

## PROCEEDINGS OF THE PERFORMING SPACE 2023 CONFERENCE

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### The Spatial Performativity: Unveiling the Dialogue Between Space and Human Experience Through Embodied Imagery

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# **The Spatial Performativity: Unveiling the Dialogue Between Space and Human Experience Through Embodied Imagery**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the complex relationship between Spatial Performativity and human experience, focusing on the transformative power of charcoal-based embodied imagery. The research examines the intersection of art, psychotherapy, and Spatial Performativity, emphasising interdisciplinary approaches to understanding human experience within environments. The objective is to contribute to understanding how creative practices can illuminate the complex relationships between individuals and the spatial environment. The research provides insights into transformative experiences and enhanced self-awareness through artistic expression.

The research was conducted through narrative inquiry and autoethnographic reflections. Key theories applied include Merleau-Ponty's (1962) concept of the "lived body," Gallagher's (2005) work on embodied cognition, and Parlett's (1997) concept of a 'unified field.' The other practitioners considered in this research are Olsen (2014), Newman and de Zegher (2003), and Schaverien (2008).

The study concludes that embodied imagery has significant transformative potential in self-exploration, evoking visceral responses and connecting viewers with shared human experiences. The findings highlight that artistic expression can externalise internal processes, create alternative meanings, and foster greater self-awareness within one's environment. This study contributes to ongoing discussions about the role of art in personal transformation and environmental interaction and offers potential applications in fields such as art, psychotherapy, and spatial performativity.

*Keywords:* Spatial Performativity, Embodied Imagery, Autoethnography, Artistic Expression, Personal Transformation, Charcoal Drawings

## The Spatial Performativity

Spatial performativity serves as a vital conceptual lens in exploring the complex relationship between human experience and inhabited spaces. This framework illuminates how human actions dynamically interact with and shape environments, examining the creation, experience, and transformation of space through performances, actions, and behaviours (Thrift, 2003). Drawing from diverse fields such as performance studies, psychotherapy and architecture, spatial performativity offers a multidisciplinary approach to understanding human-environmental interactions.

### Theoretical Framework

The concept of spatial performativity aligns with several interconnected theoretical perspectives. Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenological concept of the "lived body" and Gallagher's (2005) work on embodied cognition emphasise the crucial role of bodily experiences in shaping environmental perception and interaction, while Parlett's (1997) notion of a 'unified field' underscores the interdependence between individuals and their environment, echoing the sociocultural dimension of spatial performativity. Further enriching this theoretical framework, Olsen's (2014) exploration of bodily awareness in creative expression, and Newman as well as de Zegher's (2003) work on performative drawing provide insights into the embodied nature of artistic practices. Schaverien's (2008) concept of the 'embodied image' connects with the transformative potential of spatial performativity, suggesting how imaginative endeavours can externalise internal processes and lead to profound changes.

### Research Focus and Research Questions

The research explores embodied imagery as a powerful medium for transforming relationships with the environment, highlighting the interconnections between body, space, psyche, and artistic expression (Massey, 2005).

The following research questions guide this study:

1. *How does creating embodied imagery using charcoal reveal the dynamic dialogue between spatial performativity and human experiences?*
2. *In what ways does the transformative nature of such images enhance the understanding of ourselves and the surrounding environment?*

## **Methodology and Ethics**

In this study, I employ an autoethnographic research methodology complemented by narrative inquiry approaches. Autoethnography, characterised as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research [that] displays multiple layers of consciousness" (Ellis, 2004, p. 37), allows for a deep exploration of personal experiences in relation to broader cultural contexts. This approach facilitates a fluid movement between external and internal worlds, enabling a rich, reflective investigation.

My research process involved immersive contemplation, weaving together personal experiences, reflections from counselling encounters, and insights gained through the creation of embodied imagery.

The creative process itself formed a crucial part of the methodology. It involved free-flowing movements where gestural marks and strokes became extensions of the body, fostering an ongoing dialogue between self, physicality, and the surrounding space. This process enabled a deep exploration of the interconnections between personal and spatial environments.

Additionally, I incorporated narrative inquiry methodologies, as Clandinin (2018) outlined. This approach recognises that all experience is embodied, personal, social, and context-based. It involves a keen interest in the stories we live and tell, acknowledging their often messy, unfolding nature shaped by intention and context. As a counsellor, I firmly focused on ethical responsibilities, recognising the impact of others' stories on self-reflection and meaning-making processes.

This multifaceted methodology allowed me to explore spatial performativity and embodied imagery comprehensively, providing rich insights into the transformative potential of artistic processes and their role in shaping our understanding of self and environment.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The research revealed significant insights into the transformative potential of embodied imagery and its role in uncovering the dynamic dialogue between spatial performativity and human experiences. The process of creating charcoal artworks emerged as a powerful medium for engaging deeply felt emotions and experiences, evoking visceral responses and fostering connections with shared human experiences.

Throughout my artistic process, I experienced a continuous dialogue between self, body, and the surrounding space, mediating between internal and external worlds. This interplay highlighted the fluid nature of human experience, challenging fixed notions of form,

states, and identity. I observed that the artworks underwent continuous metamorphosis and evolution, reflecting the capacity for change and growth inherent in human experience.

Themes of vulnerability, resilience, and adaptability emerged prominently in the artistic process, mirroring human experiences and highlighting the potential for transformation within the environment. These themes resonated strongly with viewers during the research's exhibition component, confirming the embodied imagery's transformative impact.

This process illuminated the intricate interconnections between space, embodiment, and narrative within the framework of spatial performativity. It emphasised how artistic expression can profoundly shape our understanding of self and the spaces we inhabit, offering a unique lens through which to explore the human experience.

## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the profound potential of embodied imagery in facilitating personal transformation and deepening our understanding of the self in relation to the environment. The research highlights the dynamic and interconnected nature of human experience, artistic expression, and spatial context, contributing significantly to broader academic discussions about the intersection of art, psychotherapy, and spatial performativity.

This holistic approach opens up new avenues for research and practice, highlighting the dynamic interplay between individuals and their surroundings. It demonstrates how this dialogue can foster personal growth, creative expression, and a deeper understanding of our shared human experience. As such, this research not only advances our understanding of the transformative power of art but also offers valuable insights into the complex relationships between individuals, their creative processes, and the spaces they inhabit.

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