s certainly true of Franko B. Oh Lover Boy is written in blood’

Lyn Gardner,
Art and Theatre Critic
The Guardian, May the 1st, 2001

Encounters 46 (2003-2007)

Published by Arnolfini Gallery Ltd, Bristol in 2007.

46 Please refer on the critical analysis of the project on page 47.
Encounters is an extensive collection of Manuel Vason’s photographic collaborations with artists working in performance. Each photograph in the publication represents a site-specific performance for the camera, created with the aim to take the viewer to an intimate encounter with a new artwork. Through Encounters Vason destabilized the authority of the photographer over the photographed by sharing in equal part the copyright of each image with his collaborators and problematized the relationship between the action and its documentation by merging their time, space and memory. Published by Arnolfini to accompany the first major exhibition of Vason's work in the UK and edited by Dominic Johnson, Encounters brings together new critical essays on Vason's collaborative images, by Rebecca Schneider, Tracey Warr and Kate Random Love.

Through the lens of Vason's practice, these essays explore performance and photography, documentation and portraiture, and the challenging historical relationships between each genre. The publication also contains a series of commissioned artist writings on the collaborative process, by Ernst Fischer, Helen Spackman, Richard Hancock and Traci Kelly, Anne Seagrave, and other performance practitioners.


Project web link: http://manuelvason.com/encounters
‘Manuel Vason’s startling and stylised images, powerfully reproduced in Encounters, violently force bodily abjection into the arena of the sublime. Not since the era of Caravaggio and Bernini has pain been so exquisitely and beautifully rendered - here, through Vason's capacity to connect, via the red-hot wire of aesthetic reduction, to the bodies that wield and convey it’

Amelia Jones,
Robert A. Day Professor and Vice Dean of Research at the Roski School of Art and Design at University of Southern California,
Encounters' back cover endorsement, 2007

‘Vason’s pieces are arguably both photograph and performance, asking us to engage a photograph not only as a record of a performance, but as the performance itself’

Rebecca Schneider,
Associate Professor of Theatre, Speech and Dance Theatre, Speech & Dance, Brown University, USA (Schneider, 2007:34)

‘…Vason originally came to the world of performance as an ingénue, almost completely unfamiliar with the live art territory, stunned by these odd bodies in extreme contexts, bewitched by the unspeakable and the seemingly unrecordable. And it’s this challenge that propels Vason’s own practice forward as he takes some serious time to get to know his subjects: discussing their work at length, going on little adventures, repeatedly shooting the breeze before shooting a single frame.’

Tim Atack,
Writer and Music Composer
RealTime Magazine, issue 80, Aug-Sept 2007

‘A recurring theme in the collaborators’ texts is their trust of Vason. They compliment his integrity, fidelity, and commitment to the joint project. The recurrent emphasis of trust belies the generalized anxiety in culture about photography and a specifically live-art-based anti-materialist dismissal of documentation.’
Laurie Beth Clark,
Professor of the Department of Art History, University of Wisconsin

‘A treasure trove of iconoclastic images that serve as a body of evidence for an extraordinary yet often elusive area of practice.’

Lois Keidan,
Director, Live Art Development Agency
(Keidan, 2007:19)

‘Manuel Vason’s images exist somewhere between portraiture, performance documentation, and documentary - or perhaps, his images are fashion shots, but the bodies are clothed in performance.’

Tracy Warr,
Independent Curator, Editor of *The Artist’s Body*, *Encounters*’ back cover endorsement, 2007

*Encounters exhibition* was launched at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol, in July 2007. The exhibition was then re-presented at the A Foundation in Liverpool as part of the Liverpool Biennial, in 2008.
Becoming an Image is the title of a series of workshops and exhibitions, which signal Vason interest in developing his collaborative methodology with a group of participant artists/collaborators.

Influenced by Brian Massumi definition ‘an emotion is a subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from the point onward defined as personal’ (Massumi, 2015:88), during Becoming an Image workshop, the group translated emotions into photographic narratives of action-reaction and utilized the gathering as a structure in which to provoke affection and imagination among its participants.

In a 2013 interview with Professor Joanna Zylinska, published on Photomediations Machine Vason described his motivations behind the Becoming an Image project as: ‘I hope these images function as agent. I hope they trigger the imagination of the viewer, I hope they provoke sensations, I hope they trigger future actions. The bodies in these images are equal to the body of the viewer. I believe we can all identify with these images and look at them with an active spirit of participation’.

Project web link: http://manuelvason.com/becoming-an-image

47 Please refer on the critical analysis of the project on page 50.
The first *Becoming an Image* workshop was held in Thessaloniki and the outcome was exhibited as part of the 3rd edition of the Biennale of Contemporary Art of Thessaloniki in 2009. In that occasion the participant artists were: Alexia Falla, Andreas Pashias, Antonis Dalkiranidis, Christina Georgiou, Lela Ramoglou, Maria Kremeti, Olga Brouma, Thalia Zachariadou.

In 2010 a version of the *Becoming an Image* workshop was held and exhibited in Lancaster at the (LICA) Lancaster Institute for Contemporary Art. In the same year, 2010 the *Becoming an Image* workshop was held and exhibited in Rome (Italy) as part of the Rifrazioni Festival. A similar workshop was held at the Casa do Sol – Instituto Hilda Hilst in Campinas (Brazil) and the resultant outcome was exhibited at the Galeria Centrale in Sao Paulo in 2014. *Becoming an Image* workshop returned to Thessaloniki in 2015, this time hosted by the Museum of Photography.

In 2016 the *Becoming an Image* workshop was held in Hangzhou hosted by the China Academy of Art and a selection of the images created where included on a publication printed on a limited edition of ten copies. All the copies are available for consultation at the library of the Academy.
STILL_MÓVIL (2011-2015) is Vason’s first collection of co-creations with fifty choreographers, dancers and movement practitioners. Working with artists across South America, the project explored the relationship between stillness and movement, photography and dance, the image and the action. Each image was conceived as a new contemporary dance piece.

In 2011 La Red Sudamericana de Danza (an organization dedicated to the promotion and support of contemporary dance in South America) commissioned Manuel Vason to collaborate with fifty ‘experts of the movement’ with the aim to explore new strategies for the documentation of contemporary dance and, at the same time, generate a new testimony of the contemporary dance scene in South America. Working in ten countries in South America, Vason developed a methodology, which focuses on workshops, exercises and exchange between the participants. The result of the project was an itinerant exhibition containing 45 large size images and smaller size images, videos, text, drawings and a sound installation describing the process.

48 Please refer on the critical analysis of the project on page 53.
In one of the text accompanying the exhibition Natalia Ramírez Püsche, (art critic and sociologist) described **STILL_MÓVIL** as:

‘This is not about photographically documenting bodies in movement. Neither is it about constructing a pose for the camera. The concept of the project Still_Móvil is more complicated and asks us to openly observe the ways in which contemporary dance practices have been affected by other artforms. The project investigates the process of transformation of a dance piece into a photograph, an undertaking, which proposes asking whether that photograph could be considered as a dance experience, in what sense and why. The performance between the artist and his collaborators explores through the capacities of the photographic device, the transformation of the choreographers’ body as visual writing into a form that represents them. This encounter between dance, photography and performance, experiments with the possible relationships between the body’s presence and representation, movement and stillness, improvisation and organisation, spontaneity and construction, authenticity and artifice, intensity and language, process and ending. The process towards the images exhibited in Still_Móvil could be described as the creation of a photographic dance, developed with visual criteria, where the body captured in the composition signifies all that composition can possibly be.’

To accompany the **STILL_MÓVIL** exhibition La Red Sudamericana de Danza also commissioned a website and new essays by Zara Rodríguez Prieto, Andréa Bardawil, Fernando J. Garcia Barros, Alexandra Cuesta, Constanza Cordovez, André Lepecki, Natalia Ramírez Püsche, Helena Katz, Juliana Reyes, María José Cifuentes, Oswaldo Marchionda, Nayse López and Hayde Lachino.

Project web link: [http://www.stillmovil.com](http://www.stillmovil.com)
‘Vason’s operation is to transform a pulsating coexistence of polyphonic possibilities into a final tonic chord.’

Helena Katz,
Art Historian and Dance Critic based in Sao Paulo,
STILL_MÓVIL website endorsement, 2015

‘Co-creation in this particular case implies a change in the role of the photographer. The photographer stops privileging his look through the objective to be a participant in the creation process.’

Zara Rodríguez Prieto,
Editor of Efimera Magazine
Efimera Revista, vol.3 n. 4, November 2012

‘Still_Móvil is still here and there moving, simultaneously adding and multiplying, as a rhizomatic proposal, trans, inter, multi, poly ... Its relevance is to combine pretexts, contexts, texts ... to allow us to re-move, move, see ... and thus understand each other.’

Fernando J. Garcia Barros,
Director of mARTadero Art Centre,
STILL_MÓVIL website endorsement, 2015

STILL_MÓVIL exhibition was presented:
- at the Centro de Exposiciones Subte, Montevideo (Uruguay) in November - December 2011.
- at AECID, Centro Cultural de España Juan de Salazar, Asunción (Paraguay) in March - April 2012.
- at Centro Municipal de Arte Hélio Oiticica during Festival Panorama, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in November 2012.
- at DANZA PUCP, Casa O´Higgins, Lima (Peru) in April - May 2013.
- at GAM, Centro Gabriela Mistral, Santiago (Chile) in August - September 2013.
- at the Bienal SESC de Dança 2014, Santos, São Paulo (Brazil) in September 2014.

Double Exposures (2012-2015)

Published by Intellect Publishing and LADA in 2015. Hard cover, colour photographs throughout, 232 pages, 29.8x21cm ISBN 978-1783204090, UK.

Double Exposures is a collaborative venture between Manuel Vason and forty-four of the most visually arresting artists working with performance in the UK. Ten years after his first book, Exposures, Vason has produced another body of work, which sets out new ways of bridging performance and photography. For Double Exposures, Vason has worked with two groups of artists, using two distinct types of collaboration, to produce a series of double images (diptychs). Artists who had previously worked with Vason were invited to create two images, one of their own practice and another, where they took on the role of the photographer, shaping an image with Vason’s body. A second group of new collaborators were invited to create a performance, which could be captured in two photographs. All the images exist as doubles.

49 Please refer on the critical analysis of the project on page 56.
pairs, and diptychs. 

*Double Exposures* publication includes commissioned essays on photography and performance by David Bate, David Evans, Dominic Johnson, Lois Keidan, Alice Maude-Roxby, Adrien Sina, Chris Townsend, and Joanna Zylinska and an interview with Helena Blaker. Themes explored include the body, the diptych, documentation, encounters, identity, mediation and the relationship between photography and performance.

Artists featured in *Double Exposures* were Lucille Acevedo-Jones & Rajni Shah, Katherine Araniello, Oreet Ashery, Ron Athey, Franko B, Julia Bardsley, Dickie Beau, Ansuman Biswas, Nicola Canavan, Marisa Carnesky, Giovanna Maria Casetta, Brian Catling, Marcia Farquhar, Ernst Fischer, Eloise Fornieles, Mat Fraser, Hugo Glendinning, Helena Goldwater, Helena Hunter, David Hoyle, Iona Kewney, Noëmi Lakmaier, jamie lewis hadley, Stacy Makishi, Alastair MacLennan, Mad For Real (Cai Yuan & Jian Jun Xi), Rita Marcalo, Michael Mayhew, Nando Messias, Mouse, Martin O'Brien, Sinéad O'Donnell, Harold Offeh, Florence Peake, Áine Phillips, Joshua Sofaer, the vacuum cleaner, The Famous Lauren Barri Holstein, Elvira Santamaria Torres, Aaron Williamson and Alexandra Zierle & Paul Carter.

Project web link: [http://www.double-exposures.com](http://www.double-exposures.com)

‘Vason truly collaborates with his performance colleagues. His work debunks the traditional binary of photographer/model, and instead gives equal creative agency to each individual participating in the experiment. By framing Vason’s images as a truly collective, democratic work, viewers are encouraged to unpack complicated issues of authorship, ownership, credit, and criticism.’

**Guillermo Gómez-Peña,**

Performance Artist,

*Double Exposures’* back cover endorsement, 2014

‘Vason’s collaborative photographs are invitations — communicative acts that call on us to pursue intersubjective relations with alterity. Viewers are enjoined to move beyond themselves — beyond a libidinal imaginary stripped by mass media — towards singular formations. Through their bold performativity and
Jonathan Beller,  
Professor, Humanities and Media Studies, Pratt Institute, New York,  
*Double Exposures*’ website endorsement, 2014

‘Bliss I had not seen Michael Mayhew since the mid 1980s. That was my loss, not his. Until opening Manuel Vason’s luscious *Double Exposures* that is. He looks younger, but is still on fire. He had played one of the arsonists for me, beautifully, in Max Frisch’s prescient play, *The Fireraisers*, back then. And now, he reaches out towards me, as I turn the page, and then turn back. The apparatus of the camera, in Manuel’s hands, has been lying in wait, in preparation for this moment (apparare: to prepare). Vilem Flusser would have us believe, in his philosophy of photography, that the apparatus ‘sharpens its teeth’ in readiness for photography. Well here it has sprung. And from a death mask Michael faces up to us from the grass, in bliss.’

Alan Read,  
Director Performance Foundation,  
Professor of Theatre, King’s College London,  
*Double Exposures*’ website endorsement, 2014

‘Photography stages what it records; and subjects perform on that stage. In this age of the complicit auto-branding of the ‘Selfie’, it’s a relief to be reminded that the self and the camera are less knowable than we might think. In this book Manuel Vason’s collaborative photographs along with a range of nimble writers reopen for us all the uncertainties and possibilities, the trapdoors and escape hatches that make the self and the camera such wild companions.’

David Campany,  
Writer, Curator and Artist,  
*Double Exposures*’ website endorsement, 2014

‘The historical relationship between photography and performance is complex and fraught. Initially, photographs of performers were portraits. Later,
photography became the primary means of documenting performances, thus allowing them to exist beyond the evanescent moment. In such cases, the photograph is often considered as a secondary text, a reproduction of an “original” event. But photography has also emerged as a space in which performances can take place, and there is now a substantial history of photographs that document performances that happened only in the photograph itself.

Manuel Vason is clearly aware of the many forms the relationship between photography and performance has taken, and his work is informed by all of them. Indeed, he refuses to allow his work to fall into one or another of the received categories but stakes out territories on the borderlines between them. Distinctive to his work, besides the ability to produce ravishing images, is the fact that his photographs do not self-effacingly document other artists’ performances but are themselves collaborative works. Double Exposures is his latest venture along these lines, a project that sees him working in new ways with performers with whom he has collaborated before, and emerging from behind the camera to appear as a performer himself.’

Philip Auslander,
Professor at School of Literature, Media, and Communication,
Georgia Institute of Technology,
Double Exposures’ website endorsement, 2014

‘Exploring a breadth of body shapes, shocking scenes and humorous diptychs, Vason’s work creates an exciting new language of the most fleeting of art forms.’

Amelia Abraham
Commissioning Editor
ID-Vice magazine, Online Review, January 2015

The Double Exposures publication was launched in different venues and accompanied by a series of symposium, artist’s talk, live interviews and discussion.
Double Exposures was presented:
- at the Anatomy Museum as part of King’s College London in November 2014.
- at the Leeds Art Gallery as part of the Compass Live Art Festival in November 2014.
- at the Tate Britain in London in February 2015.
- at the Arnolfini Galley in Bristol as part of the In Between Time Festival in February 2015.
- at the Grace Exhibition Space in New York in April 2015.
- at the Mobius Gallery in Boston in April 2015.
- at the Defibrillator Gallery in Chicago in April 2015.
- at the Human Resources Gallery in Los Angeles in April 2015.
- at the SF Camerawork Gallery in San Francisco in May 2015.
- at the Arnolfini Gallery (this time presented as video projection with voice over of the artists involved as part of a program curated by the Live Art Development Agency) in February 2017.

Replay, Rethink, Reframe\textsuperscript{50} (2015)

\textsuperscript{50} Please refer on the critical analysis of the project on page 60.
Vason’s obsession for ‘the photograph’ as an object of contact with the memory is reflected upon within this new series of images, specifically created for the exhibition at the Solyanka Museum as part of the 6th Moscow Biennial of Contemporary Art in 2015. Vason titled this project *Replay, Rethink, Reframe* in response to the various phases of its process of creation. Vason’s decision to suspend the artwork with a red rope highlighted the tension between photography and performance and at the same time the ‘red line’ (the red rope use to hang the artwork) represented the will to fight the homophobic attitude of Russian politics at the time of this exhibition.

On the press release of the exhibition Lina Krasnyanskaya curator of Solyanka State Gallery wrote:

‘*In Replay, Rethink, Reframe* Vason is jumping in and out of the frame, in front and behind the camera, outside conventional photography, above self-portraiture, into the gap of performative imagination.’

Project web link: [http://manuelvason.com/replayrethinkreframe](http://manuelvason.com/replayrethinkreframe)

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*The PhotoPerformer* 51 (2014 on-going)

[Image of a person on a tricycle]

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51 Please refer on the critical analysis of the project on page 63.
The PhotoPerformer is an anthropologist who is documenting his own life as a case study for others.
The PhotoPerformer is an athlete of the poetic image.
The PhotoPerformer is a hunter of future memories.
The PhotoPerformer is an equilibrist honoring the instability in life.
The PhotoPerformer is an explorer of the photographic space.
The PhotoPerformer is an artist which art is to unsettle our relationship with photography.
The PhotoPerformer is a professional amateur.
The PhotoPerformer is an alter-ego with a specific purpose: to become a medium, a sort of mediatic device of differentiation, a mirror for all of us.
The PhotoPerformer represents a form of training with the aim to re-connect what photography has separated.\(^{52}\)

The PhotoPerformer is Vason most recent and on-going project. It epitomizes the conceptual manifestation of the interdependency between photography and performance by merging the two art forms into an hybrid art practice. So far the activities of The PhotoPerformer have been exhibited through live performances as well as video, sculptures, drawing, installation and text.

Project web link: http://photoperformer.com

‘Manuel Vason is a photographer converted into performer so to become an artist with a unique voice converging body and camera.’
Fermín Carreño Martínez,
Director of Casa de Cultura de la UAEM
(Autonomous University of Mexico State),
The PhotoPerformer’s website endorsement, 2016

‘Manuel Vason’s art practice is a clear example of the possible expansion of photography as action art, which I hope will be considered by the contemporary dance community as a benchmark for the emancipation and urgent expansion of our dance scene.’

\(^{52}\) The PhotoPerformer is describing him/they/itself through a sort of manifesto in constant alteration.
Elmo Guzmán Gutiérrez,
Director of CEPRODAC
(Center of Production of Contemporary Dance Mexico City),
*The PhotoPerformer’s website endorsement, 2016*

‘The PhotoPerformer, a human camera is forcing photography to unfold in the existential act of photography as a transcendental whole that guides us toward the uncertainty of darkness and meaning.’

*Yoatzin Balbuena,*
*Artist Collaborator,*
*The PhotoPerformer’s website endorsement, 2016*

*The PhotoPerformer* has been presented as a public performance:

- at La Plataformance Festival in São Paulo in April 2016.
- at the Art Space Mexico Gallery in Mexico City in November 2016.
- at the Body and Freedom Festival in Zurich in August 2018

The first *The PhotoPerformer* exhibition was present at The Museum of Queretaro (Mexico) in January 2017 under the title of *The PhotoPerformer, Permanent Actions – Disposable Images.*
Bibliography


**Declaration**

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed: [Signature]

Dated: 16th June 2019