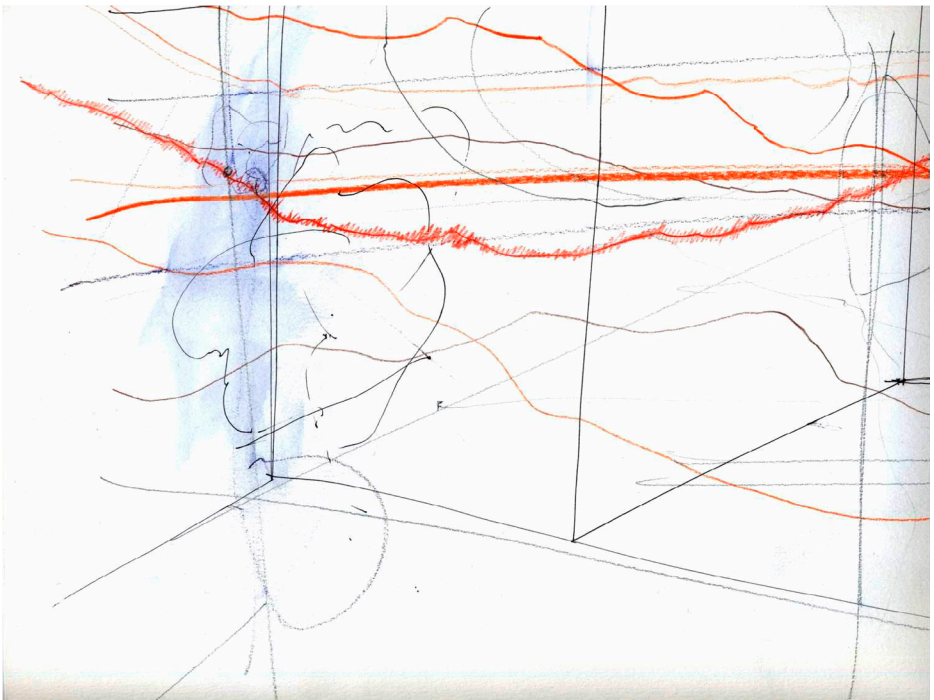

PERFORMANCE DRAWINGS



Fabrizio Manco, *The Acoustic Vanishing Point 1*, 2005, drawing. Courtesy the artist.



Fabrizio Manco, *The Saint (The Crow)*, 1998/1999, site-specific performances, Italy/UK. Photo: Fabio Pino. Courtesy the artist.

A seminal piece which is a condensed image of my work dealing with landscape and environmental ecology. This work has been explored in different media, from drawing, painting, film, video, and site-specific performances in Italy & England (1998) and in India (1999). The impetus came from the imagined sound of crows in Vincent Van Gogh's painting *Cornfield with Crows* and, a year later, was linked to the actual sound of crows encountered in India, *The Crow (The Saint)*. This work also related to the agricultural and "iconoclastic" gesture of burning fields of corn and wild oats to regenerate the soil, a typical practice in my native area.

Other *PAJ* features in the ongoing series "Performance Drawings"—

1. "Deep Trance Behavior in Potatoland and Maria Del Bosco," by Richard Foreman, *PAJ* 90 (September 2008).
2. "Geneva, Handfall," by Trisha Brown, *PAJ* 89 (May 2008).
3. "The Threepenny Opera," by Robert Wilson, *PAJ* 88 (January 2008).
4. "Research Events," by Ralph Lemon, *PAJ* 81 (September 2005).
5. "Studio as Study," by Melinda Barlow, *PAJ* 71 (May 2002).

EAR BODIES, EAR LINES

Fabrizio Manco

In my work I seek to provide a framework in which spaces can resound with bodies through hearing and listening, and where they can also interweave their particular social and cultural aspects. I engage in performative investigations into aurality in connection with architecture (spaces to play within and be played by) and the natural and urban environment (including the natural within the urban). These are sometimes affected by my own cultural perspective, that of a Southern Italian who has been resident in the UK for eighteen years. This ecology between spaces, the environment, and bodies reaches out to inform the understanding of cross-cultural site-specificity, performance, and embodied awareness. For me, this is an arena for communal and sustained sharing that develops a relationship beyond what we are already able to experience and hear. A different approach from established categorizations of the sonic, it works towards an interrogation of sound within performance art. This would also provide a way to speak of artistic and pedagogical means of intervention in what are often rigid categorizations of sound, performance, and place.

Through my condition of chronic tinnitus and hyperacusis, I have come to realize how much sound and movement are intermingled and mutually generative. Over time, I have become more aware of this interaction, and the response and accommodation of it within performance training/pedagogy and practice, which produce a reflection and a re-listening with a posthumous ear. I settle with my invisible and constant “companion,” with its hyperactivity of neurons and thoughts, searching for a world of acoustic resonance and a “silent” place. So, sound chose me, in my attempt to live outside my ears and through my ears. And I, with time, chose sound: it was simply a search for the silence that sound is.

The flattening effect of an apparent acoustic separation with the world and the bringing back of hearing patterns, the existent acoustic, and my “stretched” experience of space became my work, providing a condition and possibility for creating a new context. My whole body is called upon when a question of hearing and listening arises; it *invests* me. Sound intrudes in me, traumatizes and sometimes disturbs me, pleases, hurts, and owns me, but I cannot own sound. My personal experience and

spatial positioning, which is that of also being a member of the audience and a spectator of performance, produces particular reflections.

In summer, in beholding the woods of my native region (the Salento area of Puglia in Italy), I constantly find myself surrounded and surprised by a thousand cicadas, an experience similar to the image of shimmering light on the surface of the sea. It is, indeed, a sea of noise: a change of sound frequency and a pure tone which is hard to locate, rattling in my ears, not quite a white noise, although when in large numbers, the cicadas could sound very much alike.

In December 2005, while in the Salento countryside, I encountered a herd of sheep with their shepherd. This encounter became the impetus for the video work I called *Jiiiiingle Beells*. It is a documentation of an initial idea of improvising with movement, by using the immersive environmental sound of that site, which ended up being that of the tinkling bells of the herd gradually approaching me. I connected with those surrounding moving sounds (indeed more than an eight-channel surround system) as if I were the shepherd being guided and moved by the sheep, instead of the other way around. The moving and surrounding herd functioned as a trigger for my dance, in the interaction with my hyperacusis as body orientation and ear/head movement “panning,” as I became almost like an instrument, a “spectrum analyzer.” This conditioned and invisible inner experience of somato-sounds, together with the sonic invisible power of the “outside,” makes me aware of how sound is before, through, and after us—a multi-dimensional space which grounds us in any part of the acoustic spectrum, where even a vertical range of sound *horizontalizes* me. I favor a horizontality of *non escape*, versus a vertical transcendence of the acoustic landscape.

Rather than serving the auditory performance, or creating sound works for performance, I use a basic production of sound and aural interactivity in performance, engaged and made by systems of sonic corporeal, cultural, neural, land/soundscape ecologies. In many ways, my visual and performance work is generated and regenerated by having within sound a direct source. For instance, the employment of this acoustic awareness is to be specifically used as a destabilizer of preconceived assumptions and habits in performance.

In my performances, research, in-situ, and studio-based physical-aural explorations, I try to create a link (often through itinerant participation), between indoor spaces and our acoustic bodies and through outdoor soundscapes, where the already active spaces are further activated by that interaction, by walls or landscapes and by silences (that have been sounding in spite of us). I initiate a process in which I perform within natural landscapes and architecture taking into account its historical, aural, and visual aspects. I maintain that in connecting with a site’s soundscape, we experience a more embedded site-specific relation to that site, which is not an anthropocentric imposing of the body on a landscape. It is a transversal way of highlighting a chosen area or structural, spatial, natural element by dwelling and listening, and allowing the soundscape to enable performance, to perform you as you pass through the wide

and varied angles of the perception of the space that sound creates. In my heightened acoustic awareness, the uniqueness of every corner, nook, and cranny has a sound, the memory of each wall where a silent testimony dwells.

My ears initiate their role of dynamization and as a situated way of recovering *attention*. I have developed exercises employing drawing, walking/*kinhin* (walking Zen), body orientation, dwelling, positioning, and movement as undoers of positionality, auditory discrimination, as well as unmediated and immediate responses. I wish to convey the shifts and nuances of process, in order to reach a critical point of discovering other possible approaches of performing place and space, to question the inter-medial nature of my work in relation to the unpredictable. This is a challenge only possible through physical and environmental interaction, an always enabling opportunity to transform and share.

My involvement in Zen Buddhist practice, and in a very personal sense in a non-theistic and non-transcendental form of “spirituality,” has given me a more open and radical awareness, and an important insight into my performance and art practice. Inevitably, trying to express one’s practice, verbally or in writing, involves a risk because of the inherent limitations in such expression. During *Zazen* (sitting meditation), my heightened hearing, which is actually supposed to impede the therapy of dealing with my hyperacusis—a therapy that consists of making the sounds in my head as non-intrusive as possible—paradoxically leads to further methods of reconciliation.

This gives me an insight into “silence,” stillness, and listening as an embracing activity, which, paradoxically, helps me to go through my isolated ringing and busy “phantom mind.” This active “emptying” as listening, concentration, and breathing awareness, informs my life and work. The tasks during my workshops are all based on these embodied responses as well as the responsibility for one’s own physical interactions and movements with any environment. It is a non-objectifying process, positioning in acoustic body-based performance, of the becoming of each activity one is immersed in, whilst at the same time being intertwined with any space and surroundings. Or to put it differently: a simultaneous grounding and a surrendering to a constant “coming back.” In my art practice, this is a useful means of destabilizing every fixity; it can open up the unexpected, the aimless, and the unpremeditated.

In December 2008, at Roehampton University in London, I presented *The Acoustic Vanishing Point*, a performance work-in-progress divided in three parts, involving sound and the audience, listening, drawing, and burnt toast. Here, I focused my reflection on the monocular and mono-auditive “perspective,” that of the fixed *punto di fuga* and its authority. The audience was invited to find the (and their) “auditory vanishing point” by spending two minutes or so in a corridor to just listen to the space, then once they had found it, they were invited to place a sticky red dot on the wall where exactly they thought their point was. In the second part I lay on the floor of a second corridor, transversally positioned, almost impeding the easy passing of the audience. I placed a board on my right ear and face, upon which a

black sheet of paper was fixed, on which I had drawn/mapped my acoustic experience and outdoor soundscapes. This type of drawing was a sort of “seismograph,” a graphic recording of my experience and struggle of listening through my veil of noise, the sound of the space enhanced by an electrical generator fixed on a wall and the outdoors soundscape, while I was paying attention and drawing at the same time the sounds of the surrounding and interacting audience. This was a possible way of bridging my experiential performance research, my hearing condition, and the experience of the audience.

I see drawing as a direct improvisation, emerging from context and place. I use this as a way both towards and out of performance improvisation by applying conceptual and physical framings. The ambiguous nature of the concept of improvisation is for me a way of allowing intuition through guided structures. Since each movement is a result of the previous one, it is linked to a corporeal stratification of memory, as with sound, changing while travelling from its sources through the atmospherics of a landscape, taking its qualities and conditions that enhance acoustic propagation. It is an important form of investigation in my work, for its dynamism, temporality, and as both a performative and visual medium itself. In my workshops, I use this to enable the participants to have a further insight and approach towards movement, seeing it on paper (usually five-meter long scrolls), as well as experiencing it as performance.

I propose to perform the sonic experience and to document it through drawing, rather than record sound as my main practice. I believe that in connecting with a site’s soundscape, a more physically embedded and specific relation to that site is possible. It becomes a tool for documenting each sound-specific experience as, for instance, through my drawing soundwalks: as a drawing while walking practice. Drawing is an essential element in this dis/recovering as performative medium and as a form of engagement with perception. What I call “earlines drawing” is the visualized space between sonic sources, their locations, and movements towards dispersion. With this “taking a line for a walk,” the free movement of a line, in the famous words of Paul Klee, I am interested in mapping, as a sort of “stenography” of sound, through the sonically being-moved, oriented, or sound-choreographed, in exploring horizontal and vertical landscape acoustics. I explore line drawing not only in its link with movement and walking, but also as walking. This is the focus of what I call “*Acoustic Shadow* drawing.”

In psychoacoustics, an acoustic shadow is an apparent absence of sound in a specific area where sound waves don’t circulate. In my research and workshops, this becomes an exercise of process, which refers rather to the actual image of shadowing and sound, and to scansion and flow: walking as close as possible, following the perimeter of a building (indoors or outdoors), maintaining the same flow of pace (medium walking speed), embodying the image of a shadow sliding through the walls, eyes not closed and not too open. The idea is that of concentrating on adherence to objects encountered, adherence to the surroundings, starting from the architectural ones. Underlying this is both reference and attention to the acoustics of the architectural

space/environment, and what happens to our conscious ear when it gets closer to a vertical surface.

How is the sound refracted? Does it happen at all? How site-specific is our moving and positioning to it? An invisible relationship exists—in this case with the walls of a building, while my ear-body slides and “scans” the surface. The scope of the exercise is not to hear anything necessarily, but instead to be led towards an acoustic embodied state, where each person is subjectively and physically affected (by weather and environment) in their exploration of the differences, interruptions, qualities of environmental sound, and as a sort of peripheral line “drawing” following the perimeters of a building, done with a group of workshop participants.

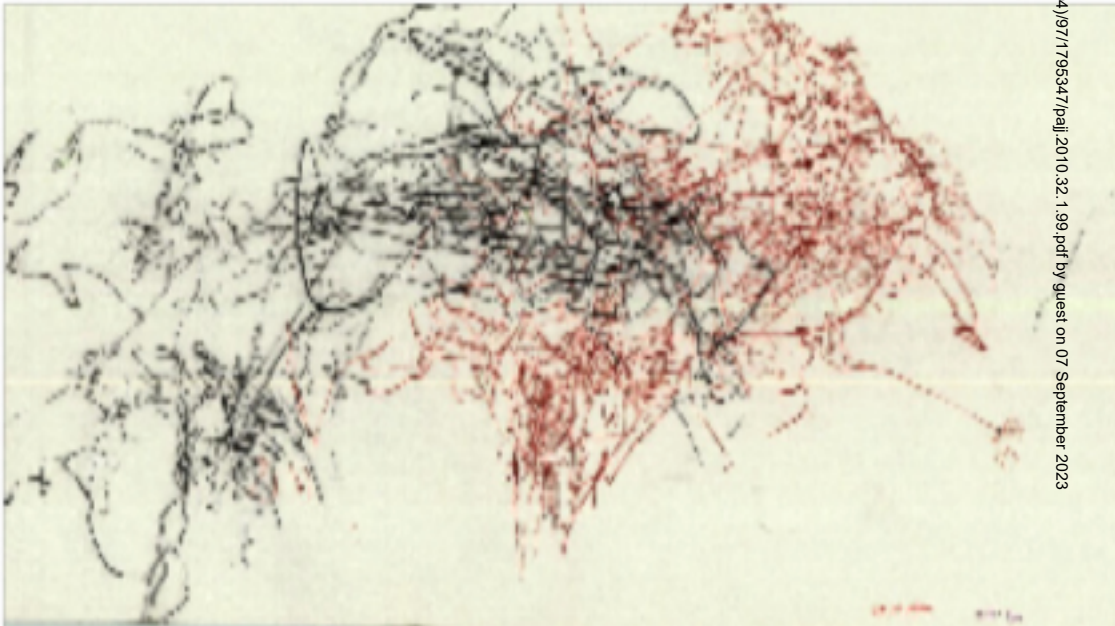
I maintain that our experience needs more of the contingent moment, more of *this* world. The transpositions of recorded soundscapes fill space with their freely ambulating ghosts, away from the sensuous nature and physical properties of sound. I seek that depth in performance—in R. Murray Schafer’s terms—the “hi-fi” quality of soundscapes, its spaces and layers of foregrounds and backgrounds. My experience of sonic memory and loss is constantly one that I/we live and engage with in the live event, the experience of the invisible within the visible (and audible), as a ghostly coming forth to me of an auditory image that I find problematic to locate.

Our ear bodies are already in tune with, and moved by, any space, in spite of our awareness. In my work I seek to create more awareness of this impermanent and constantly dynamic sonic nature, and I believe that technological capturing and controlling of sounds is a bit like ghostbusting: They need to be reminded that they are already here. We need to be reminded that we are already here.

FABRIZIO MANCO is a London-based artist whose practice includes visual and performance art, drawing, installation, and video. Exhibitions of video and performances include: *Practicing Thoughts* (Finland), “Emotional Cities” (Tranz-Tech Toronto International Video Art Biennale, Canada); *To Open the Eyes* (Worm Festival II, Singapore); *Outskirts* (Visura Aperta Festival, Momjan, Croatia); *Stalks* (UK/Italy); *Initinere* exhibit (Casarano, Italy); “Gaylitteram” poetry event (Laltrasponda, Rome); *Melissa (Home Bee)* (Melissano & district, Italy). *Ear Bodies* was recently featured in the Theatre Noise conference, Central School of Speech & Drama, London. He is a Visiting Lecturer and PhD candidate at Roehampton University in Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies.



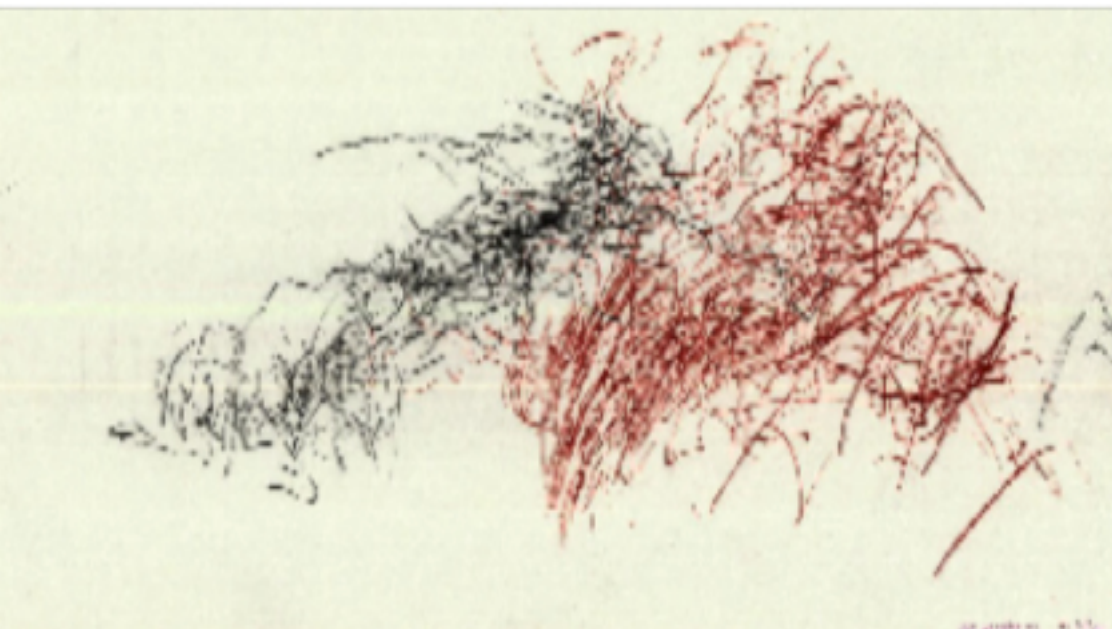
Fabrizio Manco, *Earlines* drawing, from a four-day workshop at Middlesex University; on the right, still of a participant, 2007, Trent Park, London. Courtesy the artist.

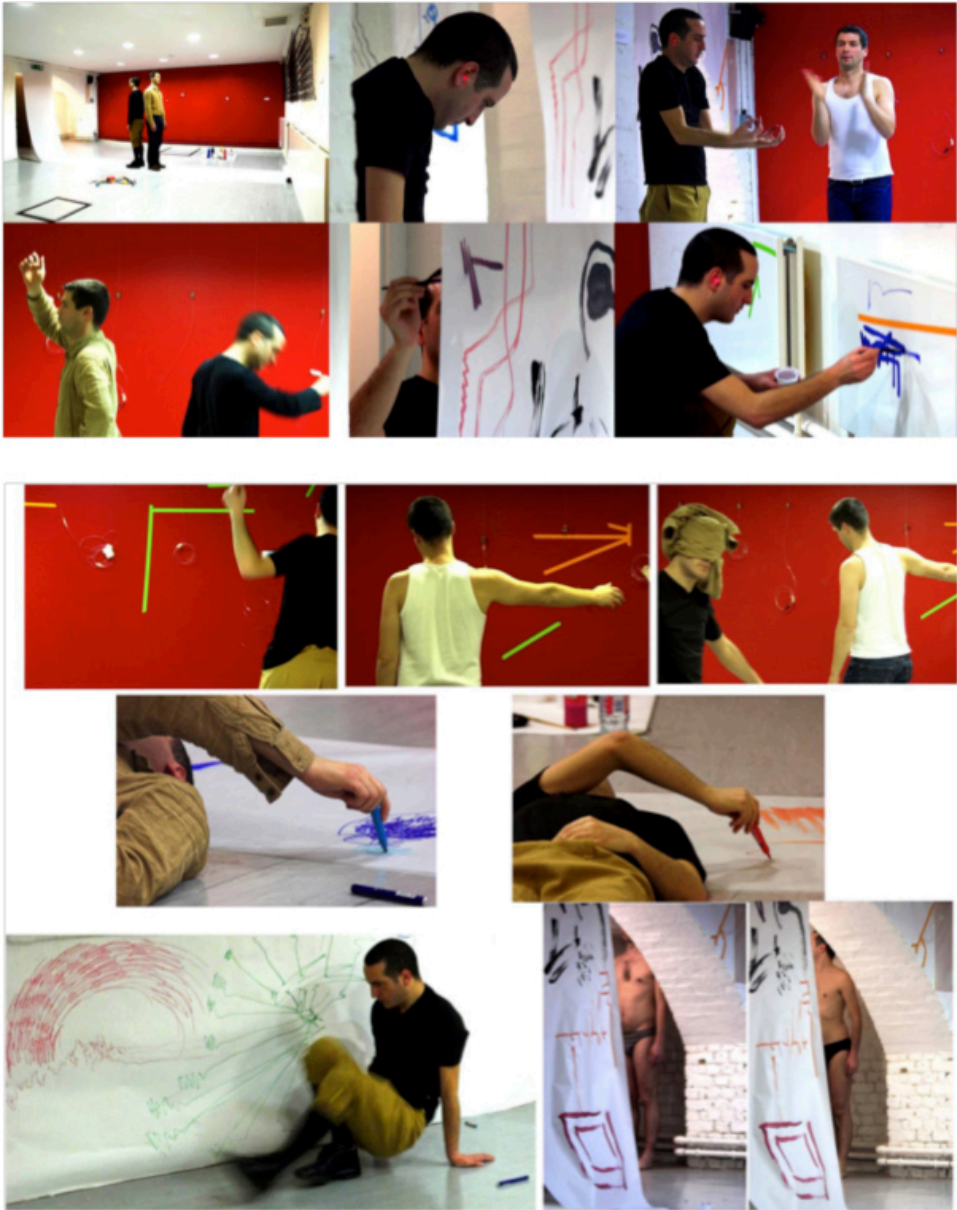


Fabrizio Manco, *Earlines*, detail from drawing on scroll, 2009, Michaelis Dance Studio, Roehampton University, London. Courtesy the artist.

EARLINES

Part of the *Earlines* workshop consisted of drawing exercises: here, a long strip of paper was placed on the floor, parallel and of the same length as a wall of windows behind the workshop participants. The drawing was produced by listening, focusing on the outdoor sound fields and binaural inputs. The source, speed, distance, intensity, duration, tone/frequency and rhythm of the external sounds were drawn using one or both hands. A two minute drawing period was timed by the blip sound of a watch; this was the indication to roll once onto the next section of paper and start drawing again until the whole acoustic experience of the outdoor landscape was drawn onto the scroll.





Fabrizio Manco, *You and You, extending into freedom—freeing from isolation*, 2006, AAS End Festival at Oxford House, London. Photo: Christian Kipp. Courtesy the artist.

You and You was a durational performance-installation in collaboration with Rainer Knupp, about the relationship between the immediate soundscape of the gallery space and the artists' physical response. Drawing with different materials on various surfaces, we responded to our own visual and auditory world with movement.



Fabrizio Manco, *Citizen*, 2006, Perspectives at Chisenhale Dance Space, London. Photo: Helly Minarti. Courtesy the artist.

In this performance, sound was produced by two different shapes of tea cups, saucers and teaspoons placed in two wooden boxes that I wore as platform shoes while walking in the space and exploring its acoustics



Fabrizio Manco, *Dolmen* site-specific improvisation, 2007, Minervino (Lecce), Italy. Photo: Fabio Pino.

The image documents my experimentation involving improvisation in connection with a specific landscape—the “Scusi” countryside (“Scusi” in the local dialect means “hiding”) in the vicinity of a prehistoric dolmen near Minervino (Lecce), in Puglia, Italy.