

The Future Contemporary
Inquiries into Visual, Performing, and Media Arts 1

Moving Spaces

Enacting Dance,
Performance, and the
Digital in the Museum

edited by
Susanne Franco and Gabriella Giannachi



Edizioni
Ca' Foscari

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and Media Arts

Series edited by
Cristina Baldacci
Miriam De Rosa
Susanne Franco

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Moving Spaces

Enacting Dance, Performance and the Digital in the Museum

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Abstract

This collection of essays investigates some of the theories and concepts related to the burgeoning presence of dance and performance in the museum. Through the hosting of performance and dance and the use of an expanding number of new technologies, museums have become more hybrid, inclusive and performative. By using the term 'museum space' we do not only refer to the museum as a building, but also to the role and functions that museums play in our societies. The presence of performative and often participatory practices inside the museum has shaken the very foundations of the museological apparatus from a range of perspectives that this collection aims to illustrate. The authors provide key analyses on why and how museums are changing by looking into decolonisation processes, the shifting relationship with the visitor/spectator, the introduction of digital practices in collection making and museum curation, and the creation of increasingly complex documentation practices. The tasks designed by dancers and choreographers who are involved in the European project *Dancing Museums. The Democracy of Beings* (2018-21) respond to the essays in the collection by suggesting a series of body-mind practices that readers could perform between the various chapters to experience how theory may affect their bodies.

Keywords Activism. Dance and performance in the museum. Participatory Art. Decoloniality. Difficult heritage. Digital. Documentation.

Moving Spaces

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Moving Spaces

Enacting Dance, Performance, and the Digital in the Museum

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Introduction

Moving Spaces: Rewriting Museology Through Practice

Susanne Franco

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This volume is the first in the new series, “The Future Contemporary. Inquiries into Visual, Performing, and Media Arts”, which aims to identify current trends that are likely to become leading in years to come. Analysing the changing nature and use of space within the contemporary museum, this collection intends to show how museums have been undergoing processes of radical transformation. By ‘museum space’ we do not only refer to the architectural dimension, but also to the role and functions that museums play in our societies. Over the last twenty years, different kinds of museums have emerged, works in the collection have become more diverse, and the ways of encountering permanent collections and temporary exhibitions, both inside and outside of the museum’s architectural structures have also undergone changes.

Through the hosting of performance, dance and the use of an expanding number of new technologies, the space of the museum has become more hybrid, diversified and performative. These art forms, in turn, have impacted on museological practices, especially curation and conservation, both in the galleries and online. Thus, museums have significantly revised not only ‘where’ they present their collections, or ‘what’ they present, but also ‘how’ they present them, and subsequently invested in the creation of novel strategies for the documentation and preservation of performative, time-based, and digital artworks. These strategies are less focused on the practice of preserving an ‘original’ version of an artwork and more oriented towards the management of how an artwork may change over time. Hence the introduction of these practices inside the museum has shaken the very foundations of the museological apparatus from a range of perspectives which this collection aims to illustrate.

Historically, performance and dance entered the museum just after the turn of the 20th century and then resurfaced again in the 1940s and 1960s. Acquisitions started shortly thereafter, usually as photographic or film documentation. Only in recent years have museums begun to acquire the rights to stage performance and dance in their collections. This has radically changed how museums not only document but also present performance and dance. Progressively, museums have started to read other artforms as performative, thereby extending the notion of activation to a range of artforms in the museum. Museums have also become interested in participatory artforms as a way to reach different types of visitors and wider communities, and as a strategy to co-create and/or co-curate work with them. This has produced novel forms of participatory practice, which have often promoted diversity and social inclusion. By placing well-being at the heart of the work, for example, some of these practices have challenged aesthetic as well as social preconceptions about the body, enabling previously marginalised individuals and groups to act and hereby claim their place in the space of the museum. Hence, thanks to their constitutive relational quality, the introduction of dance and performance in the museum has made it possible to build a socially diverse space in which visitors can not only experience but also literally become part of the work of art.

At the heart of some of these practices is the notion of knowledge exchange, and the understanding that museums should operate as active agents in society which could make a difference to a large number of communities in a range of fields. This was certainly the vision behind Tate Exchange (2016), both a space and a programme at Tate Modern, which aims to explore art as a process (rather than purely as a product) by working directly with the public. Thus, just as new kinds of museums have been created in non-museum spaces, new spaces have also been created inside museums that are specifically dedicated to novel, complex, and hybrid artforms. These have often originated outside of the museum but have entered and in some cases even appropriated museum spaces, affecting their mission and turning them into agents for aesthetic as well as social change. The effects of these transformations are likely to be felt in years to come, way beyond the museum walls.

A number of movements promoting cultural empowerment and social justice were born in response to historical absences. The Guerrilla Girls, whose mission is to bring gender and racial inequality to the attention of the artworld, and Black Lives Matter, with which many museums expressed solidarity, noting the absence of black artists from most art museums, have prompted museums to re-assess and re-contextualise their collections. Decolonising has become key to the mission of a number of museums. As a consequence of this, artworks and artefacts have started to be re-located, moved out of museums, while others have moved in, or have been passed on to other museums, possibly even in different countries. Museums may choose more and more to become care-takers (rather than owners) of those objects that were created by indigenous communities, giving away some of their authority to promote social justice. These changes are having a significant impact on the art market in that dance and performance can be seen as forms of affective and cognitive commodities produced by work conducted outside the Fordist logic of a material-commodity-producing activity. By hosting them inside the museum, choreographic practices and performative actions can be understood not only as aesthetic practices but also as social processes contributing to distributing, dislocating, re-organizing bodies in time and space.

The presence of performance, dance, time-based media, and digital art in the museum, as well as the increasingly interactive, participatory and immersive museum model, have significantly transformed visitors' physical, emotional, spatio-temporal, and intellectual encounters with museum spaces. Dance and performance, in particular, have entered museums as forms of resistance, often framing socio-political mobilisation as an aesthetic articulation that allows museums to drive change more broadly. In this sense, museums are becoming permanent experience laboratories with a renewed and timely sense of their social and ethical responsibilities as part of an ongoing process of democratisation of culture. Collaborative and participatory practices inside museums are challenging the traditional hierarchical structure of dance and its creative processes, suggesting a different and rather fluid distribution of roles among performers and choreographers, as much as a new approach to authorship, ranging from individual to collective, and from shared to delegated forms. However, this has led to challenges to the museological apparatus, questioning the role of curators, conservators and even performers. This in turn has raised issues about authorship as a hierarchical model derived from the visual arts is applied to choreographic practice, making invisible the performers' contribution to the work of art. In this sense, choreographic practices and performative artworks are no longer understood solely as ways of organising and presenting bodies in space, but also as tools for experimenting with alternative ways to aggregate and explore different sociological, political and economic models and forms of democracy. Performance, originally born outside the museum, precisely so as to escape hierarchical structure, is now reshaping museum spaces from within.

With the introduction of dance and performance in the museum, new departments were formed, and curatorial positions established leading to experimentation with existing and new spaces created purely to host live work. Thus, at MoMA, the Tate, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Centre Pompidou, the Guggenheim, to name just a few, live arts programmes radically changed programming, the space of the museum, as well as its image and broader mission. Some museums, like the Louvre, started to offer residency programmes for dancers and choreographers to enter into dialogue with their permanent collections and/or with the works displayed during temporary exhibitions. Others, such as the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam have integrated dancers and performers into their staff to design and conduct choreographed tours.

Museums have taken a turn not only to the performative or to the digital, but also to *khoreia*, working in unison with others through new practices. The adoption of behavioural codes which differ from those provided by exhibitions traditionally conceived for museum spaces produced a new order of relationships with the works on display, with the performers, among visitors and, in some cases, also with museum staff. These new spatial configurations have contributed to reclassify canonical exhibition practices ('collective', 'solo', 'anthological' or 'retrospective') with solutions that indicate a dual matrix: 'choreographic exhibition', 'choreographic installation', 'performance-installation', 'performance-exhibition'. These hybrid forms capture the tension that redefines the space of the work as an object *and* as a live embodied action. As a consequence of this, more and more attention is given to intangible heritage in a wider range of museums.

As dance and performance preserve and transmit embodied memories rather than written histories, they can articulate non-narrative and often

non-chronological representations of history which are still largely missing from museum displays. Likewise, by capturing dispersed and yet uncatalogued artworks, new technologies have shown the value of establishing a link between the past and the present to narrate and facilitate the immersion within untold, marginalised or forgotten histories.

The hybridisation generated by the encounter of the white cube and the black box, two spatial and temporal models of presentation and representation, and the behavioural conventions they produce, over time, has prompted visitors not only to switch between different roles (spectators, participants, performers, dancers, re-enactors, activists, documentalists) but also literally to inhabit multiple roles. At the same time, museums have become interested not only in hosting digital and new media art but also in making it possible for visitors to encounter their collections through digital platforms and in developing their own online digital presence. The latter led to the creation of bespoke digital spaces, such as the Artport at the Whitney (2001), which operates as the museum's portal to the internet exhibiting commissioned net art and new media art. More and more, these spaces can be accessed through virtual and mixed reality, producing augmentations of the world of the viewer which affect the way we can experience everyday spaces by overlaying them with art and heritage.

The introduction of performance and dance in the museum has had profound effects on how these institutions exhibit and preserve, but also increasingly contest knowledge about their artworks, questioning narratives thus far left unchallenged, to give voice to a wider range of stakeholders. Acting as a vibrant place, hosting a broad array of artworks and practices which are valued by a larger number of individuals and local communities, the museum is caring not just for its works but also for its people, including those who are variously related to its artworks and practices, and the creative transmission processes they involve, often through embodiment or oral memories. To an increasing extent, museums are in fact exhibiting not only objects but also practices (creative, curatorial and even conservation), making the processes of creation, production and care for art and its publics visible and questioning the unfruitful polarisation of the debate between 'tangible' and 'intangible' heritage by integrating into exhibits the intangible components of tangible heritage and artefacts.

A renewed relationship between archival strategies, past works and contemporary artists has stimulated the current growing obsession with re-enactments of past exhibitions, dance works, and performances understood as forms of non-narrative and anti-positivist approaches to the history of visual and performing arts. Re-enactments take place in the present, making it possible to re-think the multiple temporalities involved in the relationship with the past, offering personal and/or collective experiences as alternative approaches to more traditional ways of (re)presenting history, and giving voice (and body) both to single artworks and to entire repertoires. Some of these re-enactments had a huge success at the time of their 'original' public presentation, others, on the contrary, had been excluded from the 20th and 21st centuries canon, either because they were censored, considered irrelevant, or seen as forming part of non-Western or diasporic cultures. These re-enactments are therefore readdressing history, stimulating a new sensibility for narratives that privilege discontinuity over linearity, which has thus far been the privileged subject of museum exhibitions. Shaking dominant historical discourses, these re-enactments

are helping to rewrite the very history of the museum, its space and mission in society, challenging established ways of perceiving, engaging, and even 'being' in the museum. In many cases, re-enactments in museums and art galleries have also displayed a new sensibility for historical temporalities by disseminating a single event or performative work in several rooms where they occur simultaneously, and in which the visitors/spectators/participants are encouraged to move around autonomously. These are often based on individual or collective embodied memories of artists that consider their own bodies as archives or as moving sites of memory able to preserve and transmit a legacy, and to make knowledge accessible to or even embodied by a large audience.

Archival and collection care strategies have also been subject to radical changes, and the two spaces of the archive and the collection have become more and more 'fluid', in that works are seen migrating from one to the other. Thus, on the one side, museums have been considering new documentation strategies that are deeply influenced by the challenges caused by 'ephemeral' artworks such as dance and performance. On the other side, they have been rethinking the place and indeed even the storage of their collections, as was the case for the Museum Boijmans in Rotterdam, which is closed for renovation at the time of writing and which has rehoused over 150,000 artworks to a new depot. Here, all the works are stored together, with no hierarchy, making new juxtapositions and cross-connections possible. This space of publicly accessible art has created a new museum typology, where different laws and rules apply and where visitors are prompted to co-curate exhibitions starting from what they see and find during their unexpected encounters with the works. In this case, not only is material from the archive reperformed but also it is literally reassembled, in that it is the curatorial process that is passed on, with collection care becoming a potential spectacle for others to see. Hence, the Museum Boijmans is becoming more and more nomadic, suggesting that in the future perhaps museum exhibition spaces will be found in unusual locations. At the same time new collections are being created, often from unexpected points of provenance. Thus, the project *Dig it up* (2020), also in Rotterdam, for example, aims to involve audiences in creating new participatory and inclusive collections based on what they have in their own homes, giving space to everyday life, and relocating that in the museum space.

Museum spaces are moving and we practice them in different ways. Thus the authors who contributed to this collection were invited to offer insights into what kinds of movements are currently reshaping museums to variously illustrate how these practices are re-purposing, re-mediating and even re-inventing museum spaces. Each chapter discusses one or more museums, embracing a range of methodological approaches spanning from performance and dance studies, postcolonial and decolonial theory, new media, documentation and conservation.

Gerald Siegmund's chapter "Addressing the Situation. Xavier le Roy's *Retrospective* and Aesthetic Subjectivity" examines the French choreographer's 'performed exhibition' and argues that dance inside museums suggests to the viewer that all exhibited artworks are in fact performative in their address to spectators that bring the work about. Turning his attention to the making of the audience in the museum space, Siegmund unpacks the public's ongoing redefinition of the relation between aesthetics and subjectivity, which he sees as a way of producing a notion of aesthetic subjectivity.

ty. The essay ultimately shows how *Retrospective* produces a notion of aesthetic subjectivity that takes place after modernism.

In “Creolised Dance, Museumised Space: Jeannette Ehlers and Decolonial Re-edification” Ananya Jahanara Kabir takes into account three works by Danish artist Jeannette Ehlers that entail dance as a ritual movement in what Kabir terms “museumised space”. Conceptualising these pieces as creolised products deriving from the enslavement of Africans by European nations, Kabir argues that Ehlers performs an Afropean decolonial praxis of ‘re-edification’ around the silences surrounding Denmark’s colonial past, enacting a dialectic between spectrality and material sumptuousness that draws on dance in relation to the materiality of sound.

Susanne Franco’s chapter, “*Dance Well* and *Diary of a Move*: From Artistic Projects to Social Processes”, analyses two participatory projects conducted in the Civic Museum of Bassano del Grappa (Italy) as part of the Creative Europe project *Dancing Museums. The Democracy of Beings*. In this rather provincial and conservative political and social context, *Dance Well* (2015-) is addressed to people affected by Parkinson’s disease, their families and citizens of different ages. *Diary of a Move* (2020) was conceived by the Italian-Japanese choreographer Masako Matsushita during the first lockdown in Italy and involved about 60 persons of the Bassano area. Together *Dance Well* and *Diary of a Move* have had an important impact on the local population, who have experienced a sense of community through their active participation to an artistic and social process.

Jonas Tinius’ “‘Animated Words, Will Accompany my Gestures’: Seismographic Choreographies of Difficult Heritage in Museums” presents an ethnographic analysis of two choreographic projects. Pélagie Gbaguidi’s *The Sismograph* (2019) engages the Venetian Museo del Manicomio in the context of the Ultrasanity symposium in Venice; Dorothee Munyaneza engages the Marseille ethnographic collections in the framework of a symposium during Manifesta in 2021. Both choreographies sense and mediate traumatic pasts, object agency, and the continuation of modern legacies within museums. The essay invites to a debate on what choreographies and dance can do less as illustrative practices than as mediating, embodied, translated investigations of living matter, troubled heritage, and traumatic pasts inscribed in museological narratives, objects, and spaces.

In “Dancing the Museum Black: Activist Animations of the Social” Thomas DeFrantz deals with activism and the Black presence in experiences of dance in museums. Elaborating the concepts of Afropessimism, Afrofuturism, and the theory of a Black Commons, the critics focuses on four case studies where dance opens up the space museum to collective Black possibilities. The choreographic works *Dapline!* (2016), *fastPASTdance* (2017), the reconstruction of *Instead of Allowing Some Thing to Rise Up to Your Face Dancing Bruce and Dan and Other Things* (2000; 2011) and the moving-image object *APESHIT* (2018) embody special possibilities for Black dance in the museum and create a social space frequently denied to Black people in diaspora.

Gabriella Giannachi’s chapter, “Into the Space of the Digital Museum”, consists of an exploration of the space of the digital museum seen both as spaces produced by digital art and hybrid spaces generated by encountering collections through technology. Giannachi shows that digital museums spaces tend to be augmented, performative and relational, operating as microscopes, by bringing visitors closer or even inside artworks, and/or as tel-

escopes, making it possible for visitors to experience remote artworks or heritage sites. These new spaces, Giannachi explains, form *deep* spaces that can be encountered both inside and outside the museum, in which visitors reposition themselves across different and complex spatio-temporal configurations formed by the overlaying of physical and digital environments.

Acatia Finbow's "New Approaches to Documenting Performance in the Museum: Value, History, and Strategy" historicises the relationship between the museum and performance in the last twenty years to recognise a radical shift marked by the incorporation of performance-based artworks into the collection. This changes the role of the museum from repository to vital participant in the activation of the works in their collection. Finbow analyses over how the process of documentation is used to support the effective activation and conservation of performance-based artworks. A special emphasis is placed on the Tate's development of documentation practices that engage these new institutional needs, navigating both immediate and potential future value.

A number of dancers and choreographers who had participated in *Dancing Museums. The Democracy of Beings* (2018-21), an EU funded project experimenting with dance in museum spaces, were commissioned to create a series of tasks. By adapting for this volume a methodology of intervention similar to that generated during the project, they offer their own interpretation of the content of the chapters they introduce, aiming to produce actual movement in the collection. These are: Quim Bigas, Ingrid Berger Myhre, Monica Gillette, Masako Matsushita, Ariadne Mikou, Ana Pi and Eleanor Sikorski. Some of them drew up tasks aimed at awakening the reader's body and place it in the best psycho-physical condition before entering the next chapter by paying attention to the felt experience. Others offered a different methodology through which to interpret the content of the chapters they introduce and become aware of how their theory affects our bodies in practice. Others still have created a remediation of the wider aesthetic or theoretical approach of the chapter.

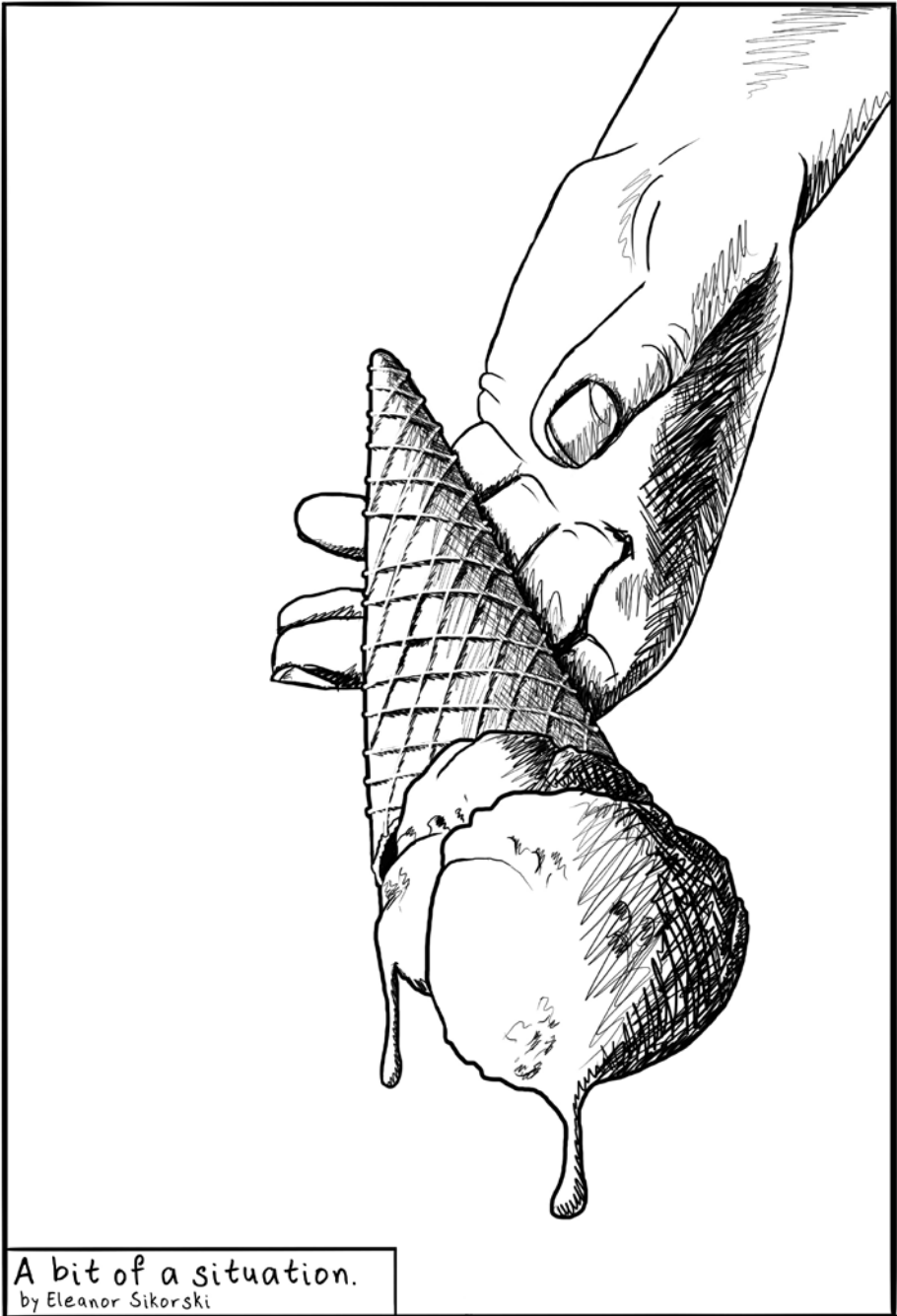
These interventions aim to encourage the reader to shift into listening to their own body, stirring them from a position of epistemic comfort to a space in between, in which contents and bodies are literally on the move. As if taking part in a choreographic or performative-exhibition, the reader can either follow the content of the chapters in the sequence proposed by the editors, or in any other order, by tracing key practices such as re-enactment, black dance, activism, documentation, conservation, choreography, as well as by exploring sites, such as the collection, the archive, the body, the museum and the city, or by carrying out the tasks before reading the chapters they respond to. Ultimately, we hope to show through these concerted voices and practices, that museums are strategic players that help us not only to understand the complexity of the world we live in, but also to see how we could change it, improve it, and make it more democratic.

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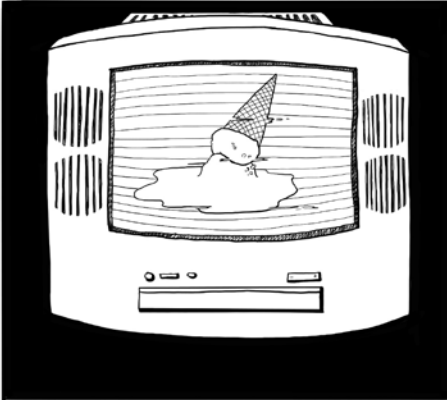
This collection constitutes Ca' Foscari's contribution to the action-research project *Dancing Museums. The Democracy of Beings* (2018-21), which promoted a broad-ranging consideration of space, curatorial planning, and human resources inside the museum. The project also trained and developed new professional figures able to imagine sustainable pathways, promote inclusion, transfer and share knowledge about cultural heritage, and experiment with new forms of democracy and community through dance. The programme was co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

The editors wish to thank Ariadne Mikou for her invaluable feedback and support in the editing of this collection.

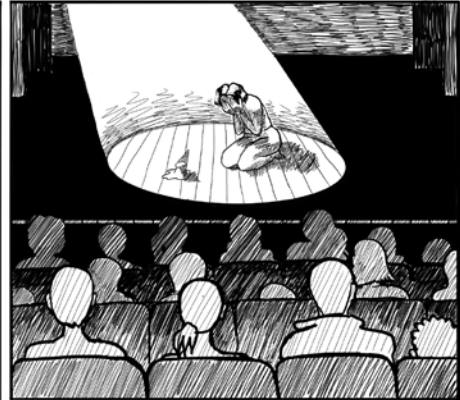
Task by Eleanor Sikorski



A bit of a situation.
by Eleanor Sikorski



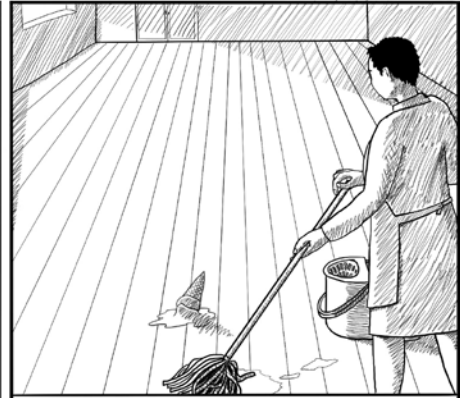
An objectified situation.



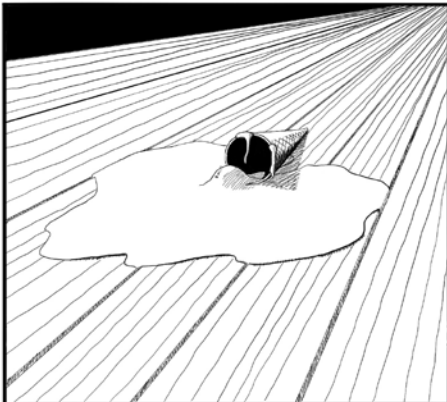
An aesthetic situation.



A hypothetical situation.



A political situation.



An ephemeral situation.



If there is a situation but no one is there to see it, is it a situation?

Addressing the Situation. Xavier le Roy's *Retrospective* and Aesthetic Subjectivity

Gerald Siegmund

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Abstract This chapter offers an insight into Le Roy's 'performed exhibition' and argues that dance, when taking place in museums, draws the viewer's attention to the fact that all artworks in the museum are performative in their address to spectators that bring the work about. Looking into the creation of a public in the museum space, I will unpack the public's ongoing redefinition of the relation between aesthetics and subjectivity, which I see as a way of producing a notion of aesthetic subjectivity. The chapter ultimately shows how the situations created in *Retrospective* produce a notion of aesthetic subjectivity that takes place after modernism.

Keywords Dance in the museum. Re-enactment. Situation. Address. The public. Aesthetic subjectivity.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Living Archives. – 3 The ephemeral, or: Dance in the museum. – 4 Addressing the Situation. – 5 From Work to Situation. – 6 Aesthetic Subjectivity. – 7 Materiality and Objectivity. – 8 From a Universal Subject to Questions of the Universal.

1 Introduction

A couple of steps lead down into the big entrance hall of Hamburger Bahnhof, which is the museum for contemporary art in Berlin.¹ I cross the floor and walk past a huge white wall that separates the hall in the middle. Together with several other visitors, I enter the space behind that is empty besides four people gathering in the centre. For a second I am not sure whether these are other visitors to the museum that have entered the space before us or whether they are actually performers waiting for their cue to start whatever action is required by them. After a short glance in our direction, the group disperses as if we had startled them by our presence. They run off in all directions only to re-enter almost immediately, almost as a movement

¹ The museum is called Museum der Gegenwart, The Museum of Today. I have visited the performance on Saturday 31 August 2019.



quotation from Xavier Le Roy's production *Low Pieces* (2011), in which the dancers performed movements of animals, plants and stones.

The show at Hamburger Bahnhof is announced as a *Retrospective* of dancer and choreographer Le Roy, a retrospective of his previous work, which explains the quotation from one of his earlier pieces. It soon transpires, however, that *Retrospective* is not a classical retrospective of an artist as one would have come to expect. While retrospectives of dance or theatre artists in museums often rely on written and visual documents, photographs and video recordings, props and costumes to document the absent work of the performance itself, this gallery space does not put any objects on display. Unlike a museum and more like a theatre, it contains nothing but moving bodies. At the same time, these bodies do not perform a sequence of Le Roy's integral pieces that make up his oeuvre between 1994 and 2014. Instead, for the next hours we witness a series of small performances that take place simultaneously in the space and that consist, for the knowing eye, of fragmented bits and pieces from Le Roy's oeuvre. As quotations, these fragments are re-assembled and re-enacted by the dancers to form an entirely new work.

Since its 2012 premiere at the Antonio Tapiès Foundation in Barcelona, *Retrospective* has been shown all around the globe in 13 other places like Beirut, Bogota, New York, Rio de Janeiro, Paris, Hamburg, Singapur and Taipei amongst others. For each city, a new group of between 8 and 20 dancers was cast, and not all of them are present the whole time during the museum's opening hours. In Berlin, it was staged between 24 August to 8 September 2019. They perform in shifts and also take turns in what they perform so as to give each dancer a greater spectrum of tasks and possibilities to engage with the spectators (Cordeiro 2014). These tasks have in common that they take as their starting point a year in the dancers' lives in which one of Le Roy's pieces was premiered. The numbers of these years are regularly shouted out aloud, which serves as an orientation for the dancers as to what to perform next. They either perform excerpts from Le Roy's piece of that year or they take the same year as a starting point for their own biographical stories including the demonstration of movements they themselves performed then. Instead of being true to the original work, the performers use Le Roy's oeuvre as a cue to unfold their own dance histories.

Traditional retrospectives serve to accept and welcome the artist into the canon of art history by giving an evaluative overview of his or her work. They do so by ordering his or her work chronologically or thematically thereby arranging a journey that the visitors are to follow. In *Retrospective* the linear chronology of the museum walk is interrupted by the fact that several pieces can be seen and heard at the same time. Here Le Roy's work is disseminated and re-appropriated by dancers of different professional, regional, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and with individual dance histories to tell. As a consequence, it is not Le Roy that is characterised as a seminal figure in recent dance history. His work appears as part of a much larger network of dance histories that is established throughout the duration of the performance by the stories of the performers. Many of these stories are hitherto untold. *Retrospective* reveals dance history as a global and ongoing process of inclusions and exclusions. Thus, *Retrospective* is a re-enactment because it transmits a specific repertoire, that of Le Roy, both on the basis of documents and oral and physical transmission. Famously, Diana Taylor distinguishes between the archive as a set of mostly written documents and the



Figure 1 Xavier Le Roy, *Retrospective*. 2019. Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin.
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repertoire as an embodied practice of transmitting (historical) knowledge (2003). Along these lines, Le Roy's *Retrospective* sees the archive and the repertoire work together to make claims for a situated contemporary art practice that, as I will argue, addresses the public in a specific way.

2 Living Archives

Retrospective is another contribution to the ongoing debates about re-enactment, the archive and performances in museums as an archival practice.² As Bishop pointed out, the production structurally follows *Product of Circumstances* (1999), an older piece by Le Roy (Bishop 2014, 94). The piece is a lecture performance in which le Roy traces the history of himself leaving behind his academic research into molecular biology to become a dancer and choreographer. With its mix of showing and telling, demonstrating and contextualising, the performance allows for both physical and verbal interventions, dancing and story telling. Therefore, it displays both the ephemeral dimension of a performance and the documentary function of an archive. It exposes a body that is, as Le Roy says in the performance, "contaminated" (1999, 67), i.e. that is interwoven with history and society on a cultural and biological level making it impossible to abstract from the materiality of the body. Here the body itself becomes an archive that performs its history in relation to and next to others [fig. 1].

Retrospective puts its own function as an archive of documents on display. Behind the performance room in Hamburger Bahnhof there is a sec-

² Baxmann, Cramer 2005; Gehm, Husemann, von Wilcke 2008; Schneider 2011; Clarke 2018.

ond room that serves as a more traditional archive room. It provides several computers where visitors may watch recordings of Le Roy's pieces or browse documents and material relating to the respective pieces. On the tables there are also books, photographs and articles dealing with Le Roy on display. In this room visitors may bump into dancers that use the materials to develop their own trajectory through the performance, or they engage in a conversation with the dancers to exchange their experiences. The archive room lays open its processes of becoming. What the dancers prepare there will later be seen and heard in the adjacent performing room. *Retrospective* thus is its own archive consisting of performing bodies, visual and written materials. It opens up its own memory, because the materials the performance consists of are all present in the archive room. Furthermore, the visible and audible transmission of material from dancer to dancer marks the material itself as remembered, or re-enacted and re-performed. Thus, *Retrospective* contributes to the debate about re-enactment in the sense that it enquires into the nature, identity and transmission of a singular artistic repertoire to the use of other artists and their respective biographies.

3 The Ephemeral, or: Dance in the Museum

The discussions about *Retrospective* have so far focused around its importance for the phenomenon of dance in the museum and for a contemporary definition of what a museum is and can do. The theme that underpins this discussion is ephemerality. In what follows, I will inquire after the importance of embodied performative practices (dance) for the museum beyond the fact that museums create attractive events or that dance becomes institutionalised by being included into museum collections. I argue that the embodied performative practices that take place in museums trigger not only a reflection on the museum, but also help to uncover the foundational principle of dance and theatre. Dance in museums therefore ceases to be only part of a museum practice but also becomes part of a larger contemporary art practice that cuts across disciplines and institutions by working through certain precepts of the arts and the performative arts 'in general'. Dance helps to uncover the truth about art as an experience that is 'also' in operation in museums. I hold that every artwork including objects in a museum is performative since it addresses spectators that help bring the artwork about. By bringing the artwork into being, spectators and artwork (here the individual performances of the dancers) enter into a relation that I call 'a situation'. Thus, what connects dance, theatre, and the museum as their underlying principle is that all three of them create situations.

Pamela Bianchi sees these truths to be in the ephemeral nature of performances that museums seek, while dance and theatre look for the documentary qualities a museum provides. Because it is ephemeral, dance changes the points of view on existing exhibits, and the architecture of museum buildings or becomes a veritable scenography of moving bodies that for the viewer highlights "the ephemeral and random nature of relationships" (Bianchi 2016, 93). With regard to Le Roy's *Retrospective*, French art historian Marcella Lista focuses on the different temporalities theatres and museums put forward and that challenge each other.

The two norms of temporal economy now existing in museums are brought into question there: on the one hand the linear course with its one-way narrative spectacularization; on the other the time of events, designed at set times to involve the audience in something beyond formats of collection and display. (Lista 2014, 21)

By making several performances take place simultaneously in the same space and during the entire opening hours of the museum, Le Roy's *Retrospective* messes up the linear dramaturgy of exhibitions, and the sequential walking from one room to the next. He thereby produces "cross-rhythms" (Lista 2014) of heterogenous temporalities, and sticks to the apparatus of the museum and its conventions of a dispersed economy of attention that each spectator may engage with at his or her liberty. He only changes the spatial arrangements, and to complicate them further, in prior editions of *Retrospective* a third room, entirely dark, existed referring to Le Roy's *Untitled* (2005) by including a puppet dressed in black that could be confused with a live performer.

For Mark Franko and André Lepecki, dance in the museum takes its historical cue in the 1970s from critical art practices in the field of the visual arts. In what has since become known as institutional critique, artists reflect upon the institutional framings of their work with its mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and the logics of the art market. The immaterial nature of artworks and their ephemeral nature become important to the museum, and performance and dance provide a new legitimacy for the museum as a contemporary institution for there is simply no more object to sell or market. Via the museum, dance is thus included into the neo-liberal capitalist economy of the global art market. The dancers and their fleeting art have since become the epitome for immaterial and affective labour that serve as ideological underpinnings of the new economy with the ephemerality of dance being considered equal to the volatility of capital (Franko, Lepecki 2014, 2). But maybe the museum was never as stable and non-ephemeral as these positions suspect.³

In my argument, I will substitute the ubiquitous notion of the ephemerality of dance that for one reason or another is attractive to the museum as an institution with the notion of address. The notion of address allows me to take into consideration both museum and dance/theatre practices as equal practices when thinking about dance in museums. Le Roy's *Retrospective*, this is my main argument, does not primarily contribute to the debate about the visualisation of movement that happens when dance is displayed in museums or galleries. Nor does it address the objectification of movement by means of visualisation (Franko, Lepecki 2014, 3). Nor is it merely another event that contributes to our contemporary culture of events as an expression of our neoliberal economies and politics. I argue that *Retrospective* focuses on exploring the various modes of addressing an audience or spectators. These modes become evident when the *dispositif* or apparatus of the museum and the theatre are confronted with each other. As a result, the production creates situations that include both performers/dancers and members of the audience, and it *performs an exhibition* by generating situations *between* physical bodies. These situations are established by various

³ Cf. also the work of Dorothea von Hantelmann on the performativity of museums (2007).

modes of address, which allow different sets of relations between individuals that engage them in their subjectivity. Since these situations are never (only) personal or private, address also creates a public that re-defines the relation between aesthetics and subjectivity. I suggest that these situations are grounding for both museum and dance practices alike because they produce a notion of aesthetic subjectivity after modernism. Neither universal and abstract nor personal and specific, subjectivity here is recast as a negotiation between personal and general or social concerns.

4 Addressing the Situation

The starting point for this argument is Le Roy's observation that, as opposed to the stage, the museum space allows for several things to happen simultaneously. As Le Roy says:

Museum exhibition allows several works to be shown in the same space or the same building at the same time so they can be experienced simultaneously or in juxtaposition. [...] So I decided to make a retrospective of works of mine, which were originally made for the theater, which would force me to transform them on the basis of the difference between the apparatus of a theater performance and a museum. (Le Roy 2014, 245)

The difference between the space of theatre and the space of a museum manifests itself in the various ways the public is addressed: "We researched how every moment of the work is performed and thus addressed to the spectator" (253). Therefore, addressing informs both form and content of the performance. It consists of various addresses that are also their own topic.

Structurally, *Retrospective* is played out along two axes that establish four performance areas at their respective ends. From the position of the spectator that enters the gallery space at Hamburger Bahnhof a vertical axis stretches out towards the back of the room. This line is intersected horizontally by a second line that runs from the wall to the left-hand side of the gallery to its right-hand side. The two axes stand in opposition toward each other, but they are also made up of oppositions in themselves. The vertical axis offers the option for the dancers to speak to the spectators whereas on the horizontal axis not a word is spoken. However, the two modes of spoken address differ considerably. "Hello, my name is Saša", a dancer introduces himself to the visitors gathered around him, "and I just showed you an excerpt of *Untitled* created by Le Roy in 2014, and this is also the beginning of my retrospective for this exhibition". In the very same year, he informs us, he danced also the following movement. He goes on to show it to us, but as soon as he perceives a new spectator coming in, he interrupts his presentation by saying: "But we have to welcome a new visitor" [fig. 2].

The dancer at the back, on the other hand, is unperturbed by these interruptions. S/he invites the audience to listen to her or his personal biography in relation to dance, his or her personal dance history. As this may take a while we are asked to sit down. The short welcoming speech near the entrance is impersonal, because the gaze and the speech are not directed to anybody in particular, whereas the conversation at the back includes its audience by establishing a more intimate situation between the dancer and members of the audience. On the right-side end of the horizontal axis a danc-



Figure 2 Xavier Le Roy, *Retrospective*. 2019. Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin.
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er performs poses or stills, in which the spectator, if s/he is familiar with Le Roy's oeuvre, may recognise figures from his previous works. The poses are actually taken from photographs that at the time were meant to document the performance for the press and the public. In front of the wall to the left, whole sequences of previous performances are re-enacted. These excerpts are short: they last 70 to 90 seconds and are performed in a constant loop. Because of its use of verbal language and narrative, the vertical axis signifies a theatre situation. The horizontal axis with its object-like bodies as stills and loops comes to signify the context of an exhibition. This distinction is supported by another opposition, that of time. Whereas on the vertical axis time is allowed to flow, often interrupted in the front, more calmly in the narratives that unfold at the back, the horizontal axis signifies a a-temporal universal standstill that is embodied in the objectified bodies.

Because all these diverse activities and modes of performing with their own notions of time unfold simultaneously, Bishop characterises *Retrospective* as "addressing temporal accumulation" (Bishop 2014, 96). I want to add here the 'accumulation of address' that goes together with these different temporalities that overlap. Even the two object-like performances at the sidewalls, which do not try to capture the gaze of the visitor, are explicitly addressed. As soon as the dancer in the front spies a new visitor entering the gallery, s/he interrupts his narrative by uttering a siren-like call. The sound is also a quote from another performance by Le Roy, *Self Unfinished* (1998). Upon hearing it, three of the four dancers, except for the one talking at the back, turn round and run from the room. Upon their re-entry they shift their positions by 90 degrees to the effect that the dancers performing objects will in due time also be allowed to address the audience as subjects by telling and sharing their own stories. The mechanical interruption draws attention to the fact that even the museum exhibits are explic-

itly staged and performed for an audience. In any case, the audience or the spectators are recognised.

For Bojana Cvejič, *Retrospective* functions as a “choreographic machine”, which re-starts every time somebody presses the reset button (Cvejič 2014b, 10). Cvejič’s comparison of the performance to a machine underlines that its mechanical aspect does not only address its functioning. *Retrospective* is also a machine because it triggers modes of perception that are influenced and shaped by media. Although we actually see human beings performing, their modes of presenting evoke sculptures, images or even technological apparatuses like the video recorder with its constant replaying of filmic loops. In this sense, theatre, dance and museum are also media with their specific protocols and viewing conventions that are present in the room. They mediate between our perceptions, their possibilities and strictures. What we see and how we see it, however, do not exist independently of our media-shaped ways of perceiving. The human body of the dancer, here, is the medium that carries all the others [fig. 3].

5 From Work to Situation

The shift from visual artwork to embodied performance changes the way we relate to the work of art. For the museum the shift implies a shift towards the recognition that meaning with art objects does not reside in the artwork, but that it results from an encounter of bodies with the artworks. For art philosopher Juliane Rebentisch, meaning production as an aesthetic experience is always a performative act that oscillates between the materiality of the body/object and the spectator (2003). The shift of dance from the theatre to the museum draws attention to the fact that (different forms of) choreography is not only a structuring of movement in space and time but also a gathering of people. In the open gallery of a museum, *Retrospective* emphasises the coming together of different groups of people that engage with each other over the subject of dance. Since coming together is the condition of possibility for all kinds of theatrical performances including dance performances, *Retrospective* draws our attention to the fact that our encounter with any kind of artwork puts us in a situation with the artwork. Therefore, dance in the museum underlines the very foundations of art production and reception as situations.

The notion of situation has recently gained a lot of traction in various scholarly publications (Siegmund 2020; Meyer 2020; Primavesi 2020). Here, it suffices to remind us that for Erving Goffman a situation emerges when at least two people come together and engage with each other, and it ends when one has left the room. What is more, to speak of a situation also implies taking the space where one meets into account. The meaning of situations varies according to the spaces they take place in and they are created by the encounter of people (Goffman 2019, 159). Specific actions are only possible in some designated spaces and not in others. A situation, therefore, engages at least two people and the space they are in.

But what happens when you say and do things in a space that is not appropriate for these actions? What happens when you do theatre and dance in the museum? Here, the distinction between an everyday situation and a situation in the context of art emerges. What is hardly possible in everyday life without violating the rules of politeness or social acceptance and jeop-



Figure 3 Xavier Le Roy, *Retrospective*. 2019. Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin.
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ardizing the success of a communicative strategy may be successful in art. *Retrospective* mixes situations and their designated spaces to the effect that the underlying principles of performances become apparent. Thus, one can say that an aesthetic situation, as opposed to an everyday situation, is only a situation when it reflects upon the foundational principles of works of art as performative. *Retrospective* is a self-reflexive performance that uses various modes of address to refer to the situation both dancers and spectators create together.

Conceiving of 'every' artwork as performance - and this is what I believe that dance in museums does - marks a fundamental rift in our understanding of aesthetic subjectivity. Since every artwork ultimately addresses a spectator, in which respect does *Retrospective* differ from older ways of conceptualising address? As has already become apparent, in the case of *Retrospective* to stage the performance as a situation appeals to the individual subjectivities of both spectators and the dancers who unfold their own narratives. This stands in stark contrast to high modernist ideas of how works of art address the subject that, after all, on the one hand produces the work, and on the other receives it. The next section, therefore, explores the difference in concepts of the subject by drawing on modernist notions of aesthetic subjectivity to use them as a backdrop for highlighting contemporary changes.

6 Aesthetic Subjectivity

In his detailed archaeology of the notion of subjectivity, philosopher Christoph Menke underlines the co-emergence at the turn of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century of the modern notion of subjectivity with that of aesthetics. Thus, subjectivity and aesthetics are intertwined in the sense that to look at things aesthetically means to look at them in regard to the subject and its understanding of itself (Menke 2003, 735). The modern notion of the subject is not primarily defined as a *sub-jectum*, as somebody who is oppressed by the worldly or clerical powers-that-be. Rather, following Descartes' notion of the *cogito*, it is to be understood as an 'I' that is in possession of certain faculties that it calls its own. "The subject is somebody who assumes his behaviour as his own" (Menke 2003, 735). The philosophical discipline of aesthetics, therefore, defines aesthetics as a medium "for the definition and unfolding of subjectivity" (735). Thus, art as the privileged realm of aesthetics unfolds subjectivity. To look at art is to look at the subject and at what it is, what it can do and achieve.

The foundational relation between aesthetics and subjectivity, however, is turned on its head in the course of the twentieth century. For modern critics and philosophers like Theodor W. Adorno the artwork is entirely desubjectified. Artworks speak of subjectivity only by a dialectical 'negation' of the subjective. Aesthetic subjectivity is a movement or an effect of negativity. Adorno argues against the notion of art as facilitating experience, empathy or expression, because experience can only be subjective and contingent. Works of art do not talk to the individual subject or person. They do not address them in their subjectivity.

This subjective experience [*Erfahrung*] directed against the I is an element of the objective truth of art. Whoever experiences [*erlebt*] artworks by referring them to himself, does not experience them; what passes for experience [*Erlebnis*] is a palmed-off cultural surrogate. (Adorno 1997, 246)

Furthermore, artworks are "apersonal" because "[t]he expression of artworks is the non-subjective in the subject; not so much the subject's expression as its copy" (113). The artist in making art transcends his or her own subjectivity. (S)he objectifies it in the work of art. As Rebentisch has shown, the two strategies of depersonalisation Adorno puts forward concern the techniques of production and the nature of the material used (Rebentisch 2003, 282). By dealing with the current state of affairs concerning the principles of construction and their technical devices, the artist is not entirely free to choose. (S)he is constrained by a historical necessity of how to make art, by what is possible and what not.

Mimesis is itself summoned up by the density of the technical procedure, whose immanent rationality indeed seems to work in opposition to expression. (Adorno 1997, 114)

Secondly, the materials used to follow their own logic. They are resistant to just any subjective or expressive use the artist may make of them.

7 Materiality and Objectivity

Le Roy's use of material in *Retrospective* follows Adorno's call for desubjectivation. He only uses material produced before, and existing independently of his doing in various medial, technological and therefore objectified formats. The material becomes objectified when it is fragmented, treated as reproducible, and disseminated. *Retrospective* presents material that only Le Roy has danced, by handing it over to a group of dancers that make their own use of it thereby spreading any kind of subjectivity that the artist may have formulated through the works. At the same time, the material pre-exists the dancers' use of it. The movement phrases function as quotations that remain exterior to their subjectivities. In this context, the machine-like quality of its dramaturgy gains significance as it objectifies any kind of expressive intentions the dancers may have when using the material. At the same time, what they perform cannot be completely abstracted from their own bodies, which defy any kind of final interpretation. And yet, other subjectivities use the material to tell their own subjective biographies as dancers while spectators sit and stand, listen and watch making something out of the material. Some kind of subjectivity, therefore, must remain with the artwork.

For Adorno, too, it is evident that even the objectified or "apersonal" artwork needs some kind of subjectivity to which it may refer. After all, the I 'experiences' art's objective truth as directed against itself. Drawing on Hegel, for Adorno the subject accompanies the work of art, it is with art (*Dabeisein*, cf. Menke 2003, 780; Rebentisch 2003, 217). Thus, subjectivity becomes a constitutive moment of art, but it loses its status as art's foundation or condition of possibility. What is more, *Dabeisein* (being with) aims at realising an objective truth by following the work's compositional principles that safeguard its objectivity (Rebentisch 2003, 216-17). Truth is in the work of art, not in the subject that does not interact with the work of art but merely 'is with' it. When we are with art because of its technically objectified status we become aware of a lack (*Desiderat*) of subjectivity. The objective and objectified truth in the artwork serves as a semblance (*Vorschein*) of a utopian true subjectivity that speaks of a subject that is free because it is not alienated.

Many contemporary dance productions resist modernism's claim to objectification. They address social and political issues and deal with questions of racism and queerness. They explore the ways bodies relate to other bodies including nonhuman bodies trying to build communities. As is often the case in dance productions that take place in the museum, performing bodies share the same space with spectators thus tearing down the audience-performer divide that since the eighteenth century facilitated the notion of the artwork as an objectified quasi-subject. In short, performances like *Retrospective* very consciously take the spectators and their bodies into account.

But as a consequence, is aesthetic experience merely subjective in the sense that, as Adorno fears, it is expressive of a mere subjective modality of feeling or seeing the world? Do we then live in a time of the artwork as a 'cultural surrogate' in the form of an event that substitutes real and sustainable social encounters with temporary and fake ones in the museum? Do we give up objectivity for identity and political concerns that require identification with a specific social and political agenda? Art then would really be partial only ever addressing peer groups that share the same beliefs and

views on the world thereby stabilising preconceived opinions like reverberations in an echo chamber. On the other hand, can art ever be objective in the sense that the subject's engagement with the work of art is reduced to realizing an objective compositional structure that transcends its subjectivity? Is experience always a surrogate as Adorno holds or can it be conceptualised more productively? Le Roy voices a similar concern when he says:

My concern is to trigger contextualization and subjectivation related to the moment, and not to bring the personal in the performance out. (2014, 265)

For him, being true to the moment as a 'shared concern' rescues the performance from being merely personal. Thus, there is something objective even in experiencing the artwork subjectively.

It seems, the question of aesthetic subjectivity needs more than just a 'being with' the work of art. As an archival project, Le Roy's *Retrospective* presents three distinct modes of address that emanate from the encounter between the respective 'dispositifs' of the museum and the theatre. These modes of address provide the objective or general form of the production that speaks of subjective issues (the dancers' biographies). Even in contemporary productions the subject's engagement with the artwork is still a question of form (composition, dramaturgy, the way things are presented) as a safeguard for (machine-like) objectivity and its relation to matters of content (what is presented, social issues, relations).

The different ways of addressing the spectator correspond to three different ways of conceptualising the spectator in times after Adorno's high modernism. If the principal tenet of aesthetics still holds today, looking at *Retrospective* in an aesthetic way always implies the question about the subject and the kind of subjectivity it produces as an artwork. What types of subject positions, then, does *Retrospective* put forward when the production clearly rejects modernism's claim to objectification by explicitly addressing the people in the room? The answer I gave above is that by addressing spectators and visitors, *Retrospective* establishes a situation between performers and audiences by address. How, then, can we understand subjectivity in relation to the situation that is *Retrospective*?

8 From a Universal Subject to Questions of the Universal

Let us remember the various modes of address that *Retrospective* employs to create one or several situations with spectators. The impersonal address that welcomes the entering spectators directs gaze and speech away from the individual into a neutral distance and space. Thus, the story of the dancer's personal retrospective that ensues is addressed at an audience function that negates a personal response. The audience experiences itself as audience: in the function of an audience. The medial transformation of physically performing objects or video loops against the walls of the gallery does not solicit any gaze from the spectators. Bodies are transformed into objects of an exhibition. The interference of live body that belongs to the theatre and dead object in the museum put the spectator in a position to reflect upon the viewing conventions of the respective institutions. The most personal address of a dancer telling her or his story without paying atten-

tion to the changes in the room allows for detailed listening and gestural or even verbal communication with the dancer. Remembering together (for instance, what did I do in 1998?) weaves a web of interpersonal memories that, although they remain individual, nonetheless in the situation they build a common horizon of reference, the potential of a 'we' that remains divided.

Therefore, one can say that the three modalities perceive subjectivity against the horizon of a public sphere that, like Adorno's universal subject, does not exist but as a potentiality and a 'question'. Michael Warner in his *Publics and Counterpublics*, therefore, speaks of the public as a "practical fiction" (Warner 2014, 73). The place of Adorno's universal subject that unifies all subjectivities in their desire to be free is now occupied by questions regarding the relation between the subject, the general, the social and, ultimately, the public. For Warner, publics only come into being when they are addressed, i.e. the address is a performative act that retroactively constitutes what it presupposes, namely the public (66). This act of addressing, however, implies that the address is always also directed to strangers, people not familiar to me, or even people that are not actually present during the event. Thus, the address is at the same time personal and impersonal (77). The impersonal address to strangers creates a "stranger sociability" (105) that marks me as part of another, larger public, which is constituted by the possibility of circulating discourse and exchange. Thus, Warner can say that "strangerhood is the necessary medium for communality" (75) and that

[t]he appeal to strangers in the circulating forms of public address thus helps us to distinguish public discourse from forms that address particular persons in their singularity. (85)

For Warner, therefore,

The known element in the addressee enables a scene of practical possibility [what we can actually do during our encounters in the museum]; the unknown, a hope for transformation. (91)

The porous spatial situation that *Retrospective* creates with its open-door policy makes audiences 'a' public temporary and fleeting, it opens the public (as audience) to other public outside the museum. It also makes 'the' public a symbolic space where discourse circulates amongst strangers that already belong to our world, although they may not share our opinions.

Since the coming together of visitors can only be fleeting and temporary, the values that could lead to build a community or a public cannot be positively affirmed. The performance shies away from community building rituals that would allow for at least a temporary community, as anthropologist Victor Turner conceives of it, to be established (Turner 2001). In this regard even the moments of subjectivity in a theatre or dance situation include a moment of modernism's negativity. We do things in public, yet how it functions remains implicit in institutions such as the museum as rules of behaviour or modes of seeing. The situation addresses the visitors in their subjectivities and asks them to become participants in a space, which stages conflicting modes of address that may not be easy to resolve. Because of the protocols of the museum and the theatre that are made explicit in the performance, the visitors are made to reflect on their singular position and modes of perception. The empathetic response of theatre and the disinterested viewing

of the museum situation overlap. If, as Warner holds, a public is only constituted by acts of address, this address, then, does not necessarily produce an imaginary identification with the situation or the artwork. In *retrospective*, various modes of address interfere with and contradict each other. Thus address, here, also functions on an impersonal symbolic level that cuts across any personal issues. It addresses 'the' public by creating 'a' public or different kinds of public as particular audiences asking the question just what it is that constitutes 'the' public and how we may go about producing it.

In as far as categories of identity and belonging (of gender, class and race) are part of the subject's fabric, they are part of the performance as 'subjective moments' (not as identity categories). Le Roy's *Retrospective* facilitates an encounter between different personal stories and histories and allows them to circulate in the situation the performance establishes. The production takes place in the public space of a museum or an exhibition hall. It questions the public and its dominant representative practices of remembering and displaying knowledge in one of the very institutions that are assumed to represent 'the' public. It questions the way dance history and dance authorship are to be exhibited and the public's received notion of them by expanding on their coming into being. It does so by challenging our modalities of viewing thereby confounding received notions of what a museum exhibition or a dance performance is and how to look at them. It draws attention to our individual responsibility as participants in the situation to help build a public by relating over issues that may also divide us.

By unfolding an aesthetic situation with culturally situated subjects, *Retrospective* differs from classical and modernist claims of a utopian universal subject. It does not, however, express subjectivity in the sense of a purely private statement or as representative of a political agenda. The treatment of its pre-existing and non-recuperable material, its machine-like operations and the way they are addressed alienates both dancers and spectators from their 'own' experience. Aesthetic experience and its correlate, aesthetic subjectivity, therefore, still depend on an objectification and the impersonal aspect of address that makes the proposal of the artwork a general and a 'public' one. It makes us question and reflect upon the ways we do things while we are doing them. In this sense, even *Retrospective* is committed to a movement of negativity, albeit not in the form of a non-alienated subjectivity. It also aims at something non-existing or non-given in the performance: a general public, which still holds as a utopian meeting point for people coming together, discoursing, answering back, addressing and being addressed, and engaging with each other in a situation. Thus, *Retrospective* questions the general idea of a pre-existing public space and its subjects in favour of an inquiry after what and who constitutes this not (yet) given public and its values.

"[W]orking and performing at the same time", as Le Roy puts it (2014, 254), we assume responsibility for the moment we meet. We show a coming together of people while at the same time we are performing it. Le Roy's material and the histories the dancers construct on its basis function as an objective exterior to our own subjective experiences, but about which we communicate and to which we may relate through questions and our own memories. Addressing the audience creates a public that asks for a different public or for different ways to conceive of this public. It introduces an ethical dimension into the performance, which is allowed to reflect its own conditions because its ethical relations are unfolding in a situation framed as aesthetic.

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Task by Ana Pi

A Still and Warm Dance to a Space

I invite you to a dance.

A dance that will be our dance.

For this work, which will not take much of your time, it will be important to observe.

Observation, even with eyes closed, is a great power enhanced by movement.

The beginning consists of listening to the sounds or the silence that make up the atmosphere around you.

What is the quality of sound?

Do you hear words?

As you read me, do you listen to your thoughts?

Do you feel free at the beginning of this conversation?

Dialogue? I hope so.

And if not, I hope that along our steps this availability will emerge so that our dance can happen in the best way.

If you hear words, what do they say?

What do they communicate?

Who utters these words?

Who can speak in the space you are in?

Ideally, all words, all sounds should be heard, even those coming from non-human beings.

These beings at this moment should also be listened to, even without words being said.

In this aural atmosphere, do you identify the presence of rhythm?

No?

Then please slowly direct your right hand to your own heart.

The left hand can then be placed below your navel.

The rhythm that all life has is here.

Enjoy this cadence, the cadence of being alive in this moment.

I invite you then to think of a pose, a gesture.

In the future when you, me and this dance will have disappeared, what will be left in this space where once there was this dance, you and me?

The only trace of our existence would be this posture you have chosen for us.

How much responsibility does it need? It is important to note the responsibility we bear in our postures.

Now let's go to space, what is the quality of the space you are in?

Can everyone access it?

If the answer is no, I think we can conclude that where you are is a space of privilege.

Or even a space of conflict.

Our dance can take conflict into account.

Our dance can also be a way to resolve the conflict.

Let's go back to the posture, are you going to follow it?

If not, get organized to take it seriously, because it will be in this posture that our dance will take place.

Our dance will be motionless, like an undated statue or monument.

What is the density of each millimetre of gesture you have chosen for us?

Do you still remember the rhythm?

That rhythm will guide our navigation.

Now is the big event, keep your pose, posture, gesture intact for the time of 8 minutes and 46 seconds.

If you're not ready to be accompanied by just your heartbeat, you can count on the accompaniment of a song, but not just any song.

I would advise you on some extended version of Bob Marley's song WAR.

If you're sitting, you might want to get out of your chair and look for a more creatively active posture.

If space doesn't authorize our music, please use your own headphones.

Also, notice how you compose with the space that surrounds you.

Like an undated statue or monument, your posture reorganizes space.

What do you propose to us for this motionless dance?

Come on.

Music.

A few minutes have passed.

For your immobility to be perfect, remember that your weight acts under the Earth and the Earth reacts to your weight, to this dance.

How's your breathing now?

Can you breathe?

In the face of this absolute immobility, your eyes continue to observe.

Do you remember that I said that observation was important?

The immobility seems to make us listen better.

Let's now pay attention to the lyrics of the song.

Perhaps by coincidence, we are on the same verse.

What does it tell us?

Let's insist a little more on this immobility.

It's curious to think that immobility and heat rhyme.

Do you feel the heat?

Does this heat warm the space?

Heating is not burning, pay attention to how subtle it is.

In which direction does our dance heat the space?

You may now be able to tell us.

Our 8 minutes will come to an end.

Our 46 seconds will also come to an end.

Will we still remain immobile?

Moving Spaces

Enacting Dance, Performance, and the Digital in the Museum
edited by Susanne Franco and Gabriella Giannachi

Creolised Dance, Museumised Space: Jeannette Ehlers and Decolonial Re-Edification

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Abstract This chapter examines three works by Danish artist Jeannette Ehlers that involve dance as ritual movement in what I call "museumised space". Examining these dances as creolised products arising from the enslavement of Africans by European nations, I will argue that Ehlers performs through them an Afropean decolonial praxis of 're-edification' around the silences surrounding Denmark's colonial past, involving in particular a dialectic between spectrality and material sumptuousness that draws purposely on dance in relation to the materiality of sound.

Keywords Creolisation. African-heritage dance. Museumised space. Decoloniality. Jeannaette Ehlers. Danish colonialism.

Summary 1 Dance as Creolising Ritual. – 2 The Materiality of Sound. – 3 Ghost in the Big House (Cracking the System).

Vine scrolls, marble drape, erect breasts carved out of white perfection. Impassive statues with blind stone eyes. The screen goes blank. Whip it good! It flashes up in white. The sound slices through the air, tearing through the edifice. We see you, white markings on brown skin. The designs of another History on your living, breathing, heaving body. A rasping sound: you are rubbing charcoal on the whip. The white canvas waits, tensed. Do the statues tremble slightly? Anticipation. The whiplash, again, now on canvas. The marble folds become visceral, your exertions, lapidary. The whipping becomes more and more frantic, building its implacable rhythm to a crescendo. Streaks crowd the canvas: a new music score in charcoal blood. You have danced. The marble statue bows its head.

In the polished room with the polished floor and the polished furniture, we catch glimpses of you. Your short red dress and trainers, sometimes just your arm stretching out as you whirl in the arms of your unseen partner. Your body is erect, you are on tiptoes, bending your knees ever so slightly in between the beats. The waltz swells. It fills the void left by unspeakable things. And you slip



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in and out of the beat, creating your own contretemps with the mirrors of history. The chandeliers glitter in the sunlight. How much more light do we need to illuminate the horror?

The snow over Marienborg was heavy. How would a Caribbean woman have endured her first Danish winter? Spirit dances. The vèvè wavers in candlelight, the gilded and upholstered chairs waver, history wavers. Rosicrucian patterns reflecting on the parquetry. Percussion rises. The traces become palpable, in their disjunction new structures emerge and dissolve. The shadow bears weight. It bends History. Then, like Michael Jackson facing the Pharaoh, on the precise split second of the percussion's final slap, you disappear into the floor. It's over. "Remember the time".¹

Dance makes sound visible and space palpable. It triangulates the body moving in time to sound within the materiality of space. To dance in this way is to instantiate relationality as *vincularidad* 'enchainment' (Mignolo, Walsh 2018, 1) of aural, kinetic, sacred, and material histories. When the dancer embodies these histories as crystallised through the matrix of displacement and renewal that we shorthand as the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993), what pasts/futures are activated? How does brutality distil beauty, and how does the same body hold together contraries? What happens when the dance(r) initiates the triangulation of movement, sound, and space within edifices that proclaim, through their material lineaments, what Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, following Anibal Quijano (2000), memorably describe as the "colonial matrix of power?" (2018, 114-15). What dialogues begin?

These questions are provoked by a consideration of the Danish artist Jeannette Ehlers,² whose practice mobilises dance within what I call 'museumised space' – a continuum that allows me to link together diverse sites where the colonial matrix of power is displayed for purposes of 'edification'. I use this word deliberately drawing on the physicality of the edifice, and its metaphoric use for improvement through instruction. Edification ensures that this coloniality keeps percolating into the present. Edification is the mobilizing of public funds and discourses around heritage preservation, pedagogy, and display, to legitimate the functioning of museumised space as a machine for inculcating a respectful attentiveness to the past commensurate with the expectations of the *Zeitgeist*. I include within museumised space, grand homes that materialised the accumulation of capital through participation of their former owners in the transatlantic slave trade, and that are now classified as heritage or national property, selectively open to visitors. Their maintenance is ensured through the taxpayer's money on the logic that the spectacle of their grandeur is beneficial to the public, whether viewed from the outside or through "organized walking" (Van Beurden 2015, 53) inside. The work of edification thus aligns these houses to sites that declare themselves explicitly as museums, and indeed, they are frequently converted into such self-declared museums that participate equally, though differently, in the work of "cultural guardianship" (Van Beurden

¹ I thank Ehlers for the detail of the waltz composition she uses in this piece (email communication with the Author, April 2021).

My responses to Jeannette Ehlers' work draw on, respectively: *Whip it Good!* (many versions exist; I refer to the one that was commissioned by Art Labour Archives); *Three Steps of Story*, and *Black Magic at the White House*.

² <https://www.jeannetteehlers.dk/portefolje.html>.

2015, 61-99). I use Ehlers' danced interventions in such museumised spaces to explore how the "activation" (Apter, Derby 2009) of memories of slavery and colonialism, which she claims as part of her personal history, can enact a decolonial praxis.

Ehlers' mother is (white) Danish, and her father (Afro-descendant) Trinidadian. She has a Danish last name, lives in Copenhagen, and self-identifies as non-white. *Prima facie*, she inhabits an easily decipherable version of 'Afropean' identity - "a space where blackness was taking part in shaping European identity at large" (Pitts 2019, 1). Indeed, "delv[ing] into ethnicity and identity inspired by her own Danish / West Indian background [she creates] pieces [that] revolve around big questions and difficult issues, such as Denmark's role as a slave nation - part of the Danish cultural heritage, which often gets overlooked in the general historiography" (Jeannette Ehlers). Exemplifying the Afropean as "living in and with more than one idea: Africa and Europe, or, by extension, the Global South and the West, without being mixed-this, half-that, or black-other" (Pitt 2019, 1), her creative process is sutured to explorations of decolonial thinking through the project *BE.BOP*, which she claims was an "epiphany" for her "personal as well as artistic life" (Lockward 2019, 429).³ One of the three pieces discussed in this essay, *Whip It Good!* [fig. 1], was commissioned in 2013 by *BE.BOP* as a live act that has since been performed across Europe in numerous sites that aggregate into museumised space. The other two pieces are short films (each just over three minutes long), produced in 2009 as part of a set of works termed *Atlantic*.⁴ *Black Magic in the White House* [fig. 2] is a digitally manipulated film of her dancing to Haitian percussion inside a space suggestive of Marienborg, the official residence of the Danish Prime Minister since 1962.⁵ *Three Steps of Story* [fig. 3] shows her waltzing inside Fort Frederik, a National Historic Landmark in the Caribbean island of Saint Croix, formerly part of the Danish West Indies and now part of the US Virgin Islands. Each work activates memories of enslavement to instigate processes of re-edification through bringing into the museumised space African-heritage dance practices generated through circum-Atlantic creolisation processes (Kabir 2020a).

These dances are the kinetic-memorial record of how the sacred, the secular, the African, and the European, come together in unpredictable yet irrepressible ways to resist the Plantation as a necropolitical system (Mbembe

³ *BE.BOP* (Black Europe Body Politics) is a collaborative project that was flagged off in 2012 at Berlin's Ballhaus Naunynstraße. It is "a safe space for healing colonial and imperial wounds" where "knowledge is understood as a collective creation, a collective healing process" and that "has engaged European audiences in intricate detail with the outrage generated by Black/African Diaspora peoples when confronting a racist world order structured along the lines of coloniality" (Lockward 2019, 419). The key thinker translating Latin American concepts and praxis of decoloniality, Walter D. Mignolo, has been associated with *BE.BOP* from its inception, and the late Alanna Lockward, one of the founders, who worked closely with Ehlers within *BE.BOP*, is acknowledged by Walter Mignolo as an important influence (Mignolo, Walsh 2018, xi).

⁴ The installation *Atlantic* (2009) consists of four videos, including the two examined here, which move between museumised spaces in Denmark, the Danish West Indies, and the Cape Coast, Ghana.

⁵ The camera shows Marienborg from the outside only and an embroidered sampler on a white china plate that presents its stylised façade. The interior is from "another location in Copenhagen, since Ehlers was refused permission to film at Marienborg by the Prime Minister's Office" (Hvenegård-Lassen, Staunæs 2020, 234). This important elision will be addressed at the close of the essay.



Figure 1 Jeannette Ehlers, *Whip It Good!* Photographer: Nikolaj Recke. © Jeannette Ehlers

Figure 2 Jeannette Ehlers, *Black Magic at the White House*. © Jeannette Ehlers



Figure 3 Jeannette Ehlers, *Three Steps of Story*. © Jeannette Ehlers

2003). The African heritage that their flexible resources either foreground or camouflage is also the heritage that gives the dancer an affective vocabulary for somatically remembering identities experienced as lost, alienated, fragmented, and yet powerfully capable of inciting subversion and rebellion. This vocabulary, too, generates a continuum: on it a dance like the waltz can be situated alongside percussive ritualised movement to the drums, because each is haunted by an infinitely mediated idea of Africa.⁶ This idea resonates through the music to which Ehlers dances, and the habitus within which she performs. One piece emphasises Europeanness through the waltz, the other, Africanity through voodoo. Together and complementarily, however, they signify creolised dance as reservoirs of collective memory that can activate at different times and places an African heritage: neither to return to origins nor to declare the impossibility of return, but rather, to intervene within the project of edification through a variegated play of covert/overt compromise and resistance. In this frame, *Whip It Good!* too, invites being read as a hyper-ritualised, reparative dance performance, conducted to the soundtrack of the rhythmically cracking whip.⁷ Responding to these three pieces while paying close attention to the spaces of their performance and exhibition, I interpret Ehlers' Afropean practice through the lens of creolisation as touch-

⁶ The essay starts with the premise that, like languages of Europe, dance forms of Europe too circulate within circuits of creolisation. The waltz is thus as haunted and potentially infused by Africanity as are French, English, Portuguese, Dutch, and Spanish. Provincialising Europe through the waltz is arguably one of the basic motivations for Ehlers choosing to dance this genre in the space of Fort Frederik along with the historical memory of waltzing in this space, which I shall elaborate on later in the essay.

⁷ My reading thus diverges from Lockward's (2017, 110): "In her latest piece, Jeannette Ehlers finally did in front of an audience what she had done previously in such works such as the above-mentioned *Black Magic in the White House*, as well as in *Three Steps of Story* (2009). Instead of dancing, however, in her first live performance, *Whip it Good!* (2013), she challenged the audience with a deceptively simple action: whipping".

stone for global modernity's intricate relationship to the traumatic processes of enslavement, colonialism, and extractive capitalism. Dancing in the museumised space performs re-edification through creolisation as relationality (Glissant 1997; Wendt 2019). As Ehlers affiliates these different dances to different sites in the Caribbean and Denmark, and elsewhere in Europe, she dances into being a new archipelagic "kinetoscape" (Kabir 2020a), within which Denmark and the Caribbean become relationally re-situated.

1 Dance as Creolising Ritual

The starting point of this essay is dance, so let us first explicate what, and how, Ehlers dances. The two pieces of 2009 differ from *Whip It Good!* in drawing on codified and recognisable dance genres, which their respective titles draw attention to. *Three Steps of Story* refers to the three steps that constitute the basis of the waltz, while the first part of *Black Magic* is an ironic-serious reference to the strong associations between dance and percussion in voodoo ritual – associations that are born out in this piece by the use of a lighted candle, a brush, a small vessel, and a vèvè or floor drawing for the voodoo divinity Papa Legba. In *Three Steps of Story*, Ehlers dances the waltz with a light yet stately grace, tracing out a highly controlled linear geometry. In *Black Magic at the White House*, she dances to percussion in keeping with the increasing tempo of the drumming, performing circular, sweeping movements isolating the pelvis accentuated by the dress with a bustle that we see in silhouette. These movements are executed mostly upright but at times with her crouching on the floor in 'twerking' position, which has ritual significance in African heritage dances and should not be interpreted as unreconstructed sexualisation of the female body. While the arms in *Three Steps of Story* are held in partner-hold position and the torso is locked, in *Black Magic at the White House* the arms are locked because they hold aloft the lit candle throughout, even as the torso moves in accordance with Africanist kinaesthetic principles of isolation and polycentrism. Finally, the two pieces may be contrasted by their respective mobilisations of a secular and a sacred dancing practice.

Despite these evident contrasts in form and function, both pieces draw on the same heritage of circum-Atlantic creolised performative traditions that developed through what Joseph Roach called "oceanic interculture" (1996). Neither is dancing to voodoo purely 'African', nor is the 'waltz' purely European; rather, each performance reveals an elastic kine-to-somatic structure for embodied performance that connects people and places through potentially infinite permutations of 'Africanity' and 'Europeanness'. The sartorial code of the dancing body in *Black Magic at the White House* Europeanises the Africanity of voodoo while the brown body dancing in *Three Steps of Story* Africanises the European connotations of waltz – reversals that are amplified by the assignment of 'three steps' to a Caribbean location, and 'black magic' to a Northern European one. The reminder of waltz's ubiquity as social dance of creolised cultures (De Jong 2003; Brokken 2015) is complemented by the reminder of Afro-diasporic religiosity's North Atlantic life (Matory 2018). Through these inversions, Ehlers signals the fundamental obscuring of origins that is the hallmark of creolisation as process and theory (Kabir 2000b). Jointly, the two performances of 2009 proclaim an Afropean kinesthetics that is not just intent on showcasing the somat-

ic impress of the black body in white space (including the White Cube), but announces as an 'always-already,' a dialogic, creative, and unpredictable relationality. Neither national borders nor racialised essences, but webbed and entangled (Pinnix 2019) structures for understanding cultural dispersal and re-aggregation throughout the circum-Atlantic space, are the choices exercised by Ehlers' signal.

These swirled and non-binaristic models for circum-Atlantic, creolised interculture also impel us to question the ostensible contrast between secular and sacred dance genres that Ehlers' 2009 performances set up. We see, instead, two sides of the same coin: 'ritual'. In both cases, the body interacting with the collective provides meaning and 'gravitas'. The precise ritualistic function of each dance genre does, however, diverge, in accordance with the ratio of Europeanness to Africanity each piece foregrounds. The sacred nature of voodoo does not need elaboration or defence today, although it was precisely this sacrality that led to the fear and fascination with which Haiti continues to be regarded by the North Atlantic gaze (Ulysse 2015). On the other side of the spectrum, creolised forms of European dances - not just the waltz that Ehlers dances, but the contredanse and quadrille traditions which preceded it - were powerful social rituals: the means of choosing to preserve a status quo that I have elsewhere called a "balancing act" (Kabir 2020b). Despite the collaboration implied by the dances, which retain their European names, the revolution triggered by voodoo rites, and the corresponding variations in their outward forms, each transmits the resistive power of creolisation. Even C.L.R. James (2001, 14), who contrasts the "dream of freedom" embodied in "midnight celebrations of voodoo" where the enslaved of Saint-Domingue "danced and sang", with the "house slaves [...] dressed in cast-off silks and brocades" who "like trained monkeys [...] danced minuets and quadrilles, and bowed and curtsied in the fashion of Versailles", concedes that such instances of 'mimicry' offered alternative pathways to revolutionary consciousness.

The spectrum of creolised circum-Atlantic dance that Ehlers references in *Two Steps of Story* and *Black Magic at the White House* sets up a historical, kinetic, and materialist frame for us to interpret *Whip It Good!* as a dance performance, even though Ehlers does not refer to or import into the performance any specific dance genre. Across the numerous performances of the piece in different sites, certain features remain constant: the whip rubbed with black charcoal, the white canvas suspended from the ceiling like a punching bag, Ehlers' outfit comprising two pieces of plain white cloth wrapped minimally around her body and a matching white headwrap, and chalk-white body paint. This monochromatic minimalism is matched by the minimalism of gesture: all that the performance does is repeating, over and again, two acts: whipping the canvas and rubbing charcoal onto the whip, in alternating gestures. Yet this alternation sets up a rhythm that gives choreological coherence to the performance. Together with the body art and the compressed violence of the act of whipping, the choreology endows the whole with the signifying power of the 2009 performances - in particular *Black Magic at the White House*. Exercising the whip performs expiation and excoriation as part of the same ritual. Furthermore, every 'artwork' created by the repeated lashings of the whip against the canvas is completed by volunteers from the audience who are invited to mimic the artist at the close of her performance. The participatory nature of this piece augments its ritualistic format. By creating a new collective consciousness through

body movement in space and to sound, *Whip It Good!* illustrates how creolisation can generate unexpected new responses to what Peter Fryer, in the context of Afro-Brazilian percussive and kinetic traditions, called the “rhythms of resistance” (2000).

2 The Materiality of Sound

The whiplash slicing through the air “lacerates the whole audience” (Bariendos, s.d. online), conjoining Ehlers’ movements to convert spectacle to an extreme of shared hapticity. Handing over the whip to audience members elicits divergent responses dependent on their racial identification – including those whose refusal of the challenge Ehlers attributes to their self-perception as racially white (Lockward 2017). Assuming the “ambivalent nature of the fetish” then, the whip “darkly illuminate[s] the role of material things in the continual re-negotiation of human social relationships” (Matory 2018, xii). The whip’s “intermaterial vibration can afford a better understanding of the ways in which music does what it does, and the ways in which humans use it as a force for good and bad” (Eidsheim 2015, 163), because Ehlers’ visceral soundtrack produces what Matthew Morrison calls “Blacksound” (2019). Drawing on the invocation of “phonic materiality” by Fred Moten (2003, 1), whereby the scream of the enslaved is the ground zero of resistance, Blacksound attunes us to “the material hypersonicity of blackness that always cuts through and across the scripting and erasure of black people and their aesthetic practices” (Morrison 2019, 792). Through Ehlers’ danced ritual, the whiplashes script on the white canvas another story about blackness, aesthetics, and labour. In its repetitive (black)sound congeals both the enslaved person’s labour and the necropolitical exercise of power. Piercing through museumised space to reclaim it as public domain, the whip reminds us that, “breaking with uprootedness and the pure world of things of which he or she is but a fragment, the slave is able to demonstrate the protean capabilities of the human bond through music and the very body that was supposedly possessed by another” (Mbembe 2003, 37).

The whip is the reminder that “musical sounds are made by labor” (Abbate 2004, 505). *Whip It Good!* performs re-edification through the whiplash that the artist’s labouring body converts to Blacksound. The movement-sound-space triangulation invites audience members to reorganise their commonly-held interpretations of sound as either noise or music: “with noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world. With music is born power and its opposite: subversion” (Laing 1987, 6). As radical music, the whiplash activates the dialectic between power and subversion through the ritualised movement of Ehlers’ body repeatedly whipping the canvas. Its sound conflates two sources of fugitive percussion for the enslaved – the body and *objets trouvés*. Creolisation was instantiated as resistance through the astonishing proliferation of idiophones as well as membranophones on the Plantation. Caribbean percussive traditions and instruments proliferate, mutate, and generate pleasurable sounds through unexpected source materials: skin and wooden frames; crates and storage boxes; seeds, gourds, tree trunks, wooden sticks used in shipbuilding, and a range of metallic objects purloined from everyday use, from oil drums to ablution vessels to spoons; and now, a whip. Ehlers perpetuates this tradition by taking the whip and generating through it a spectacle of moving ritually to Blacksound. The whip

as Ehlers' percussive instrument reveals the body "as capable not only of production and consumption, and even of entering into relations with others, but also of autonomous pleasure" (Laing 1987, 32), precisely as the border between pleasure and pain is uncomfortably disrupted by the hyper-racialisation of the performing body. The body markings accentuate the oscillating semiotics that tremble between appropriation and affiliation, acknowledgement and mourning, dis- and re-enchantment – enacting a fetishisation that reclaims the fetish.

Ehlers had already begun exploring this complex affective charge of Afro-Atlantic percussion in *Black Magic in the White House*. That performance is sonically unadorned by any other instrument or voice. It also lacks textual exegesis, with accompanying texts simply calling it 'voodoo dance' without elaborating on the nature of the rhythm or the drums involved.⁸ The resultant opacity draws attention to a threshold beyond which meaning is withheld for the uninitiated. The esoteric quality of the vèvè, the candle, and the brush augment this mysterious, ritualised sacrality (Hvenegård-Lassen, Staunæs 2020) whose connotations are channelled through the single word 'voudou' and its silent partner 'Haiti'. From Père Labat writing of his enslaved dancing on the Dominican-owned plantations of northern Martinique (1724), to Moreau de Saint-Mery (1801) observing dance in Saint-Domingue on the eve of the Haitian Revolution, the sound of African-heritage percussion has continued to trigger in observers a fear and fascination intimately connected with the drum's potential to incite rebellion. For this very reason, the Afro-diasporic drum has become a privileged trope for all those formulating or excavating modes of resistance by being "Closer to the drums" (Escobar 2008, 25). The connection between rhythm, retention, and resistance are read as codes that "refer us to traditional knowledge, symbolic if you will, that the West can no longer detect" (Benitez-Rojo 1996, 225), which shape Caribbean self-understanding as a "culture that shatters the stone of time" (Glissant 1997, 137). Indeed, the immense significance granted heuristically to African-derived music's syncopated, polyrhythmic percussion sees it capable of subverting not only European understandings of rhythm, but the linear temporality of capitalism itself.

Yet it is not just moving to the lacerating whip and the menace of 'black magic' through which Ehlers mobilises dance as resistance and subversion. Her use of Emile Waldteufel's famous Skaters' Waltz within *Three Steps of Story* suggests that dancing in museumised space must evoke but also move beyond binaries of 'black' and 'white' – whether through the witty title that riffs off the moralistic connotations of the adjectival pair, or the charcoal streaks left against the white canvas. One of the most frequently creolised European genres, the waltz as dance form lent its partner hold to the myriad "dance-of-two" (Chasteen 2004, *passim*) forms that emerged all across the Atlantic rim, but equally important was its popularity with Creole composers (Kabir 2020a). As Dutch journalist Jan Brokken recently discovered

⁸ The credits to the video let some information slip through: the piece, "Fanamfe Af", is a non-traditional composition by Ghanaian percussionist Francis Kofi Aziati, included in his album *Vugbe (Drum Language): Traditional Rhythms of Ghana* (Sonos Records, s.d.). The use of a Ghanaian composition was based on rhythms of the Ewe ethnicity spread across Ghana, Togo, and Benin, to evoke Haiti as somatic memory in a pastiche of Marienborg (as discussed earlier in the essay) by an artist with Trinidadian parentage. This relay shows the infinite permutational power of the idea of creolisation. There can be no fixed point of 'origin', only nodes and intersections, call and response.

to his astonishment, “if you wanted to please someone on Curaçao or Aruba, you gave them a waltz as a gift” (2004, 89). Ehlers’ choice of a composition by Waldteufel, whose compositions circulated widely in the Americas as part of 19th century “World music” (Magaldi 2009), is additionally resonant because of his identity. While not a Creole composer himself, as a Jewish person from the Alsatian borderland between France and Germany, he is, arguably, creolised (Boatcă 2020). His Jewishness activates memory of the lively participation of Jewish composers within the history of Caribbean creole waltz, which, as Nanette De Jong has shown for the Antillean waltz of Curaçao, “has crossed and re-crossed racial, political, and social barriers to re-energize the island’s repertoire of popular and classical music” (2003, 251). As Waldteufel’s Skaters’ Waltz reverberates through Fort Frederik in Ehlers’ film, Blacksound seeps into ‘creolesound’, and resistance expands to encompass both mimicry and marronage.

3 Ghost in the Big House (Cracking the System)

What Ehlers dances (to) is every bit as important as where she stages this dance: the sumptuous and beautifully maintained Mirror Hall of Fort Frederik. She thereby activates a particular memory: the relationship between creolisation, dance, and the emancipation of slaves from Fort Frederik on 3 July 1848 by Carl Frederik von Scholten, Governor-General of the Danish West Indies from 1827 to 1848. Von Scholten’s place in history, while ensured by this act, was underwritten by his policy of inviting freed former slaves to his notorious Governor’s Dances in Fort Frederik from as early as 1831 – social gatherings taking place in this very Mirror Hall we see, during which the racialised divisions holding in place a deeply unequal social order would have momentarily given way to racially and socially mixed groups dancing the creolised mazurka, schottische, quadrille, and waltz (Hall 1980). This unexpected open-mindedness displayed by the Governor-General was a consequence of his twenty-year long relationship with a second-generation freed slave woman from Saint Croix, Anna Hergaard (Olsen 2016). Culminating in his bold move to emancipate the enslaved in 1848, it ended with von Scholten’s consequent departure from the Islands to Denmark. Did this separation, part of the tumultuous overturning of the status quo, feed into the psychic derangement that von Scholten apparently suffered from on return to Europe? And what about Anna Hergaard? These unanswered questions find visible echo in the waltz danced singly by Ehlers, with but a shadow partner outlined in her arms. Moreover, we never see Ehlers directly: we see only reflections of her brown body, clad in a red dress and white tennis shoes, framed successively in the mirrors that line the room through whose length she waltzes.

These reflected fragments, the glittering mirrors, and the absent partner punctuate the waltz with a polyrhythm of unspeakable things, illuminating the confusing space of intimacy, emotion, compromise and negotiation that exists between ‘black’ and ‘white’. This is not a shadowy but lustrous state, conveyed by the sparkling mirrors, the highly polished parquet floor, and the glittering chandeliers. Like the shiny carapace of the fetish that hides and calls for attention (Mulvey 1991), it highlights the dancer seen only in the reflection of the same mirrors that constitute the room’s material splendour. A similar dialectic between spectrality and sumptuousness is achieved by the digital manipulation of the dancer’s image in *Black*

Magic in the White House. Except for few momentary flashes, we never see Ehlers' dancing body directly, but always in outline, through traces and ripples it leaves in space-time - "effecting a distortion of the straight lines of the panels, the doors, and the frame of the romantic landscape paintings" (Hvenegård-Lassen, Staunæs 2020, 234). That we see only the silhouetted body accentuates the silhouette itself - of a woman in 19th century European dress consonant with the habitus of Marienborg, built as a summer residence for Commander Olfert Fischer in 1744. Wealth accumulated through the slave trade thus congeals in the elegance and taste (Gikandi 2011) that emanates from the high-quality furnishings and décor, in keeping with the property's current role as residence of the Danish prime minister. Gliding across walls, furniture, frames and floors that constitute the material history of museumised space, Ehlers' ghostly dancing body activates "the interplays between slave trade, economic wealth, and the spectral value of artworks as commodities", haunting and performing an "exorcism of the aesthetic spirits of coloniality" (Barriendos s.d. online).

Speaking of the African Americans she recruited for her new dance projects evoking the expressive culture of the Caribbean islands she had experienced during her anthropological fieldwork, Katherine Dunham once observed that "the creole waltz and mazurka they performed like true veterans, bowing, curtsying, shuffling, fluttering their beribboned fans and embroidered lace kerchiefs, as I had imagined the slave population of those islands would have done in the mimicry of the masters of the big house" (Kabir 2015, 220). The Big House spun into existence "sticky webs of copy and contact" (Taussig 2017, 21). Through dance and sartorial styles, the so-called house slaves mimicked - just a bit too faithfully, recalling Homi Bhabha's notion of "sly civility" (2012) - European codes often denied through sumptuary laws, to offer early Afro-diasporic versions of "African modes of self-writing" (Mbembe 2002). The freed slaves who accepted von Scholten's invitation to dance in Fort Frederik; the enslaved brought to live and work inside Marienborg; Ehlers' 'voodoo dance' in one location; her forever partially reflected waltz in another, in the frame of the Big House, these are all self-conscious annotations of attempts at "fleeing the Plantation" (Crichlow 2009). Straddling the Atlantic Ocean, Marienborg and Fort Frederik stand as manifestations of a *Casa grande e senzala* complex (Freyre 1995), where *casa grande* is the 'Big House' and *senzala*, the Kimbundu word for 'village' that, in Brazil, comes to mean 'Slave's Quarters'. If the *casa grande* remains a traumatic splinter in the post-*senzala* self, dancing through this space those very dances that perform creolisation's foundational scene of encounter (Kabir 2020a) activates the memory of creolisation as a process of both collaboration and resistance. The splinter then triggers a counter-process of inducing "cracks" (Walsh, Mignolo 2018, 81-96) within the system of post-Plantation edification.

Ehlers' Afropean consciousness (Lockward 2017) makes her body porous to the ironies and as well as to the new possibilities of creolised performance through which she cracks open the colonial matrix of power. The heuristic of creolisation moves us away from descriptive labels of an Afropean identity as 'hybrid' (or even more limitingly as a product of 'métissage', which restrains the matter to biology alone) towards analytical explication of the ways in which such identity enters and motivates praxis. Creolisation as a shared condition that connects past and present as well as specific insular and continental histories frees Ehlers, whose Caribbean ancestry is from Trinidad rather than Saint Croix, to perform affiliation as *vincularidad*, and

to connect with the Danish West Indies as well as Haiti. As a relational state, creolisation is capable of disrupting the system from within. It is the Trojan horse that brings *cimarronaje* 'marronage' into the *casa grande* through "posture, attitude, act, action and thought *casa adentro* (or in-house) of disobedience, rebellion, resistance and insurgency, and also of the decolonial construction and creation of freedom" (Walsh, Mignolo 2018, 43).

The endless repetition necessitated by mimicry can enable release from history through the right conditions that include technological resources such as the digital manipulation and circulation of danced interventions we see in Ehlers' 2009 works. The whiplash that lacerates consciousness *in situ* can then crack open the system because it arises from a praxis that brings into museumised space creolised dances that assume Europeanised forms as well as those whose African kinetic repertoires overtly signify *cimarronaje*. By treating these dances as proximate rather than polarised, Ehlers is able to disrupt the master-narratives and silences that still surround histories of enslavement, colonialism, and empire in public discourse and monumentality.

The slaves walked on their naked feet through two hundred years of Danish history without leaving any other trace than the bit of information we find in the school textbook about Denmark being the first country to abolish the slave trade.
(Thorkild Hansen 2002, 33)

Slavery flows all over the city [...] Black Copenhagen [...]. Running through our veins no matter how hard they try to let those flows dry. That's why I speak in visual tongues, poetically shaking up from colonial amnesia [...] confronting the denial, and challenging the denial of the denial.
(Jeanette Ehlers)

The involvement of Scandinavian countries in those histories has only very recently begun to be interrogated and unmasked. Yet the road towards a decolonial seizing of history cannot be a simple matter of overturning the curriculum. To the (White) Danish historian, the "naked feet" of slaves left no trace other than the slender yet unshakeable authority of the textbook (Hansen 2002, 33). Even that admission of amnesia can recede only up to the horizon of European pedagogy. The edifice remains unshaken. A few more bits of information should do the trick and we shall all be happy again. The (Afropean) Danish artist sees the matter quite differently. The enslaved and her history leak all over the city, making its whiteness black (Ehler in Barriandos s.d., online). And if she is with naked feet, it is because she chooses to be so, in order to "challenge the denial of the denial". She can equally well be in tennis shoes dancing a waltz, or in a big skirt dancing to what the uninitiated hears as 'voodoo rhythm'. Indeed, because she has made you think it is a 'voodoo dance', straight from Haiti, the joke is on you. It is percussion by a Ghanaian artist using rhythms of the Ewe ethnicity, present in several West African nations. If Marienborg is out of bounds because it is the Danish President's residence, she will digitally mimic its interior and make an ironic comment on stereotyping and fetishisation by signalling its façade via an embroidery sampler. Through mimicry, parody, improvisa-

tion - all aspects that motor creolisation - the edifice will be disrupted. As she says in the context of her latest work - the collaboration *I Am Queen Mary* with the artist of Virgin Islands heritage, LaBelle Vaughn - "working within a decolonial discourse is disruptive by nature since the aim is to create counter narratives to the dominant colonial structure" (Ehlers cited in Georgadis 2021, n.p.).

In the case of "Denmark's own vexed attitudes of pride, glorification, shame, and amnesia toward its colonial heritage in the Danish West Indies (which was sold to the United States in 1917) and the nation's role in the black Atlantic slave trade" (Lunde, Stenport 2008, 228), the centenary of the sale of those islands was a trigger to open up this discourse. Ehlers' pieces of 2009 and 2013 excavated for her audiences this buried connection between Denmark and the Caribbean via the triangular trade, preparing the ground, in a way, for that new consciousness to emerge (however painfully and slowly). Although this essay has not been able to consider the ways in which her wider praxis involves Danish presence in the coastal forts of West Africa as creolising and museumised spaces, I hope this focused reading of specific works by her will open pathways for a broader consideration of how creolisation as a heuristic can decode the decolonial work of re-edification that she performs through dance in the museum. It can also offer a fresh perspective on her most recent collaborations with La Belle Vaughn, which initiate museumisation of spaces of storage and distribution associated with Denmark's colonial trade through monumental rather than kinetic interventions. The earlier danced interventions examined here thus ask to be assessed as necessary steps in Ehlers' ongoing project of re-edification, through which emerges over time a decolonising aesthetics for the "art plantations of modernity" (Lockward 2017, 430). Ehlers has remarked that "most art institutions are not ready for decolonization" and she "still struggle[s] with decolonizing [her] relationship with them" (Lockward 2017, 430). Dance, codified movement to meaningful sound, interacts with the materiality of museumised space as embodiment of this struggle. "The silencing of Danish brutal and corrupt history is defiantly challenged by the ubiquitous and phantasmagorical appearance of the artist whose presence is alternatively erased and exaggerated" (Lockward 2019, 110). Dancing thus, the weight of the past is redistributed.

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Task by Quim Bigas

Find a spot
And check how your body is doing
Inhale... (do it)
Exhale... (let it all out)
Trace all the movements you have done today
Take your time

Wakened up, checked the phone, got up, walked,
made coffee, spread tahini on the bread, poured
coffee into the cup, drank, peeled an apple...

Wakened up
Opened my eyes
bent my knees
did some spirals on the bed
reached for something
caressed an object...

Checked the phone
Scrolled, clicked, typed
Scrolled, clicked, typed
Scrolled, clicked, typed
Scrolled, scrolled, scrolled
Blocked

Just be (physically or mentally) with all the
movements you have done today
Do you have a name for all the movements you
have done?

There was a movement before opening the eyes
There was a movement before bending the knees
There was a movement before spiralling on the bed

There was a movement before reaching...
There was a movement
How many movements are there in a movement?

Close your eyes (do it)
If you want
As many times as you want
Take time

Find a spot
How is the space that helps you to move?
How does the space in which you are allow you to
move?

Take a stand
Point
Speak
Attend

Go back
As many times as you want
Do it

Open your eyes
Sense the movement that is already happening

The lamp is flickering
The water is boiling
The plant is growing
The heart is beating

An electric spark
A draft
A fly
An -ing

The space between my vertebrae
My lower back
Stretching my neck
My hand on my diaphragm
Inhale

I am leaning back slowly
I feel heavy

Down, down, down, down
Attraction
Down
I close my eyes

Inhale
Exhale
Big yawn: the dance
5,6,7,8...
Breathing
Calmly

There is a movement
Trace the movements of your journey
Trace the movements of our journey
Find a spot

Some things might give a feeling of time
Time moves
5,6,7,8...
And listen

Is there any movement we haven't done
together?
Movement of a movement of a...
Exhale
Time

A letter of a 5
To the future 56.785.678
Go back
As many times as you want

Just think on what helps you to go back
Back back and behind

Documents, papers, oral transmission,
registers, lists, archives...
The trace of a disaster
The trace of a disappearance

Not because we don't know
It did not happen

It happens
Inhale
Time
Now

Down
down
Attracted
To the core of a movement

There is no beginning
Just extension
There was a movement before

Find a spot
Move with that
Whatever that is
Move with that

The space between your vertebrae
The lower back
Stretch your neck
Your hand on your diaphragm
Inhale

Lean back slowly
Feel the heaviness
Do it
Let it all out

Down, down, down, down
Attraction
Speak
Down
Close your eyes

Open your eyes
Close
Open
Find a spot

Scroll, click, type
Walk
Reach
Flicker
Trace the fly

Feel the gap
Between 5 and 6
Sense and time
Being and disappearance

You and we
Inhale and exhale
Core
Memories

Reach out
And let the spiral show the way

Look around
Move around
Listen to...
Stand with...

Sense the movement that is already happening
Wake up
If you want
As many times as you want

Caress the draft
And check how the draft is doing
Inhale
And move

***Dance Well* and *Diary of a Move*: From Artistic Projects to Social Processes**

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Abstract This chapter analyses two participatory projects conducted in the frame of the Creative Europe project *Dancing Museumus. Dance Well. Movement Research for Parkinson's* (2015) was hosted by the Civic Museum of Bassano del Grappa (Italy) and was aimed at people affected by Parkinson's disease and their families; *Diary of a Move* (2020), which was conceived by the Italian-Japanese choreographer Masako Matsushita during the first lockdown in Italy, was addressed to a large audience. Operating outside the contemporary art mainstream and in a rather provincial and conservative political and social context, these two artistic projects and the processes they initiate by actively involving their audiences, have produced real social change and have created a sense of community rather than merely producing a display or a staged version of it. Both projects also prove how museums as cultural institutions can be “democratising and inclusive spaces” and how they “work for diverse communities” to “enhance understandings of the world”, as the 2019 ICOM Standing Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials suggested.

Keywords Participatory Art. Dance in the museum. Community. Re-enactment. Archive.

Summary 1 Defining Museums. – 2 *Dance Well*: From Museum to Society.– 3 *Diary of a Move*: From Society to Museum.

1 Defining Museums

Over the last twenty years, we have witnessed a growing presence of dance performances, choreographic works, and the birth of several new formats such as choreographic installations and choreographic exhibitions in museums of different kinds (art, natural history, science). Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, this phenomenon has fuelled a lively debate and stimulated many questions such as what changes may come to dance and to museums from their interaction, and what so-

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cial and political issues are raised through it.¹ More specifically, scholars and curators have discussed whether museums give a real space to dancers and choreographers to explore new ways of relating to the public while recognizing their role in the history of art, or rather exploit them to increase and diversify visitors. It is undeniable that the presence of dance in museums contributes to communicating to a larger audience that dance and choreography are not only ways to structure movement in space and time, but also tools to gather people and make them interact with each other. To dance in museums is a form of participation and political intervention inasmuch as it activates a critical attitude in the visitors and encourages a sense of a local community. To dance in these spaces also means to transmit, share and preserve knowledge, memories and traditions, and to question our understanding of what heritage is and how we preserve it. Dancers and their choreographic approaches to exhibition spaces help in using these spaces to build a different sense of the past, contrasting linear and progressive narratives of rather traditional historiographical approaches, and safeguarding a wide range of memories for future generations.

In this chapter, I analyse two participatory projects, *Dance Well. Movement Research for Parkinson's*,² an ongoing project that began in 2015, and *Diary of a Move* (2020) that were both hosted by the Civic Museum of Basano del Grappa (Italy), as part of the activities conducted in the frame of the Creative Europe project *Dancing Museums*.³ These examples testify to how museums as cultural institutions can be “democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces” and work “in active partnership with and for diverse communities” as suggested in 2019 by a controversial definition of museum proposed by the Standing Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). Aiming to reflect on the complexity and challenges of the contemporary world, the new definition identifies museums’ principal mission in the establishment of a “critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures” (ICOM 2019). It does not deny the importance of museum’s ‘traditional’ functions (to acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit the tangible and intangible heritage), though the absence of the term ‘collection’ shifts the emphasis from the ownership of artistic work and cultural heritage to the process of recognizing the cultural practices and the immaterial forms of knowledge that generated them or are generated by them. From this perspective, museums continue to “hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society” but they also need to “safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people” (ICOM 2019). This sounds provoking in a museum system that is profoundly tied to the art market valorising artefacts and products over processes. ICOM’s provisional definition of the museum quickly became the subject of heated discussions because it produces a considerable change in direction. It has been accused of being far too ambitious and political if not ideological, in its aim to contribute to “human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing” and not only to “education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM 2019).

1 Franko, Lepecki 2014; Bénichou 2015; Chevalier et al. 2018; Franco 2020.

2 <https://www.operaestate.it/it/dance-well-2>.

3 *Dancing Museums* consisted of two parts: the first, “Old Masters, New Traces” (2015-17), and the second, “The Democracy of Beings” (2018-21). <https://www.dancingmuseums.com/>.

Critics of the new definition suggest that it should be sharper because museums cannot be everything; its supporters respond that to work with marginalised communities and minorities or decide not to do it are both political acts. The artist Tobias Rehberger recently suggested that it would be preferable to “stop thinking about what a museum should be” and rather think “about what museums are and what they could be” (cited in Bechtler, Imhof 2018, 192). This statement inevitably took on a different value during the pandemic that has overwhelmed museums, their programming and, for many, put into question the very possibility of their future existence. Today, it invites us to reflect also as ordinary citizens on the role of these valuable cultural institutions.

The ICOM Committee considers that museums should be “participatory and transparent” and should “collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world” (ICOM 2019). As a matter of fact, many dance artists invited to perform or create events inside museums have proposed performances and choreographed exhibitions that we can identify as forms of ‘participatory art’, a term that encompasses a great variety of genres such as interactive, relational, interventionist, cooperative, engaged, activist, dialogic, and community-based art. As suggested by Gabriella Giannachi, participation is not only a form of redistribution of power and a production mode of resources but also a form of consumption of value and is, therefore, part of the “experience economy” of our contemporary world (2021, 56), and of what Dorothea von Hantelmann defines as the “experiential turn” in contemporary art (2014). In our post-Fordist economy, the consumer is more and more a de-politicised ‘prosumer’ who actively participates in the production of what he or she consumes. Participatory art projects contribute to increase the number of visitors and diversify their type, but also to transform museum institutions into fully meaningful places for community members (Simon 2010). However, Clare Bishop advises that

participatory art is not a privileged political medium [...] but it is as uncertain and precarious as democracy itself; neither are legitimated in advance but need continually to be performed and tested in every specific context. (2012, 284)

Through this lens, I believe that participatory art in the museum can create a concrete dimension for political intervention by fostering initiatives that aim to sustain social minorities, the socially disadvantaged people and groups and the wellbeing of our social life. Participatory art can also build bridges, although fragile, between different communities and encourage political interest and engagement with today’s troubled world.

Historically, participation is about identity, empowerment and knowledge, and the notion of participation in art has been at the service of different political goals and can present a wide range of aesthetic outcomes. It implies forms of social and political mobilisation that would open alternative possibilities of living together and it contributes to inventing a new understanding of the public and the common through collaborative forms. According to Bishop, the relevant feature of participatory art is the need to “overturn the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist and the audience” (2012, 2). More precisely she affirms that the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as

a collaborator and producer of *situations*; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product, is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a coproducer or *participant* (Bishop 2012, 2). The idea of a coproduced situation is also embraced by Michael Kelly who points out that participatory art can produce an object or a performance but in other cases, the term "participatory" refers to the establishment of a set of relationships or the start of a process (2014).

The artistic projects I discuss here and the processes they initiate by actively involving their audiences may create a community rather than simply displaying or staging it. Operating outside contemporary art mainstream museums, but in a rather provincial and conservative political and social context, these projects have produced a real social change due to their strong and effective connection to other research projects and cultural activities involving the participation of local communities through the performing arts over a long period of time. The first project under the title *Dance Well* is an inclusive dance project for people affected by Parkinson's disease that has activated a social process that is still growing after almost a decade far beyond the physical boundaries of the museum. *Diary of a Move*, the second project in this discourse, is a dance project created during the first lockdown in Italy (April and May 2020), which proposed new forms of participation and coming together able to shape concrete examples of what a community can be. By presenting these two cases, I focus on how an artistic project based on inter-subjective exchanges and de-hierarchised creative processes can bring individual experiences, social situations, collective dynamics and needs before the visitor/spectator. I also show how an artistic project can be transformed into a social process lasting over a long period and involving different groups of participants and/or visitors/spectators. *Dance Well* was created for the museum and later moved towards society, while *Diary of a Move* was born in private homes and then arrived at the museum first as a performance and then as an exhibition.

These dance projects were carried out in Bassano del Grappa, which is located in North Eastern Italy near Vicenza. A beautiful and small medieval town with strong historical connections with both World Wars, Bassano del Grappa is part of the Veneto region which went from being a mainly agricultural economy plagued by poverty and migration to become one of the most affluent European regions, with a post-War economic expansion that also underwent profound social, political, and cultural changes. Known for its closely-knit rural communities mainly supporting conservative Catholic forces, Veneto became a bastion of the Lega Nord party, whose populist agenda has targeted Southern Italians and foreign migrants as different scapegoats over the years. Mostly concerned for the region's economic prosperity the disillusioned voters have contributed to making Veneto a region riddled with contradictions where racism coexists with socially integrated migrants and the very rich cultural and artistic heritage with an anti-intellectual stand. All these factors, alongside the decline of Catholicism, have put an enormous pressure on the traditional sense of identity and belonging, which makes it very interesting to notice how alternative forms of community have been experimented with in recent years through the performing arts. These changes have profoundly transformed Italian society in the transition from the second to the third millennium, providing the socio-

logical context where influential philosophical theorisations of the community have been offered by Italian thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben (1993), Roberto Esposito (2010), and Massimo Cacciari (2016).

Bassano is also the only city in Italy that directly manages a multidisciplinary festival and a Centre for Contemporary Scene (CSC), which is both part of the European Dance House Network, and a space for artists, producers and scholars to meet and creatively collaborate. More specifically, it sustains the programming of Operaestate Festival (founded in 1987), and most recently of BMotion, a festival within a festival, which has gained reputation as one of the most original and stimulating international hubs and showcases of choreographic research. In 2006, the CSC was established as a residency centre for dancers and choreographers, and as a platform where to present new works and to discuss the outcomes of these experiences with both experts in the field and the local community. The CSC (which is hosted in a former huge garage made available by the owner of the famous Grappa Nardini, one of the leading local industries) has also become part of the European Dancehouse Network, which includes some of the most active centres of contemporary dance in Europe, promotes and supports professional artists and their transnational mobility through numerous European grants. All together these activities have contributed to the growth of new generations of artists, both locally and internationally, and to the education of spectators through the audience development activities of many dance projects scheduled during the year in the local museum. The Civic Museum of Bassano del Grappa is one of the most ancient museums in this region, and is known for its paintings from the 13th to the 20th centuries (among others, the largest collection of works by Jacopo Bassano, sculptures by Antonio Canova, and paintings by Giambattista Tiepolo), its archaeological collection, and its Cloister with lapidary of stones, inscriptions, and other architectural fragments.

Over time, the 'Bassano system' has affected the mentality of local people and their perception of what contemporary dance could be by creating new occasions for them to attend performances and site-specific works in various public places as well as public events and meetings with Italian and foreign dance practitioners in residence. It has also had a great impact on the Italian artistic scene, where contemporary dance has little economic support and is followed by an audience largely made up of professionals. In Bassano on the contrary, contemporary dance is not only a familiar art form for many people, but is also interwoven with the local economy, thanks to the ancillary activities that the presence of so many artists and spectators produces. In this context, the role of the museum and the many inclusive and participatory art projects that hosted and supported have also changed it profoundly, rendering it for many citizens in a participatory place. In Bassano, practising and seeing dance in the museum is not perceived as an unusual activity, rather it is part of social life and constitutes a form of political engagement into the weaving of the social fabric.

2 Dance Well: From Museum to Society

Dance Well. Movement Research for Parkinson's is a form of contemporary dance training offered weekly and for free in the Civic Museum to people affected by Parkinson's disease and their families between the ages of forty and seventy, but also to dancers, choreographers, doctors, physiotherapists and researchers interested in various ways of exploring new forms of practising wellbeing.⁴ Since 2015 more than 13,000 participants have attended *Dance Well* classes, whose ensuring continuity despite the frequent cuts in health care support, served as a concrete response to the needs of people affected by Parkinson's and their families in addition to the cycles of the standard medical therapy. *Dance Well* originated as part of *Act Your Age* (2011-13),⁵ a research project supported by the Culture Program of the European Commission and based in Bassano that aimed to involve artists usually excluded from the stage because of their age and to encourage a dialogue with the multi-generational audience of Operaestate Festival.⁶ In the same period, the CSC began to collaborate with the Dutch headquarters of *Dance & Health with Parkinson* where ten Italian dancers followed the training and right after started the first series of free contemporary dance lessons at the Civic Museum. In 2015, this group initiated the first edition of *Dance Well* to investigate new approaches to Parkinson's focusing on the concept of health as a harmonious balance between all components of the individual.

Dance Well is less a method than a series of shared principles and objectives. During the classes, the teachers share their technique based on their personal experience with dance. The classes, therefore, do not constitute "a new form of dance therapy because their purpose is artistic, not therapeutic" (Houston 2019, 52). Parkinson's is a neurodegenerative condition that affects voluntary movement and balance. The complex symptomatology that accompanies the development of the disease is characterised by movement disorders (tremor, rigidity, akinesia), compromised static posture, altered dynamic balance, but also affective disorders and mood alterations, states of anxiety, depression, social withdrawal and fear. Pharmacological stimulation can also produce the exact opposite, namely euphoria, disinhibition and hyper-impulsivity. While in traditional physiotherapy priority is given to the recovery of certain aspects of body movement and posture, the practice of contemporary dance has offered to many patients a different way to improve motor performance but also increased psychic wellbeing. In particular, the use of choreography to structure movement sequences in time and space and to stimulate both the senses and the imagination contributes to developing a new awareness embodied through constant practice. Dance stimulates cognitive skills and proprioceptive abilities, which favour the acquisition and retention of new motor habits. Moreover, *Dance Well* helps to overcome the sense of isolation, whether self-imposed or involuntary, which is a common consequence of the disease, by encouraging social participation and transforming a group of dancers into a lively community.

⁴ See <https://www.danceforparkinsons.online/kinesiphilia/>.

⁵ See <https://www.operaestate.it/it/progetti-europei/57-centro-per-la-scena-contemporanea/progetti-europei/progetti-chiusi/2954-act-your-age>.

⁶ See https://www.nederlandsedansdagen.nl/en/publiek/ndd_projecten/act_your_age.

The artistic environment has also proven to amplify the impact of the practice of dance by offering a source of inspiration. More specifically, it suggests critically rethinking some of the fundamental values of our aesthetics such as harmony and grace. In dance, the concept of grace is tied to natural predisposition or a particular skill gained by the dancer through exercise and in a constant comparison to other bodies (when not in competition with them) to master a harmonious relationship between weight, flow and time. In a community context like a *Dance Well* class, grace needs to be reassessed because people move in diverse ways yet feel a sense of relationship and belonging. Here each person comes to terms with their condition and the transformation of their unique body, rather than the evaluation of their own achievements in comparison to the other members of the group. Sara Houston has pointed out that “dignity is a sign of the empathetic relationship that these people feel one to each other in a non-judgemental and non-stigmatizing atmosphere” (2019, 129). Moreover, she affirms that in a dance for Parkinson’s context, grace and dignity are both relational and community focused (Houston 2019). In these classes, *Dance Well*’s dancers – as they define themselves – feel again their bodies in motion as a source of pleasure and as a vehicle of beauty and grace, a sensation definitely amplified by being surrounded by paintings, sculptures and installations.

One of the strengths of the development of this project is a long-term process that goes beyond the material boundaries of the museum through its interaction with other research projects based in Bassano, which are supported by the European Community and have transformed the city into a hub for artistic and social research. Thus *Dance Well* has crossed paths with *Migrant Bodies Moving Borders* (2017-19)⁷ that focuses on identifying, developing and testing new and relevant actions for the inclusion of refugees and migrants within dance and movement-based initiatives. Migrants and refugees have been invited to participate in *Dance Well* classes, attend events and performances, experience being part of a collective, and live a shared experience with members of the local community. Their presence in the *Dance Well* classes has enriched the educational programme, insofar as each of them brings different traditions and choreographic knowledge, creating new possibilities of exchange with the *Dance Well* dancers, the choreographers in residence, and the local population. The *Dance Well* dancers were also able to meet the members of the Creative Europe funded project *Performing Gender* (2016-19) that aimed to help a new generation of European dance artists and professionals to develop a new form of narrative for the LGBTQ+ identities.⁸ *Dance Well* also intersected with *Empowering Dance*, a project supported by Erasmus+ that examined how contemporary dance (practised in collaboration with others and in which the creative body is central) can be an example of a practice that helps people of all ages to develop those ‘soft skills’ considered crucial in contemporary society and labour market.⁹ Moreover, *Dance Well Explore* is one of the side projects of *Dance Well* and consists in a dance practice open to visually impaired and blind people, while *Dance Well Crea* offers dance classes for oncological patients in collaboration with a local association of medical assis-

⁷ See <http://www.migrantbodies.eu/>.

⁸ See <http://www.performinggender.eu/about/>.

⁹ See <http://dansateliers.nl/en/project/empowering-dance-developing-soft-skills/>.



Figure 1 Dance Well class at the Civic Museum of Bassano del Grappa (Italy). © Roberto Cinconze

tance.¹⁰ All together these networks have proved to be a fundamental factor in developing the project and turning it into a social process. Last but not least, the collaboration with local secondary schools and the involvement of younger members of the local community has offered an opportunity for different generations to enter into dialogue and support each other. It gave the chance to young people to experience at first hand a way of building relationships with the older generation marked by illness by practising dance and actively contributing to an artistic and inclusive activity that should become a reference point for future projects [fig. 1].

Dance Well was also one of the activities included in the first part of the project *Dancing Museums* that brought together five European dance organisations and eight museums¹¹ to explore new ways of engaging audiences. This occasion was fundamental to coordinate the activities of the museum, the festival and the CSC so that at each edition the *Dance Well* dancers could study with the affiliated professional choreographers who were invited to the residency programme of Bassano every year. The festival has also started to commission site-specific dance pieces for them, which are presented as part of the official programmes of Operaestate and BMotion festivals. This synergy has led to the paradoxical situation that, in a country where there is no national training centre for contemporary dance (only a national academy mainly oriented towards classical dance), the *Dance Well* dancers are one of the groups that has studied and worked with many internationally known choreographers, from Yasmeen Godder to Daniele Ninarello, and from Pablo Leyton to Francesca Foscari among others, and is now starting to be programmed at festivals and events outside Bassano.

¹⁰ See <https://www.operaestate.it/it/dance-well-2>.

¹¹ See <http://www.dancingmuseums.com/>.

These encounters offer the people with Parkinson's an opportunity to participate in an artistic project and to meet with local and international audiences, presenting themselves as dancers and not as patients affected by a disease. In this sense, *Dance Well* has become a microcosm in which different generations interact to claim a political solution for inclusiveness. Power relations are maintained (if not created), building an alternative space where to dance means also to live and share a social dimension.

This project started a process that is still ongoing and involves an increasing number of people from different generations and social groups, outlining the contours of a model of socialisation in which certain aspects highlighted by sociological and philosophical theories on community resonate. In particular, Roberto Esposito has introduced the concepts of "communitas" and "immunitas" to contrast the idea of community as the negation of the individual (2010). Starting from the Latin noun of *munus* (gift/duty) that denotes exchange (by accepting a *munus*, we are in obligation to perform a good or service), he proposed a notion of *communitas* understood not as belonging but rather as a process resulting in a mutual relationship based on giving and taking. This shared commitment is opposed to the concept of *immunitas* (immunisation), which consists in prioritising the individual relief from taking charge of the common good and therefore defending oneself against full absorption in the *communitas*. In our post-Fordist and neo-liberal globalised societies, art (and dance) seems to have assumed new responsibilities, and artistic projects are asked to compensate the dismantling of the welfare state. Social integration and participation are the main functions that art is more and more required to take on to be relevant for our societies, while we need to be conscious that this is possible only "at the price of dissolution of the boundaries of art itself" (Klein 2013, 206). If we agree that aesthetics is inscribed in political practices, which in turn delineate both the political space and our own perception of the social dimension, we can also affirm that dance practices (whether as a shared activity or in the form of a choreographic work) are political actions. In this sense, they represent configurations of the concept of community that society cannot ignore. As a dance practice and as a series of performances, *Dance Well* has become a social process happening into the museum but spreading its effects far beyond its walls and (re)presenting an innovative model of artistic and political inclusion for the local community.

3 Diary of a Move: From Society to Museum

Diary of a Move, conceived by the Italian-Japanese choreographer Masako Matsushita, is a creative, multidisciplinary, and participatory artistic project promoted by the CSC at Bassano del Grappa between March and April 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown.¹² Matsushita describes herself as a "mover" or a "movement artist" rather than a dancer and choreographer acknowledging her political responsibilities and taking a stand in contemporary debates. As for *Dance Well*, the creative process of *Diary of a Move* started long before, to be precise in 2012 in London, where Matsushita be-

¹² See the short documentary *Diary of a Move*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_NFW9j0pr0.

gan to investigate the subject of movement archiving and the role of the body in long-term memory creation through her piece *UK30*. The project was further developed in 2016 in Norway and Japan with *NOR14 | JP15*. After a short residency at the CSC in early 2020 and the outbreak of the pandemic a few weeks later, Matsushita decided to react to the unexpected interruption of her work by launching a public call for participants willing to record one movement a day for at minimum 14 and maximum 30 days in an analogue or digital diary. Among the many people of different ages and social backgrounds who responded, sixty-two decided to share their diaries with the choreographer. Participants subsequently stated that they had decided to apply to fill their days and to give meaning to the timelessness in which they were suddenly immersed and felt deprived, but also to get to know contemporary dance as an essentially relational art form, to follow a creative process from within, and make their own vocabulary. For many, it was a way of living fully in the present at a time of psychological and existential uncertainty, as well as of restricted mobility.

Standing, sitting, walking and running but also perceiving our weight, balance, and orientation in space and time tells us about the many ways we experience our condition of being in the world. The body is shaped by use and therefore is a repository of forms of usage that Marcel Mauss has defined as “body techniques” ([1936] 1973). In our everyday life we also kinesthetically perceive our ordinary movements and gestures and empathise with other people’s ways of moving, building a complex network of inter-subjective and inter-corporeal relationships. Some dance and performance scholars have recently revived the concept of the body as an archive of sensorial knowledge that preserves and at the same time processes our individual and collective memory (Baxmann 2007; Lepecki 2010; Bissell, Caruso Haviland 2018). They have also recognised how precious is the body when we aim to activate narratives of a past event (Buckland 2001) and how (dance) performances are conceivable as forms of archiving processes (Taylor 2003). In order to use our body, we always need a form of archive, whether it is based on muscle, visual and verbal memory. Everyday movements, more than dance movements, stimulate the sensorimotor system of a person watching it according to a shared body technique and a shared memory. Dance, as a practice of radical embodiment, as a social practice, and as a performing art, mobilises kinesthetic empathy, activates sensorial memories, stimulates consciousness, involves embodied cognition, and, last but not least, produces a sense of community (Foster 2011). By dancing, we acquire knowledge, we remember, express our emotions and transmit our stories. Dance activates and mediates personal and cultural memories producing long-lasting effects on the audience who ‘internally simulate’ the movements and gestures as they were enacting them while observing them. The audience also processes and transforms this experience into their incorporated memories (Hagendoorn 2004). Finally, if dance is a metaphorical space in which to reflect on bodies and their mobility, and the culture of knowledge (Brandstetter 2007), dancing must be considered as an embodied cultural and historical phenomenon to inquire, if we want to expand our understanding of the past (Nordera forthcoming; Franco, Nordera 2010).

Participants in the *Diary of a Move* were asked to indicate the date, place and source of the movement and to note a ‘pause’ if there were no movements to enter during the set time frame. People notated graphically as well as verbally and recorded on video simple actions such as kneading bread, locking

and unlocking the house or cutting a flower. Other movements, such as the act of opening arms to the sky imitating the flight of a bird, rhythmically dipping a tea bag up and down in the cup, but also steps and gestures passively incorporated thanks to recurring (if not tormenting) commercials or video clips that went viral on social media, all speak about excitement, desires, boredom, and loneliness. After 14 to 30 days, Matsushita with the help of two dancers and assistants, Vittoria Caneva and Ilaria Marcolin, contacted the participants again and through individual meetings began to compare the many movements noted and verify differences and similarities. The final analysis revealed, for example, how the pauses in the archiving process were linked to moments in the day when various forms of psychophysical discomfort were most evident due to stress or online work. During the notation process, the participants could share their experiences via Zoom and discuss with Matsushita the sense of their moving and how they felt. The exercise of listening to a movement consultant was experienced by many as a concrete help in overcoming these difficulties with such beneficial effects that more than half of the participants decided to continue the filing process for another two weeks. By writing down their movements in their personal diary (and describing them in a technical or narrative way or emphasising their psychological aspects) they became more aware of the way they use their bodies, express themselves and draw on personal memories also by evoking gestures, postures and motor sequences. They also learnt to exercise a form of control over their built-in habits and postures and developed a greater awareness of how even bodily movements that are functional for performing everyday actions carry deeper meanings. Movement research became a way of creating relational dynamics in a micro-community of interconnected citizens thanks to a daily practice of listening, observing and archiving. In addition, the process of sharing traces and memories brought out in the participants the empathic ability to rediscover themselves in the experience of the body of the other, restoring the emotional ties threatened by loneliness and the digital dimension. In a subsequent interview, Matsushita remembers the psychological burden of listening to these voices and looking at these bodies expressing moments of joy, discomfort and grief as when some of them lost their parents in these very weeks.¹³

At the end of this archival phase, participants were invited to choose one of the movements from their diary that they considered most representative of this time and experience, and show it via Zoom to the group. Matsushita, who performed her own movement, was thus able to watch the participants and incorporate their movements together with the personal stories they were tied to. Having both in mind and in her own body the drawings and descriptions of the diaries, the real movements and the voices of each participant, she created a choreography from each individual contribution making reference to a set of compositional rules and dramaturgical strategies. She then shaped a spatial and temporal order that could express the sensation of extreme compression and dilation experienced during the lockdown. The final work, a solo performed by Matsushita also named *Diary of a Move*, was presented in August 2020 in the museum cloister as part of the

¹³ *Diary of a Move* is a film directed by Matteo Maffesanti and Beatrice Bresolin. It is produced by the Operaestate Festival and supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Cooperation (Italy), 2020.



Figure 2 Masako Matsushita in *Diary of a Move* (2020). Civic Museum of Bassano del Grappa (Italy). © Elena Bovo

Operaestate Festival program in front of the project's participants who for the first time met physically, and then to a larger audience. This solo is an archive made alive and a performance displaying its function as both an archive and archiving process.

Diary of a Move is a dance solo based on the re-enactment of a series of movements and gestures selected, re-elaborated and performed by an artist who interacts with this material adding her own emotional experience, memories, body technique and movement quality. As it is for a dance piece (or a performance), which, every time it takes place and is re-enacted in a public context, it will be transformed and placed in a web of individual, collective and historical temporalities (Franko 2018, 4) that contribute to keeping it alive and meaningful for other audiences. When performed (or reenacted) in a museum, it also contributes to re-evaluating dance as a living experience rather than as a stable artistic product to be preserved and passed on [fig. 2].

The last phase of the process activated by *Diary of a Move* was its transformation into an exhibition called *Terzo Paesaggio. Inchiostro degli occhi e diari in movimento* (Third Landscape. Eye Ink and Diaries in Motion) that was inaugurated in September 2020 at the Civic Museum to present the project to a larger audience, including visitors not familiar with contemporary dance. A selection of the participants' diaries, drawings and videos was displayed in dialogue with the pictures taken by the Gruppo di Sostegno per Fotografi Pigri (Support Group for Lazy Photographers) that was coordinated by the visual artist Sara Lando to chronicle people's experience of the lockdown. A special space, named 'phone call corner', was dedicated to real-time interactions with some of the authors of the diaries. The visitors could contact them to discuss their experience and this improvised interaction was an act of interrogating the traditional museums' protocols and viewing conventions that helped to experience immediacy and proximity.

Diary of a Move echoes a long tradition in the 20th and 21st centuries of artworks by artists using archival methodologies for exhibiting personal or autobiographical histories (Giannachi 2016). Recent curatorial projects that use digital tools to record, document and preserve individual memories of ordinary people reflect a similar tendency that is directed towards building a collective past.¹⁴ Altogether the solo, the exhibition and the catalogue that reproduces the diaries offer an example of how performance and documentation are “mutually constitutive” (Westerman cited in Westerman, Giannachi 2018, 11) but also how archiving, exhibiting and performing can be mutually generative (Borggreen, Gade 2013, 16). Finally, they contribute to discuss what dance and dancing mean for us today and how we can preserve dance pieces, traditions, and repertoires by making them present.

When bodies move and dance, both for artistic purposes and in everyday life, they convey an ideology. In other words, through dancing a social order is installed directly at the level of the body because dance is a generative force capable of establishing new embodied social and political procedures and *habitus* (Hewitt 2005). As pointed out by Bojana Kunst

the attentiveness to the forces of mobilization that sets bodies in motion could disclose a great deal about the political dimension of society and the time in which we live. (2015, 90)

In this sense, dance and choreographic practices need to be understood as a laboratory of possible ways of moving and acting in which the spatial and temporal arrangements of bodies can influence social behaviours, and offer “another understanding of the public and the common” (90). The two projects analysed here are being developing precisely along this direction and so far they seem to have started complex social processes through which to mobilise museum spaces and enrich their institutional and political mission and role.

Politics becomes a discipline and a participatory practice that is entirely aesthetic because it is capable of changing the way we see, feel and perceive. Following Jacques Rancière’s concept of “distribution of the sensible” (2004) politics and aesthetics hold the possibility to make the previously unseen ‘seen’. Referring to these kinds of political (and artistic) engagement that would guarantee the active participation in the “distribution of the sensible” with the verb “to initiate” rather than “to participate” is a valuable critique suggested by André Lepecki (2013). The very act “of initiating a movement”, both in its physical and political meaning, can actualise something “unthinkable beyond authoritative authors, leaders, artists, and disengaged (yet perceptually free!) spectators or aesthetes” (Lepecki 2013, 37-8). By hosting dance and dancing people, museums ‘initiated’ a movement that is of great help in exploring new possibilities that make them “democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces”... and hopefully also moving spaces.

¹⁴ See, for instance, the project *Citizen Heritage*, <http://www.citizenheritage.com/the-project/>.

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Task by Monica Gillette

This introduction is an invitation to become aware of the thinking and processing in your body, to pay attention to your felt experience. I encourage you to shift into listening to your body as you read.

I

Let's start with your breath. As it flows in and out, notice what might give it more ease. More space. How can your breath guide you to notice what your body wants to tell you?

Perhaps you need to change your position, find a new way to place yourself.

Take the time to feel your breath throughout your body. Its expansion and spread.

Now I would like to guide you to a specific sensation you may be able to feel in your body.

A sensation that alerts you. A sensation that tells you when something is not right.

Where do you feel the alarm bells, the quake, the buzzing in your body when you feel something unjust?

Is it in your chest? Your belly? Does your heartbeat go faster? Do your cheeks burn?

When you feel that body radar, that internal signal telling you something is not right, what do you do?

Do you try to ignore it? Push it aside to "other-people's-problems"?

Or do you try to stay with it? Use it?

Go there. Go there now. That place in your body that alerts you.

Could some vitality come from the discomfort?

Listen to its vibration. Sense it.

Does it tremble? Quake? Buzz?

Can you tune into its frequency and allow it to grow, gradually spreading it throughout your body?

Can it bring you into movement?

Can you increase its physicality and imprint it in the space around you?

Can you take it up a notch? Can you rock the boat?

In what world would you feel free to let this vibration exist in its fullness?

For the quake beneath your skin to be your new compass? To guide you to next.

II

What do you do with the alertness now? Can this new body compass reach beyond you?

Can it vibrate outwards in the form of little antennae?

Reaching, extending and curving into new formations.

Hypersensitive antennae that intuitively find their counterparts – the other squashed antennae, whose internal dances are being newly seen.

Where are your antennae now? Who are they embracing?

At what frequency are they vibrating, pulsing, breathing now?

Can their sensitive tips inscribe new stories?

To whom are your antennae guiding you to?

Can they weave a new web?

A new web, a new community of listeners, pulsing on the in-between, the nonverbal.

This new web vibrates and contorts, flutters and reconfigures.

A collection of frequencies pulsing out its own radio signal. A program of emotions telling of secret celebrations and unspoken values.

They know how to self-regulate, adapting to a cry across the way or to a belly laugh that couldn't be contained, amplified purely on its own joyous vibration.

Can you hear it? With the hair of your skin?

Like little highways running through your body and beyond. Nourished by the collective pulse, fed with ingredients of instincts.

Instincts that know how to slow down when the rhythm gets off and how to recalibrate and tune to the breath of the person in need.

“Animated Words, Will Accompany My Gestures”

Seismographic Choreographies of Difficult Heritage in Museums

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Abstract This chapter offers an ethnographic analysis of two choreographic projects – *The Sismograph* (2019) by Pélagie Gbaguidi, which addressed the Venetian Museo del Manicomio. La follia reclusa in the context of the Ultrasanità symposium in Venice and the planned contribution of Dorothée Munyaneza on the Marseille ethnographic collections in the framework of a symposium during Manifesta 13 (2021). Both choreographies are analysed as performances that sense and mediate traumatic pasts, object agency, and the continuation of modern legacies in museums. The objective of this contribution is to open a discussion on the possibilities of choreographies and dance not as illustrative practices, but as mediating, embodied, translated investigations of active matter, difficult heritage, and the traumatic pasts inscribed in museological narratives, objects, and spaces.

Keywords Difficult heritage. Choreography. Museum. Colonial legacies. Venice. Marseille.

Summary 1 San Servolo, Museo del Manicomio, 2019. – 2 Mediating Objects, Theatrical Museums. – 3 The Ethnographic Collections in the Former Almshouse, Vieille Charité, Marseille. – 4 Learning from Seismographic Choreographies.

1 San Servolo, Museo del Manicomio, 2019

My contribution in this special day of collective awakening will be to make visible as a sismogram the non-visible areas of pain traces, to communicate them to you on a visible support #writing# morse# so that together we can connect to our own sensitive areas.

(Pélagie Gbaguidi)

I found myself, together with twenty or so artists, psychiatrists, and neuroscientists, on the Venetian island of San Servolo, a short boat ride from the famous canals of the city of Venice. This was during the opening days of the 2019 Venice Biennale for Contemporary Art. The island of San Servolo is a loaded space, walled, reformed, odd;



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a former psychiatric clinic and mental asylum in and yet outside of the city of Venice that instituted the “profound relation [...] between madness and confinement” (Foucault 2009, 217), creating the ‘abominable’, the ‘abnormal’, and neutralising the generative potential of mental diversity. This is a place that was designed for the unwanted, the sick, the mentally troubled, the homeless, those who had been marginalised and constructed as other. The island of San Servolo is the former site of a Benedictines’ convent, and in 1725 it became a psychiatric hospital for Venetian nobles. In 1797, Napoleon’s government decreed that those considered mentally troubled were to be interned at San Servolo, a procedure followed by both the Austrian and Savoy reigns. In 1978 the Basaglia law, or Law 180 as it was known, was passed, which saw a shift of mental care into the community with the aim to deinstitutionalise psychiatric practice.

Consequently, the hospital on San Servolo was abandoned, and patients moved to other institutions, such as the Palazzo Boldù. While the island has in recent years become the site of the Venice International University, a satellite of Ca’ Foscari University of Venice and the Venice Academy of Fine Arts, and home to the Venetian Metropolitan Services, the memories of the old mental hospital and its patients are conserved with many objects within the wings of the Museo del Manicomio di San Servolo - La follia reclusa, the asylum museum that opened in 2006. What is more, the seat of the foundation and the archives of Franco and Franca Basaglia are also housed on the same site, the legacies of which are not without contestation in Italy.¹

Museums such as the Museo del Manicomio present an awkward history, a “difficult heritage”, in Sharon Macdonald’s terms (2009), for they not only preserve a problematic past but also ask the visitors to position themselves in relation to them. Basaglia’s reforms were pervasive and affected generations of families and professionals across Italy, making its concrete archiving and musealisation on San Servolo a focal point of an immense legal, ethical, and political seismic shift (De Cunto 2014). The museum and its collection are a matter of concern and a prism that emanates a controversial historical shift, which can be less easily reconciled with an affirmative view on the present, as many parts of the nearby Venetian islands and their internationally celebrated museums and exhibition spaces may suggest. The proximity on the island of the asylum museum, and the altogether antipodal position embodied in the Basaglia Foundation become concrete and controversial locations from which to reflect on questions of justice, violence, and social reform.

The symposium that brought us together on the island was organised by the Berlin-based arts space SAVVY Contemporary as part of their longer-term project *Ultrasanity*, which addressed healing possibilities afforded by anti-psychiatric forms of care (Ndikung, Agudio, Krugman 2021).² In one

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1 Museo del Manicomio. La follia reclusa (<https://museomanicomio.serviziometropolitani.ve.it/ilmuseo/>). The museum catalogue provides a comprehensive history, documents, and evidence of the site’s transition (Accordi 2007).

2 The event was a collaboration between SAVVY Contemporary and the Association of Neuroaesthetics (AoN) Berlin, curated by Elena Agudio. It formed part of a larger-term research and exhibition project in multiple chapters in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Morocco, Italy, and Germany by the arts space SAVVY Contemporary. See <https://savvy-contemporary.com/en/projects/2019/ultrasanity/>.



Figure 1 Installation of *Systomograph*, 2019. Colour Charcoal on paper. *Ultrasanity* exhibition at SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin. Courtesy of the artist. © SAVVY Contemporary

of the wood-and-glass pavilions purposely built to expand the island’s activities, listeners had gathered for a series of talks and performances. In the early afternoon, we listened to Jazwant Guzder, psychiatrist and head of child psychiatry at the Jewish General Hospital (McGill University, Canada), who explored the relationship between drawing and therapy. Guzder, a close friend and colleague of the late Fred W. Hickling, Jamaican pioneer of community-engaged mental therapy, was one among several speakers to draw on the legacy of Basaglia and the field of deinstitutionalised psychiatry that so clearly marked the site of the event.

Guzder formed part of the circle of chairs. While she was talking, next to her, almost like any other audience member, the Dakar-born Belgian-based performer Pélagie Gbaguidi began what she describes as “seismographic choreographies”. Sensing, feeling, giving gestures to words, she followed the talk and its narratives of trauma, healing, and drawing. Initially, her body rested calmly on a chair, her hands moving a thread, holding it in the air. Accompanying Guzder’s talk like a gestural commentary, Gbaguidi then moved to take a set of felt pens and charcoal sticks to start drawing on A4 paper sheets, which she subsequently ripped out of the book and let glide onto the floor. After the talk, the floor was covered in red, black, and white drawings. She writes herself of the drawing that it invites to “probe the vibrations”, providing participants with exemplary tools – “writings, cut-outs (of shapes from the museum’s objects)” – which would be used throughout the day to create “an improvised mapping of our collective excavation” [fig. 1].³

³ <https://www.pelagiegbaguidi.com/publications/symposium-ultrasanity-58th-bien-nale-di-venezia-10/>.

Gbaguidi describes herself as a “contemporary Griot”. In doing so, she takes reference from the West African tradition of (traditionally) a man who, in her words, questions the individual as he or she moves through life by absorbing the words of the ancients and modelling them like a ball of fat that he places in the stomach of each passer-by with the ingredients of the day.⁴ Gbaguidi understands her work as “an anthology of signs and traces on trauma”, which she enacts through the mediating role of the Griot.

The second part of her performance, which she called *The Sismograph*,⁵ slowly led the symposium participants out of the dedicated seminar space into the open space of the island, walking towards the garden. Standing around a tree, she sought to conjure up the voices of the ghosts of former residents of the islands, but also the more-than-human spirits. She then ‘followed the voices’ and in doing so accompanied the spirits and also the participants, across the islands – passing by the local chapel, and other landmarks of the islands (doors, thresholds, gates), into the permanent exhibition of San Servolo’s Museo del Manicomio, to find out “why these spirits are still screaming so loudly”.⁶ In this commissioned choreography, Gbaguidi walked through the corridors and rooms of the museum, guiding participants in the symposium, in order to effect a “collective awakening” as she puts it. Her body, in her understanding, mediated “the non-visible areas of pain” in order to “trace, to communicate them”.⁷ Evidently, the museum showcased visible areas of pain and trauma, such as nineteenth-century instruments of painful treatment and inhumane incarceration, including chains, handcuffs, and straight jackets, but also tools used “to cure mental illnesses” (Accordi 2007), such as electroshock machines. Gbaguidi’s choreographed movements appeared calm and composed, but as she walked through the museum corridors, her body, when coming across disturbing objects, occasionally erupted and reacted, like a seismograph that responds to a trigger, “moved by energy”,⁸ as she puts it. Her movements were described as ‘fluid’ by one of the participants. In her understanding, the corporeal response attuned not just with the affective energy of the instruments and objects, but also the ancestral and afterlife presences of those that had been incarcerated on the island. For Gbaguidi, her choreography translates and mediates important areas to render them visible through her body. She affirms: “[t]o link and unlink, like animated words, will accompany my gestures, my thoughts to create spaces of co-existence”.⁹

In the following sections, I will contextualise and analyse this understanding of the body of the female performer as a translating medium engaged in seismographic investigations of difficult heritage.

4 For an expanded self-description of the artist, see: <https://www.pelagiegbaguidi.com/about-us/>.

5 <https://www.pelagiegbaguidi.com/artists/the-sismograph/>.

6 Personal comment by the artist during the symposium.

7 <https://www.pelagiegbaguidi.com/publications/symposium-ultrasanity-58th-bienale-di-venezia-10/>.

8 Cf. fn. above.

9 Cf. fn. above.

2 Mediating Objects, Theatrical Museums

The relationship between different types of performance (theatre, dance, choreography) and exhibition spaces (museums, galleries) is marked more by porosity than distinction. In *Art Beyond Itself* (2014), Nestor Garcia Canclini analyses the history of modern and contemporary art as one that reveals the essentially modern character of institutional critique, arguing that any form of transgression of modern institutional spaces undergirds the institution and its modern character. Whilst the white cube and modern art museum can thus be seen as achievements of artistic autonomy – a marked feature of modern art –, the reaction *against* their institutional confines does not constitute a breaking with that legacy. In fact, Claire Bishop’s *Artificial Hells* (2012) and earlier writings on relational art (Bishop 2004) in which she criticises the pseudo-utopian ambitions of Nicolas Bourriaud’s curated and thus-coined relational aesthetics (1998), underscore this argument. The didactic, and often undemocratic involvement of participatory performances in museum spaces, does not reveal a utopian horizon, as suggested by Bourriaud, but recreates spectator-performer boundaries that often inhibit the open-ended nature of such “exhibition experiments” (Basu, Macdonald 2007). In that sense, museums are themselves “theatrical” in their set-sidedness of experience (Davis, Postlewait 2003). They comprise performative scenographies, with their captions, paths, and narratives, which more often than not purport participation and interaction whilst rigidly guiding interpretation and experience (Lidchi 1997; Tinius 2015). Furthermore, we know what great labour museums invest in the artifice of standstill and conservation, thus working against the idea of immobility and passive materiality (Rubio 2020). Quite on the other side, bodily habitus and techniques form archives and repertoires of national (Mauss 1973) and cultural memory (Taylor 2003). The shift of curatorial practice, since the 1990s, to understand exhibition-making in the expanded curatorial field as the literal “staging-ground of the development of an idea” (Rogoff 2013, 45; Tinius, Macdonald 2020) pushes us to understand the limited prism of Western institutional and disciplinary compartmentalisation of performance and museums. This brief summary serves as a background to my discussion on the role of choreographies in engaging with museums and exhibition spaces. I furthermore take a cue from two sets of discussions on materiality and museums to address the potential of seismographic choreographies for our understanding of critical heritage and exhibition-making.

First, I consider materiality and objecthood as agentic, mediating, and pulsing. This draws on Science and Technology Studies, in particular the elaboration of Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), which has allowed an understanding of mediation, translation, and implication of objects, affects, and human beings. It seeks to overcome an asymmetry in the empirical study of technologies, science, and the natural world. Instead of proposing an intersubjective analysis of human interaction, such as Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), it seeks to resituate social scientific writing by proposing an understanding of agents, or actors and networks as a sequence of associations. This is based on a redefinition of a range of terms, such as ‘the social’, ‘an account’, and ‘interaction’, aiming to enable a more complex, more localised, less imposed analysis of science, knowledge, and the world.

Actors, or agents, are defined in ANT, not in terms of agency, but as *mediators* for associations, as objects among other objects (Latour 2005, 128).

In *On recalling ANT* (1999, 18), Latour, therefore, describes the new position of the actor as 'interobjectivity'. It is in this sense that one can consider a biology textbook, for example, an actor because "of the new active role given to the gene" (Latour 2005, 10) in constituting knowledge, discussion etc. Or, in the context of this chapter, a caption underneath a museum object, as an actor in mediating colonial and postcolonial reckoning with violence. Rather than defining actors as having a particular quality, like being human, having agency etc, Latour posits that an actor is only an actor if it makes a difference, if it creates an association (130). In other words, ANT considers actors as networks of mediators, as precarious "network effects" (136). Networks are the traces between these mediations, which are made visible by them, for which one can account. Interestingly, the account a scientist writes, one that traces the moves of actors, who mediate between further actors, is yet another such network. A network is both what is being described, and, in doing so, what describes another network.

This understanding of agency in networks is relevant for understanding the more-than-affective performativity of museum collections. Not only the charged objects behind the vitrine windows act upon visitors, but the vitrines themselves mediate knowledge (or bias) about the use and abuse of objects. Likewise, museum corridors, books, posters – the entire three-dimensionality of an exhibition – act upon each other, creating not-always-evident spheres of association for 'seismographic choreographies' that trace them.

The second body of literature on which I draw takes such a complex understanding of agents, mediations, and networks into the realm of difficult heritage and awkward politics. For, we may ask, who has the power to cut or create such networks and associations, besides curators? As Strathern puts it in her critique of ANT, the claim that the very "power of such analytical networks is also their problem" (2005, 484), namely that they do not have a limit except where they are forcibly cut or extended. Interpretation is one such cutting of a network of associations, as well as interior design, visitor flows, accompanying literature that are also all acts of cutting networks of possible associations. Thus, the associations of actors and networks within museums (captions, artefacts, vitrines, texts, architecture etc.) are not neutral and flat, but activated, placed, used, and arranged by curators and designers as well as users alike. They are, in other words, curated in manifold ways, and it is the force and effect of insensitive curatorial arrangements that are at stake in the seismographic choreography of Gbaguidi.

What Latour did for materiality has been a long-standing interest in the curatorial engagement with the agency of art. Alfred Gell posited that we should consider traps closer in their relationship to artworks, because they *implicate* – or hook (Felski 2020) – a subject. As Gell writes

this trap is a model as well as an implement. In fact, all implements are models, because they have to be adapted to their user's characteristics, and so bear their imprint. (1996, 26)

While Gell's theory of agency sought to understand the "implication" of spectators (1998), he remained in a particular kind of relational mode bound up in visibility and materiality (Le peuple qui manque in Von Oswald, Tinius 2020). The seismographic performances of Gbaguidi and Dorothée Munyanza go beyond visibility to reflect on affect, history, and emotional trauma.

The question that arises is: what happens if the relationality is not just between any particular abstract artwork and a disinterested viewer anymore? If, as Macdonald writes, we conceive of a relation between a "difficult heritage", that is, a heritage "recognised as meaningful in the present, but that [is] also contested and awkward for public reconciliation" (Macdonald 2009, 1) and "communities of implication" (Lehrer 2020, 289). As Michael Rothberg (2019) and Erica Lehrer have argued, we ought to understand those affected by the display of difficult heritage as potentially anonymous but related and implicated in communities or subjects. In such a way, as I have analysed in the context of colonial-era artefacts exhibited in an archival space in Germany (Tinius 2018), the mediation and the network created between a spectator and an object depends starkly on between whom and how this encounter takes place. The way we are 'hooked' or attached to artworks, objects, or artefacts, is, in other words, a consequence of the person's particular identity and positionality, but also of how such a relation is curated. The questions 'who sees what?' and 'which trigger warnings are attached to racist descriptions?' are, after all, part of the three-dimensional narrative of a museum exhibition.

Curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, whose own practice engages in forms of curatorial expansion from object-centred work to a consideration of fields, networks, and forms of implication, has put forward a series of essays that complicate this relationship (2021). He asks: what happens if we consider the body of the visitor of a museum as a multiple, dividual, assemblage of experiences, sedimented, and scarred? What if, in other words, we consider museums' visitors as corporeal museums? In an unpublished conversation I conducted with Ndikung and Chris Dercon (9 July 2018), Ndikung elaborated on this understanding by saying that "first and foremost, the self is the museum, the body is the museum - that being which carries and disseminates knowledge". For that reason, he continues,

whenever I get into the museum, the museum is a museum and can only be a museum in relation to what I bring with me: it is always in relation, in movement, in negotiation. (Personal comment by the artist during the symposium)

Then, considering that difficult heritage and awkward objects are relational problems, meaning, they activate different responses depending on who and how one encounters them, every visitor to a museum space is to some degree a seismographic mediator of experiences. It is noteworthy, however, that analyses of the Western history of the spectator in a museum (Sansi 2014; Kemp 2015) - even the attempt of a participatory reversal, as discussed by Bishop - have overstated the agency of the spectator in distancing, detaching, or relating, at the expense of the mediating function of inscribed traumatic histories.

Writing of ethnographic collections, Ndikung argues that

many Western museums and institutions wrongly and forcefully harbouring many so-called 'objects' from the non-West do not understand, or have not fully recognised, that most of the so-called 'objects' have never been and will never be objects. (2019)

This position reveals not merely a misunderstanding of the traditions of their making, he writes, but a process tied up with the imperial modern "de-

humanization and objectification of humans from the non-West” (Ndikung 2019). Drawing a parallel line between the way that objects have been detained as artefacts and humans as slaves, he suggests that

understanding these so-called objects as subjects necessitates a radical shift from Western understandings of subjecthood, personhood, and community. (Ndikung 2019)

This shift towards understanding the subjectivity of objects, for him, implies three aspects in particular: first, a reckoning with the ancestral logic of objects – “not representations of ancestors [...] rather [...] as incarnations, embodiments or personifications of our ancestors” (Ndikung 2019). Second, an understanding that some of what is commonly understood as an object possesses subjectivity as ritual entities, and, as such,

contain the possibility for healing, mediating between (wo)men and gods, and conscious of the dynamics of communities as they protect individuals in society. (Ndikung 2019)

Third, he argues that we need to take into account the drastically different understandings of art when considering objecthood and subjecthood. In reference to Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), he points out that many art objects are not made to validate themselves as autonomous objects of art, but to validate humans, thus not separated or independent of those to whom they refer. Ndikung’s elaboration of the radical and complex shifts necessary to reckon with the subjectivity of objects in collections implicates not just the viewer and the object, but also the role of the curator as caretaker of these relations (Ndikung 2021).

This section presented a series of possible pathways to understanding museums as theatrical, choreographed spaces, and to reconsidering curating objects as a form of mediation that considers the subjectivity of matter. It serves as an introduction to my second case study and another practice of seismographic choreography, namely Dorothee Munyaneza’s planned address of the ethnographic collections of the MAAOA in Marseille’s Vieille Charité. The performance in Marseille serves as a comparative field site to the island of San Servolo: both sites are marked by their modern history of othering, and the subsequent musealisation of modern universal epistemologies that enshrined the dichotomies between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’, ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’.

3 The Ethnographic Collections in the Former Almshouse, Vieille Charité, Marseille

The body is a bearer of memory. It is my body that moves, sings. It is not simply acting out pre-constructed phrases, but finding its memories - beginning in my ribs, between my thighs, in my head, reverberating and echoing off the walls.
Dorothee Munyaneza

On the occasion of a symposium on repair, reparation, and restitution and during a scorching September afternoon, we had set up a roundtable in the courtyard of the Vieille Charité with Dorothee Munyaneza, British-Rwandan dancer, singer, and choreographer.¹⁰ She responded with the above quotation to a question I had asked her about the role of the body as a mediating seismograph, and her response framed the conversation with the director of Marseille's public museums, Xavier Rey, and the philosopher and curator Barbara Cassin. Originally, I, and the two other curators of the event, Alya Sebti and Nikola Hartl, had commissioned Munyaneza to work with the ethnographic collection of the MAAOA (le Musée d'Arts Africains, Océaniens et Amérindiens), housed on one side of the former almshouse where the symposium took place. A historic building, charged with a history of isolation, quarantine - and its modern institutionalised form - not too dissimilar to the first context I described on San Servolo. Unbeknownst to us at the time, the planned performance was later cancelled due to the risk posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Rey had invited Cassin to curate an exhibition of moving, migrating objects (*Objets Migrateurs*, then planned to take place between 17 June-10 November 2021 in the Vieille Charité), which they elaborated as a response to the international claims and calls for restitution hotly debated in France at the time. The roundtable was kicked off by a performance put together by Assia Zouane and Estelle N'Tsendé, who form part of the Marseille-based activist group *Les Lunettes Décoloniales*. The situation was tense, since the group had recorded and broadcast voices from citizens of Marseille, who articulated a candid desire for the restitution of African heritage from French ethnographic collections back to the continent. The presentation created an intense atmosphere, not only because they had decided to 'perform' their intervention at the outset of the panel just days before, but also because their charged and accusatory tone, and the clear voices they let us listen to, contrasted with the intellectually composed and defensive tone of Rey and Cassin, who spoke of 'dialogue', 'reflection', and 'involvement', but not of return, restitution, and redress [fig. 2].

Munyaneza's choreography envisaged a tracing of the subject-object threshold of the ethnographic collections. Her explication of what it means to choreograph such an encounter within a museum that she knew from several previous private visits echoed both Gbaguidi's elaboration of her choreography and Ndikung's thoughts on objects and subjects. Objects, Munyaneza explained, "bear the memory of stories" (in Manifesta 2020).¹¹ When

¹⁰ This event under the title *Tracing Fractures* was co-curated with Nikola Hartl and Alya Sebti, who had invited us to propose this symposium in the framework of the 2020 Marseille Manifesta 13. The entire programme is documented and can be watched in French with English subtitles on the webpage of Manifesta 13 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y687p1GW5CM>).

¹¹ The roundtable with Munyaneza's statement (2020) that can be found on the page of Manifesta 13 begins from 1'50'45" onwards with a presentation by *Les Lunettes Décoloniales*, which



Figure 2 Image from the *Tracing Fractures* Symposium and roundtable with Dorothée Munyaneza, Barbara Cassin, Xavier Rey, and Jonas Tinius (from left to right) in the courtyard of Vieille Charité, Marseille. The MAOAH halls are on the left. © Vost Collectif

we arrive in museum spaces, she goes on, “we are loaded with stories [...] As a Rwandan woman living in Marseille, I have accumulated stories, and I encounter objects loaded with stories”, she said (Munyaneza in Manifesta 2020). Especially when these stories - of theft, loot, colonial violence - are evidently associated with pain, she considers her choreographies a form of ‘encounter’ with these stories and their relation to the objects. As she put it, and I am citing here from the roundtable:

They [the objects in the collection] are frozen behind walls and considered as no longer inhabited. Interacting or inhabiting these spaces, which are themselves inhabited, is a dialogue [...] a living communication [...] a political gesture, a social gesture, a cultural gesture. (Munyaneza in Manifesta 2020)

More than being just a seismograph in the sense of the griot practice as articulated by Gbaguidi, Munyaneza considers the encounter between her and the objects, her performance and the audience, as a kind of contagion: it “contaminates or interferes with the bodies of those who witness that moment” (Manifesta 2020), she said. Nevertheless, this contamination necessitates a sensing body. Similar to the ‘body as museum’ proposed by Ndikung, she considers the body as “bearer of memory”, which is “reverberating and echoing” in relation to space (Munyaneza in Manifesta 2020). Expanding on the seismographic notion I elaborated with view to Gbaguidi’s performance, Munyaneza describes the act of relating to objects as “a way for me to di-

opened the conversation with recorded statements on restitution in Marseille and provided an important backdrop for the conversation.

gest, to chew on something, and to share it afterwards" (Manifesta 2020). She puts it even more concretely by speaking of her body as "an instrument that I master - and that I also do not control [...] letting other things come out, which manifest themselves" (Manifesta 2020).

However, Munyaneza's elaboration of the sensing and seismographic activity of the body is not directed solely at documentation, or tracing, but rather at elaborating a future-oriented situation. In her words, "even though I come loaded with memories, I produce for a future" (Manifesta 2020). Recalling an experience of visiting the MAAOA with her son's school class, she ponders that her activity is directed at transmission: "the question of this transmission is to trace and leave traces, which can be done in one visit, or even in one hour" (Manifesta 2020). Considering her own body as an "instrument" and as "weapon", in her view a critical choreographic approach "opens doors to spaces that were impassable, uninhabitable for bodies like mine" (Manifesta 2020). As such, her choreographic engagement with objects bearing a difficult past expands the traumatic tracing already elaborated by Gbaguidi to think about the 'displacement and questioning of privileges' that she addresses when walking through a Western ethnographic museum. She states that "[i]f my body allows that [...] I can bring the street into these galleries and kids can look at their history, the history of their ancestors" (Manifesta 2020).

The symposium in Marseille took place against the backdrop of an increasingly polarised conversation on the restitution of African heritage from European museums. While the question of whether to retribute looted artefacts and human remains from former European colonies - particularly on the African continent - is far from a recent conversation (Savoy 2021), several events had preceded the symposium that charged the air on the day itself. President Emmanuel Macron's 2017 plea to retribute proven looted artworks from French national collections, and the subsequently commissioned report on restitution by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy (2018) had fuelled pan-European calls for the 'decolonisation' of European heritage institutions, in particular museums (Grechi 2021). In the run-up to the symposium, rumour had it that the symposium caused stir and nervousness, since it was the first of its kind to address restitution on the actual grounds of one of the city's museums.

What is more, on 30 July, just over a month before the event, the activist Mwazulu Diyabanza and three other men who form part of the *Multicultural Anti-Spoliation Front* had entered the MAAOA. They forcibly removed a ceremonial spear made of ivory from the display, before they headed for the exit. The activists were stopped, the object returned to the museum, and the group was charged, and subsequently acquitted a few months later. But the echo of their actions remains. In fact, Diyabanza's prolific social media commentary on ongoing court cases for similar acts in France and the Netherlands continue to resonate and circulate. His actions appear simple, yet they are forceful interpellations of audiences (both present during the actions and later viewing his live-streamed performances) and objects as well as questions of justice and the prefigurative role of museum activism. On that day in late July, after Mwazulu and his group dislodged the spear and walked through the courtyard in Marseille, he found himself confronted by security; instead of letting the arrest become a petty situation of a blocked action, he turns left and addresses the visitors in the café: "Are you complicit in crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Occi-

dent?”. His whispers to the objects (“we bring you home”), and his address to the public authorities (“what has been stolen cannot be stolen back!”) are prefigurative gestures and reflections on justice (UDC 2020). His actions had charged the museum as a site of confrontation and negotiation of ethical positions; the form-giving function of collections in a future-oriented battle of planetary justice have been shifted into the courtyard and towards the viewer (Tinius 2021).

Rey and Cassin were aware of the watchful eye of those visitors who followed the actions; those who had been aware of Diyabanza and the restitution report. The audio collages by *Les Lunettes Décoloniales* that preceded the roundtable, and the broadcast recordings of Marseille’s inhabitants and their stark rebuttal of public attempts on behalf of heritage institutions to defuse arguments for restitution, elevated Munyaneza’s statements. Her description of an anticipated choreography acted like a calm seismograph of the tensions underlying the difficult heritage of the ethnographic collections in Marseille and other European cities more generally. Munyaneza’s imagined performance was charged with additional significance: a repair, a reconnection to the objects as agentive relational subjects with a past, a landscape to be sensed with the choreographer as a seismograph of past pain. The catalytical function became most evident when an audience member accused the idea of a participatory room in the proposed exhibition by Cassin and colleagues, in which the public gets to curate their own thoughts on restitution, as ‘genius and coward’ at the same time. Genius, the audience member explained, because it allowed the divesting of responsibility and involvement of ‘the public’; coward, because it acts as a fig leaf for the otherwise avoided stance on restitution.¹²

4 Learning from Seismographic Choreographies

These two performances – one that took place, and one that was planned but remained unrealised – are an example of what I call ‘seismographic choreographies’ that mobilise the body of the performer as a medium for the sensing of energies. Like a ‘seismograph’, these bodies react to the unseen, unheard, or untouched, and mediate between the spectators and the “non-visible areas of pain” that they experience kinaesthetically.¹³ I reflected on the corporeal sensing of such areas of pain through mediation and object-agency, but also addressed how this can be thought of as a way to think about the notion of the ‘implicated subject’ or community, as elaborated, among others, by Erica Lehrer (2020) and Michael Rothberg (2019), in the context of colonial and post-Holocaust reckoning with difficult heritage.

I worked through a brief contextualisation of these choreographic examples to trace the ways in which museums with sensitive or difficult collections can be accessed or activated. I am particularly interested in seeing choreographic, conceptual, and reflexive positions such as those by Munyaneza and Gbaguidi not in sharp contradistinction to curatorial confrontations of difficult collections. Instead, I understand them as proposals for

¹² This exchange is documented in the video of the event that took place in the frame of Manifesta 13.

¹³ <https://www.pelagiegbaguidi.com/artists/the-sysmograph/>.

how to engage with the legacies of objects, the subjectivities with which they may be imbued, and the possibilities of engaging with them. I chose two contexts where modern institutions, and their collections, posed concrete problems – past trauma (psychiatric incarceration and colonial loot) – and offered concrete situations of painful narratives to the choreographers. By linking the work done by Gbaguidi and Munyaneza through their mediating bodies to critical reflections on implicated communities of past trauma and multidirectional memory, I hope to contribute to an understanding of performance and choreography as investigative, troubling, and interrogative practices in the field of museums and European heritage.

The comparative aspect of my participant observation underlined how the two choreographers conceive of their bodies as tools or instruments, not just in a personal or artistic quest, but as a cultural, social, and political gesture (UDC 2020) towards global reconciliation and ethical repair. Even though Munyaneza’s performance was eventually not realised, I worked with her then still anticipating reflection on the choreography, analysing how she conceived of her work as a seismographic and transformative tracing of the possible, multiple, and intergenerational implicated subjects of a past pain inflicted by the European imperial project. In this sense, one comparative heuristic for the two performances is how the choreographers “deployed” their bodies as “tools and weapons”, to cite Munyaneza’s statements during the Marseille roundtable, to act as seismographers of a past still sedimented, and of an agency in the presence of objects, which remain in museums of madness and anthropology. While Gbaguidi emphasised, in the context of the Venetian asylum museum, possibilities of healing and ‘collective awakening’, Munyaneza explicitly spoke of her body moving in the context of an ethnographic collection as a ‘weapon’ or a ‘tool’ which became an entrance to impermeable and impenetrable spaces to bodies marked as other by a normative western museological narrative. The seismographic choreographies thus both created what I may call ‘scenarios of problematisation’ in which exhibition spaces are rendered as prisms, problems, situations, and potential crime-scenes to be activated and analysed through artistic work. On the Venetian island of San Servolo, Gbaguidi’s performance explicitly aimed at a form of social healing, a process of corporeal reflection of unease; in Marseille’s Vieille Charité, Munyaneza’s choreography was a political gesture of cultural grasping, opening, and access. In both contexts, the museums epitomised the universal modern gesture of collections – to collect, preserve, and display – thus carrying with them into the present the burden of an imperial past and a normalising discourse on mental troubles. Gbaguidi and Munyaneza’s corporeal conversation and seismographic choreographies offered a glimpse at how we can analyse difficult heritage and artistic-curatorial work productively together. In both contexts, seismographic choreographies become ways to “rehabilitate to subjecthood” (Ndikung 2019) collections of objects thought long dead.

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Task by Ingrid Berger Myhre

A text is a site.

Like a living room. A public bench. Or a gallery.

A space to go for a stroll in
to lean into
to eavesdrop on

a place where an argument could happen
where a digression might lead you a

s
tra
y

You move through it.

Your eyes from left to right climbing down the page line by line (maybe escorted by your index finger)
At times hovering over some places for longer than others:

Your thoughts wander too.

to enjoy the v i e w
or because
you
got lost

Maybe you're a quick reader, devouring it all in one go.

Or perhaps you work your way through it m e t i c u l o u s l y
and over time.

Or maybe you read

diagonally
as they say.

You are in charge of the temporality of your reading*

maybe you are reading this text because someone told you to read it.
maybe it came your way by chance.
maybe you meant to read it for a long time,
or perhaps you picked it up spontaneously

~~there's even a chance you've already put it away~~

You might read this text printed onto paper.
Or maybe it is visible to you through a screen.

What is the support of the text?
What does it make possible?

How is context support?

Are you seated?
However you are, your reading body has a S H A P E
This S H E P A might shift over the course of your reading.

Maybe other things will shift too.

The text you are about to read is a site.
Go ahead, enter.

Dancing the Museum Black: Activist Animations of the Social

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Abstract This chapter considers concepts of activism and Black presence in experiences of dance in museums. Working through concepts of Afropessimism, Afrofuturism, and the theoretical gathering notion of a Black Commons, I will offer four case studies of dance in the museum that render the space towards collective Black possibilities. The choreographic works *Dapline!* (2016), *fastPASTdance* (2017), as well as a reconstruction of *Instead of Allowing Some Thing to Rise Up to Your Face Dancing Bruce and Dance and Other Things* (2000) and the moving-image object *APESHIT* (2018) offer evidence of a special possibility for Black dance in the museum space; a creation of social space too-often denied to Black people in diaspora.

Keywords Afropessimism. Afrofuturism. Black dance. Black Commons. Activism.

Summary 1 Museums and Black Commons. – 2 Afropessimism and Black Thought. – 3 Dancing the Museum Black: Studio Museum of Harlem. – 4 Articulations of Black Dance. – 5 Dancing The Museum Toward Black: Centre Pompidou. – 6 Dancing the Museum Black: The Louvre. – 7 Afrofuturism. – 8 Dancing the Museum Black: The Detroit Institute of the Arts. – 9 Conclusion: Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death.

1 Museums and Black Commons

What I want to call a *Black Commons* could be a “gathering notion” (Outlaw 1996, 64) for concerns of Black life that arrives in contradistinction to hegemonic modes of white supremacy and Eurocentric constructions of social space. While the Black Commons originally referred to the need for land in the context of the United States (Mestrum 2013), or the structure of activities that allowed enslaved Africans in the Americas (Roane 2018), by now, a Black Commons might be a theoretical social space that emerges somewhat in relation to white systems of structural domination, but as a space that cares for the possibilities of Black life. A Black Commons can mobilise political action, and remind Black people of a shared potentiality through practices of artmaking, social assembly, worship, and imagination. A Black Commons might be a place of “study”, explained by Fred Moten as “the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activities [as] already present” (Harney, Moten 2013, 110).

It may be that museums and Black Commons arrive as antithetical propositions. Where museums try to gather information and objects and organise them according to some systematic matrices of category and relationship, Black Commons emerge as spaces of multivalent disarray, built mostly from the relational sensibilities and aesthetics of a Black public in motion. Museums might tend towards the sustainable organisation of committed real estate, while Black Commons might be temporary and fugitive. Museums thrive in the quietness of reflection while Black Commons typically ‘sound’, and revel in the noisy, animated movements shared among lively people and the always-shifting reckonings of relationship.

The Black Commons offers a particular mode of analysis towards considering dance and activism in the museum, especially in terms of practices of dance that are endemic to Black life or fomented in Black common spaces. Thinking with the Black Commons as a mobile, fugitive constellation of social assembly that privileges Black life in its teeming diversities might allow us to understand activism in the dancing museum to arrive in an unexpected and transparent manner.

This chapter explores the Black Commons in relation to two important trending theoretical models of cultural production: Afropessimism and Afrofuturism. These conceptual interventions each suggest ways that the mainstream museum repeatedly fails to gather the concerns of Black people or facilitate the crucial emergence of a Black Commons. In pursuing these related lines of flight through Black thought, I argue that the mainstream museum is repeatedly curated as anti-Black. As we consider dance in an intentionally Black circumstance of the Studio Museum in Harlem, as well as in mainstream venues of the Pompidou and the Louvre, we will note how ‘dancing the museum Black’ will be to animate the space differently; to pay attention to the impermanence of dance as a lever to reconsider how art might be assembled, and the limitless potentials of bodies in motion to foreground activist activity.

2 Afropessimism and Black Thought

Recent attention to Afropessimism as a lever to understand the shifting terms of Black life in the world forces us to consider the socio-political terms of an encounter with the museum space. In short, Afropessimism wonders at the pre-acceleration of disavowal that surrounds Black existences, so much so that Blacks shimmer into and out of the category of ‘human’ (Jackson 2020; Hartman 2019; Sharpe 2016). Afropessimist thought wonders at the Black assembly that is always already circumscribed by political incommensurability: by all accounts of colonialism, slavery and apartheid, Black life should not exist (Mbembe 2017). And yet, Black life is integral to understanding the emergence of Western modernity. As an always-present alterity, Black life describes a non-state of being that allows the scaffolding of white hegemonic sociality.

Frank Wilderson’s vision of Afropessimism arrives as

less of a theory and more of a *metatheory*: a critical project that, by deploying Blackness as a lens of interpretation, interrogates the unspoken, assumptive logic of Marxism, postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, and feminism through rigorous theoretical consideration of their *properties and assumptive logic*. (Wilderson 2020, 14; italics in the original)

Reaching toward a “higher level of abstraction than the discourse and methods of the theories it interrogates”, Afropessimism concerns itself with a relational logic that places Blackness in opposition to the assumptive category of “human” (14). Theorising how it is that “the Black is needed to mark the border of Human subjectivity” (164), Afropessimist thought confirms that “Blacks are the sentient beings *against which Humanity is defined*” (167; italics in the original).

In this, Black presence might always be bound up with animations of modern culture. And Black presence in the space of the museum speaks directly to the distensions of social life that produce white hegemonic normativities, as well as fantastical elaborations of possibility. In opposition to the “provisional rendering of humanity” of Black life that cultural theorist Zakkiah Jackson asserts, dancing Black presence in the museum could resist “the specter of nullification” which is “precisely the work that racism does” (Jackson 2020, 16). Dancing, we might animate beyond the “status crime” of Black presence (Hartman 2019), and activate toward an artful potential of vibration and expression.

3 Dancing the Museum Black: Studio Museum of Harlem

We gather in a small crowd in the streets of Harlem, pressing against each other in order to see the moving bodies dancing inside the museum. Sightlines are difficult, and after a short while, we are admitted into the galleries. Passing through exhibitions, we are greeted by a vibrant African American male character sporting a phenomenal red three-piece suit. He approaches us, one and the next, and asks us to dance with him. It doesn't matter whether we know the steps; he shows them to us as we move through the room, dancing alongside us and cajoling us to smile and move with him as he sings and guides us through the space. He releases us into the next room, happily prepared by our brief participatory moment to be surprised by our encounters with diffuse, bleeding and blurry electronic sounds and the stage rendering of dance that follows. We enter the performance space of the museum alive in our assembly as Black and Brown people, collectively ready to be enlivened by dancing alongside each other.

The multi-sited work *Dapline!*, created as an initiative of autodidact multi-disciplinary African American artist LaMont Hamilton, moved through the Studio Museum of Harlem in several performances in 2016 [fig. 1]. The work arrives variously: as a documentary film project, as a series of photographs, as an ethnographic study composed of interviews by the artist with a number of African American Vietnam war veterans, and as a choreographic work embedded within a series of performative tableaux encountered by museum visitors. The performance installations occurred at the museum on 28 February 2016, and involved the participation of sound artist Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste, vocal artist Yaw and performance artist Yon Tandé along with Hamilton and choreographer André Zachery.

After museum visitors witnessed a short duet from outside, through the windows facing the streets of Harlem, they wound through the various exhibitions on display at the time, meeting performers who engaged them in conversation and song and exhortations to dance alongside them. Eventually, the public arrived in the lower-level performance hall of the museum, to sit in seats outlining a raised platform that accommodated a theatrical dance



Figure 1 *Dapline!* by LaMont Hamilton and André Zachery. Pictured: (front) Andre Cole, TJ 'Rocka' Jamez, (rear) Martell Ruffin, Ehizoje Azeke. Not pictured: Brian 'Hallow Dreamz' Henry, David 'Twicelight' Adelaje, Johnnie Cruise Mercer, Yaw Agyeman. © LaMont Hamilton and André Zachery, and Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Harlem NYC

invention. Six Black and Brown men moved through an elaborate danced rendering of the 'dap,' a stylised handshake and greeting ritual created by African Americans in the military as a system of private communication. As a dance, the work revelled in big leaping strides among gestures of explosive krump dancing, and permutations of rhythms of 'dap' greeting, with the whole infused with occasional slow-motion passages. At one point, they line up, then lie on the ground, as if they are victims of police brutality. The men, clad in simple black t-shirts and pants, allowed for a sweaty intimacy that surely transformed the museum into a site of serious play and careful consideration of movement as communication.

According to its promotional materials, *Dapline!* intended to represent "an intergenerational channel for Black solidarity, consciousness and identity". The work surely demonstrated underexplored creative crafting by Black people towards communication and affiliation, assuming the possibilities of a Black Commons in the Studio Museum of Harlem, an intentionally Black space. And yet, in several moments, a spectre of Afropessimism peeks through the choreography, as when the men lie on the ground, with hands clasped behind their backs in subjugation. Moments of competitive encounter between the men predict battles that no one will win. In some ways, *Dapline!* affirmed a connection of Black abjection through time, entwining an Afropessimist point of view within the presence of men engaging in rituals of greeting and communion. At times, the work did "tend-toward the void of Black subjectivity" proposed by Afropessimism (Zondi 2020). And still, *Dapline!* suggested an activist intervention as it constructed a temporary Black Commons in its organisation, and then reminded its audience of the limitations of Black humanity within worlds of white supremacy.

'Activism' has become a way that we might understand social encounters to be both mutable and as pivot towards concerns of social justice. For Black people, activism becomes a mode of creative life; a lens of imagining social possibility through the organisation of stakeholders who might transform a political landscape towards social progress and self-determination. Because museums routinely display artworks in shows that underscore the achievement of individual artists or curators in terms of self-representation or the will to assemble, it might be expected that museums could be sites of social activation that leads towards concerns of social justice or reparations for Black publics.

However, museums are rarely included in the histories of concerns of social justice. In 2017, the exhibition of a tribute to the murdered young African American citizen Emmett Till painted by a white artist sparked a tribute in the Whitney Museum of New York (Eckardt 2017). African American activists and their allies staged a series of events designed to turn attention to the concerns of Black people, mobilised by the depictions of Black trauma that the painting incited. Activists wrote letters, mobilised media outlets, and published cogent accounts of how the exploitation of Black experience by white artists has long formed a backbone of museum cultures. In person, Black activists stood in front of the painting for hours at a time, obscuring its view by others who might enter the gallery. The controversy surrounding the painting brought attention to an artist whose work is seldom concerned with Black lives of Black loves.

The mainstream museum – one not explicitly designed to gather the concerns of Black people or the emergence of a Black Commons, in the ways that the Studio Museum of Harlem, or the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco strive to be – struggles to accommodate Black presence. Black presence inevitably arrives as an engagement with political concerns of inequality, police violence, asymmetrical access to resources, cultural disenfranchisement, and intersectional marginalisations that eventually force forward concerns of social justice. While some art projects might want to address these systems of structural inequality, many works of art turn toward axes of expression for an individual white artist without seeming regard for collective social action.

And yet, Black presence also arrives in relation to a diasporic rendering of artmaking as a daily activity. Black cultures engage art, and especially music and dance, in rich tapestries of social imperative. A Black Commons emerges as the public assembly that includes *performance beyond [white] governance*; a temporary space where Black dance and music allow for an expression beyond the terms of white supremacy and hegemonic politics of respectability. In this rendering, Black music and dance activate concerns of an expansive re-orientation of social assembly. Dancing the Museum Black, the museum can be rendered differently, as a temporary site of Black possibility.

As the example of *Dapline!* demonstrates, dancing the museum Black offers an "otherwise way of being" for visitors and artists alike, opening unexpected portals of body and presence (Crawley 2017). At its best, dance in the museum moves beyond a here and now that might be the concern of the political moment. And yet, dance and its operations always arrive enveloped and entangled in the political moment. We must wonder at the tension between dance as a practice that supports its own mobilisations, but simultaneously dance as a practice that can turn our attention to a political concern well outside of the framework of its occurrence.

The obvious defining possibility of dance in the museum has to do with breath and liveliness featured as possibilities for 'temporary human relation'. In this, we turn our attention not to representations of dance, as in films or mediated objects including paintings or sculpture, but to the liveliness of performance as a structuring tool for understanding relationship. Live performance embedded into museum exhibitions offer us an opportunity to consider how breath and sensorial vibration allow a re-orientation for visitors and artists in the crafting of time spent in the museum's container. Live performance - by artists or visitors to the museum space - offer vivid and urgent portals of entry to considerations of presence and activism.

To think in this manner, we acknowledge that live art or live artists in the museum space are always already considered exceptional presences when they occur. After all, live performance tends to be structured by time, and even durational performances have beginning and ending gestures that mark their ephemerality. Museum objects, and the structuring logics of collection-building, indicate a tendency toward permanence as well as the construction of an archive. The museum emerges from a teleology of withstanding time and crafting of cultural stabilities. By way of contrast, live performance in museum spaces activates a specialness, or a state of aesthetic exception. This exception heightens attentiveness from visitors and performers, rendering the museum differently when performers are present.

To call on a 'state of exception' in the arrival of living artistry within the space of the museum heightens an understanding of risk as an essential aspect of live art performance, and dancing museums (Agamben 2005). This is a reasonable reference to a sort of 'bare life' that subtends the riskiness and awkwardness of museum performance. Thrust into spaces and circumstances that were not designed for its presence, dancing in the museum heightens a sense of mysterious difficulty, or unexpected possibility, and an out-of-placeness that deserves attention.

Dancing the Museum Black arrives as a fundamental contradiction. The dancing cannot be archived as its realisation among us in sweat and smell, as an emergent strategy of unexpected choices, navigated moment-to-moment by dancers and witnesses. We might be able to capture the movements in some manner, but we have no secure way to transcribe or relate their feeling with comprehensive accuracy. The dancing museum activates a 'something else' in its emergence. While some researchers are surely compelled to account for practices of archiving museum performances, the ongoing encounter with gravity that characterises human life and liveliness exposed by live performance probably exceeds the documentary and existing archival logics of the museum as institution.

These arguments intend to establish the contested ground that surrounds dancing museums, and some logics of activism as an implicit component of this activity. Activism as a turning towards social relationship is also at issue here. As we consider the placement of dance in the container of the museum space, we consider legacies of appropriateness and capacity that will always be exceeded by the labour of dancers moving through circumstances that were never crafted for them. This would also be the circumstance of political activism, to move with intention through difficult circumstances, in order to force some sort of political, legislative, or social change.

4 Articulations of Black Dance

Black dance offers capacious encounter for any variety of movement ideologies (DeFrantz 2019). Black dance might include aspects of modern dance, postmodern dance, contemporary dance, experimental work, ballet, tap dance, and on and on. Because Black dance, like the Black Commons, operates as a gathering notion for modes of movement, its terms of aesthetic production are open to encompass genres and styles adapted from a number of sources, including those defined by cultural outsiders.

By way of its obscure and diffuse definition, Black dance animates the field of dance differently than categories of ‘modern dance’ or ‘ballet’ or ‘durational performance’ might. Black dance emerges as a catch-all designation that refers to a process of performance, and many researchers have detailed the impossibly bulbous task of articulating Black dance (DeFrantz 2019). For this discussion, we pay attention to the political aesthetic dimension of Black dance as a process of extension and elaboration. Black dance renderings, which might be recognisable to participants in a Black Commons, extend any form of practice towards something beyond its originary methods, towards the concerns of a particular present and the structuring logics of Black life that arrive inevitably outside the comforts of hegemonic whiteness.

5 Dancing The Museum Toward Black: Centre Pompidou

At times, a Black Commons might emerge briefly, in a serendipitous manner, as a by-product of dancing museums circumstances. The large *Danser Sa Vie* exhibition included the Tino Sehgal work *Instead of Allowing Something to Rise Up to Your Face Dancing Bruce and Dan and Other Things* (2000). Termed a “constructed situation” (Von Hantelmann s.d.), the work is comprised of a long dance phrase performed continuously by a series of interpreters, with each performer working through the movement materials for a couple hours at a time. The work looks like dance to those of us who are accustomed to looking at dance, or to those of us who dance ourselves. Still, some art critics claim that it does not look like dance, but rather like slow-motion physical phasing of vibration; a task that allows a body to become a work of art.

Inside this sort of assessment, we might sense an orientation away from dance as a possibility worthy of exploration towards the making of something else - something more relevant to the historical context of the museum. Sehgal’s work gains in worthiness to the degree that it relates to the work of visual artists Dan Graham and Bruce Nauman; to the degree that it resists being aligned with previous practices of dance performance. Whether the work achieves this distancing depends on the witness and their expertise. As a dance, the work carries interest in its slow unfolding, its seeming movement-without-end. Like Yvonne Rainer’s *Trio A*, the work seems to have little rhythmic punctuation or accents of physical gesture; it is performed like a long physical yawn, across space.

I witnessed the work at the Centre Pompidou in 2011. I probably saw four interpreters move through the work and its propositions across a couple of hours of witnessing. The gallery that contained the work made no provisions for my activity as a viewer. There were no chairs in the space, nowhere to

rest or pause beyond a leaning on against the wall, or a sitting on the floor of the gallery. While I did sit on the floor, along with other visitors at times, this action was uncomfortable and felt wrong, considering the terms of my arrival in the space. If the work encouraged my witnessing in any way, it was in a short-term encounter of standing for a few minutes and moving on to the next room. In order to witness the entire sequence of movement, I would have to accommodate my own comfort, lying on the ground at times, or even sitting on the floor which would attract unwelcome attention from other gallery visitors.

At times a group of people would gather to witness the dancing, but the group seemed to form because it thought something interesting might happen. But the uninflected movement passages contain little interest in attracting attention or energetic assembly; an hour spent contemplating the movement might be a bit like watching clouds float overhead listlessly and only with the purpose of their movement as part of the weather. The interpreters completed the unenviable task of moving slowly without regard for the energetic vibrations of the people who might witness their labour. Dancing as if to deny any sort of vibrational connection to others is no easy task for performers trained to modulate physicality according to a number of physical techniques. Interpreters for this work had to be carefully trained artists, able to move with the continual serenity of a wondering through time. And yet, the work demanded that the performers offer no emotional or relational cues to their public; dancing as if they were not really there in the museum gallery.

Sehgal has more recently made many performance works for museum spaces that call on diverse arrays of performers to complete tasks that might be difficult or unusual. Children and elders are engaged to hold conversations with museum visitors; strangers move according to a simple movement score comprised mostly of tempi for walking while simultaneously telling stories about life-changing moments. Yet this earlier work, *dancing bruce* and the more famous *The Kiss* (2003) deploy trained dance interpreters, even as they ask those dancers to resist the deployments of energy that might constitute performative affect in order for the 'live art object' to be acquired by the museum. Remarkably, when Sehgal's 'constructed situations' are included in collection listings for major museums, the notations seldom reference the fact of live interpreters. This omission points toward an orientation away from caring for dance or dancers as co-creators in the process of dancing museums.

At one point, a gender non-binary interpreter with recognizable African ancestry performed "...dancing bruce...". Witnessing that particular rendering of the work, I allowed myself to feel something else in the work. Something of resistance, and a desire to charge the space of the museum gallery. Our presence together in the room did that, with me witnessing a performance, while briefly, no one else was there; a connection of the eyes even as the performer twisted slowly away from me. A rendering of a momentary Black alliance in the gallery; the very modest seedlings of a possible Black Commons that could be animated sometime soon, somewhere else.

6 Dancing the Museum Black: The Louvre

Jay-Z and Beyoncé, known as the Carters, crafted a moving-image object that placed dance in the grandest of all museums, the Louvre, in their 2018 creation *APESHIT*. This widely-discussed manifestation of a mediated dancing museum deserves attention here for its actual movement vocabularies (Crawley 2020). Working with more than a dozen dance artists and consultant choreographers Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and JaQuel Knight, along with director Ricky Saiz, the Carters present a museum dancing in accord to particular African American dance and music innovations of the late 20th century (Plate 2019).

The song *APESHIT*, written by the Carters with Pharrell Williams, calls forth trap music, an atmospheric genre of hip hop that builds from emphatically synthesised, electronic musical landscapes that suggest the shifting fortunes of African American neighbourhoods disadvantaged by unfair housing and labour practices. Trap music refers to the circumstance of Black American life as being lived 'in a trap' of continual, unfortunate circles of disavowal.

Trap music aligns itself with the terms of Black life for many, but it does not need to be an Afropessimist exploration of foreclosed possibility. Indeed, trap music promotes a certain sort of Black Commons that acknowledges affiliation across Black identities through our liveliness in music and dance. And *APESHIT* arrives as a glamorous, fully realised rendering of trap music, backed by all of the production value that money can buy. The production of the music video also demonstrates an abandon by way of economic and corporate privilege as the Carters and their affiliated artists take over the Louvre and activate dancing in front of large paintings and sculptural objects that are never witnessed by a general public without the crush of large crowds. Beyoncé and the uncredited dance artists move in the sinuous, hip-rolling gestures of J-sette and jazz dance, and an insuppressible attack at the front of the musical beat in passages of theatrical krumping. Appearing in a variety of costumes among the venerated objects, the Carters animate the museum toward an explicitly Black American possibility, one that engages rhythm as a component of presence, and one that considers dance as a necessary creative activity in response to other works of art.

The finished video of APESHIT does not include much dancing at all, really, but the bits included routinely exceed the visual backgrounds of the various objects on display. This dancing beyond place excites the state of exception. White visitors and guards, docents and curators are entirely absent from this fantastical invention. The utter Blackness of the encounter contributes to the patently activist intention of the work. The museum is danced Black, and for a moment, a temporary Black Commons arrives in the spaces of popular culture media, rendering the Louvre available to those of us who might never go there, or witness its contents, enlivened, otherwise.

7 Afrofuturism

A counterpoint to the concerns with Black social death that characterise Afropessimism might be the progressive and technologically-infused inventions of Afrofuturism. Typically, Afrofuturism is narrated in terms of speculative science fiction laden with fantasy imagery of aliens and cyborgs; Funkadelic music and its progeny, the electronic, vocoded soundings of a digitised Black soul music; festooned costuming that references other-worldly space-travelling indigenous populations; and the ironic implications of dense cultural criticism projecting an impossible future rife with Black corporealities cognizant of middle passages. Irony is surely a key component of how Afrofuturism achieves social traction. Common assumptions surrounding a future/presence of blackness might assume an assimilation that could render the Black unrecognisable; a hue among many without specific cultural imperatives. Afrofuturism, though, assumes a tangible Black affect present in an entirely mediated future; not a future without race, though one with an abeyance of racism; not a future without Black ministries, though one with a release from the primitive-naïve analyses consistently associated with the Black church; not a future without Black subjectivity, but one that evades the inevitable yoke of subaltern status. Instead, it is a future of queer, trans- and hetero-cis Black people engaged with the fabrication and deployment of technologies (DeFrantz 2016).

British theorist Kodwo Eshun and American artist DJ Spooky (Paul Miller) narrate the musical in Afrofuturism as breakbeat science, or rhythm science, which suggests the alignment of so-called hard scientific analyses – beats per minute, tiny differences in particular technologies of musical production, engagements with software and hardware, histories of invention and product creation – with the undeniably soft esoteric spaces of playful literary translation (Eshun 1999; 2003). As a concept, breakbeat science legitimises Africanist rhythmicity to post-Enlightenment doctrines of value. In writings, recorded explorations, and performances, breakbeat or rhythm science authors fast-forward to a somewhat obscure space where concepts of affect are defined by their digital coding, and still allowed to be mysteriously fun (Miller 2004).

The Afrofuturist space shimmers in anticipation of a future always just beyond imagination. Afrofuturists demonstrate responsibility ‘towards the not-yet, towards becoming’ to create aspirational space that speaks to social ambitions enlivened by artmaking practice. This may be something like the queer utopia that theorist José Esteban Muñoz predicts, one that is always out of reach, in part because its value lies in its pursuit. Muñoz wonders about queerness as horizon, or queerness as an ideality; a horizon imbued with potentiality. Queerness as a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel “beyond the quagmire of the present” (Muñoz 2009). Like Afrofuturist performance, Muñoz’s queer futurity imagines itself ahead toward possibility.



Figure 2 Carmen Carriker in the SLIPPAGE production *fastDANCEpast*, 2016. Detroit Institute of the Arts. © SLIPPAGE

8 Dancing the Museum Black: The Detroit Institute of the Arts

The SLIPPAGE project *fastPASTdance* deployed a green-screen interface to project artists of colour into the imagery painted by artists represented within the 2016 Detroit Institute of the Arts show *Dance: American Art 1830-1960*. The *Dance* show included some 90 works from storied American artists including John Singer Sargent, Mary Cassatt, Harlem Renaissance stars and artists who shaped the aesthetics of modern dance including Isamu Noguchi, Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol. While the show opened in Detroit, it later toured to the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and the Denver Art Museum [fig. 2].

SLIPPAGE was commissioned to create an intervention for the opening weekend of the show in Detroit, which was repeated in the Crystal Bridges museum. I direct SLIPPAGE, and this particular creative invitation arrived alongside a range of activities that included writing for the exhibition catalogue creating a series of large-format, original moving-image objects describing dance from several points of view, and the live-processing performance intervention of the opening nights of the exhibit in two locations.

Our goal in crafting *fastPASTdance* was to trouble the paucity of Black presence in the many objects on display, and to embed a lively Black Dancing Commons into the proceedings of the museum. We worked with a two-channel installation that placed a small dance platform in one room of the museum, while a large-format projection setup in another nearby, but discrete, performance space. The larger space included a recognisable stage platform for dancing with a rear-projection image that acted as backdrop. The small dance platform was crafted as a green screen area, with a single video camera capturing the movements of interpreters who were able to hear the sounds piped into both spaces.

Audiences witnessed the interpreters in both spaces: in front of the green-screen setup, and in a much larger assembly, in front of the stage and the large video projection. Those who chose to watch the small stage engaged in an intimate encounter with the dancers, as the audience was

able to be quite near to the performers. In the larger hall, the event held a more familiar proscenium theatre-style arrangement, with the audience seated in rows and witnessing from a distance.

Audiences might have been unaware of the activist bent of the performance to insert Black and Indigenous performers into the objects of the exhibition where they had not been before. The interface designed for the event captured the movements of the interpreters and interpellated them into vibrating, bouncing versions of the artworks, in an eerie and provocative effect. The interface manipulated the performance materials, sometimes rendering gestures faster or slower than they had been crafted; sometimes doubling or tripling the dancer's appearances within the large-scale projection.

In all, the performance confirmed an uneasy contemporaneousness of performers of colour and the white subjects of the art objects on display, bringing Black dance into lively accord with a whitened past. Black ballerina, Black modern dancer, Black social dancers, Black tap dancer, and Black experimental artist, alongside an exceptional Native American performer, confirmed a Black Commons as a possibility for a museum in motion. As if in a futurist innovation, the Black performers brought unprecedented movement to the artworks, destabilising their completeness by suggesting Black dance as an antidote to the supposed permanence of permanent museum display.

9 Conclusion: Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death

In 1992, Black film theorist and artist Arthur Jafa imagined a "black visual intonation" that would echo prominent performative features of Black vocal intonation. Jafa predicted a future of filmmaking that could reproduce "visual equivalencies of vibrato, rhythmic patterns, slurred or bent notes, and other musical effects... samba beats, reggae beats, all kinds of things" (1992, 254). In short, Jafa predicted a sort of filmmaking that might construct the terms of a Black visibility tethered to an inviolable connection between music and dance in the Africanist grain.

Jafa returned to this intense, particular stylisation in 2016 when he realised a moving-image object that mobilises Black dancing to produce something well beyond its contents. Jafa's outrageous and despondent moving-image object that has toured several galleries and museums, it was featured as a simultaneous streaming event on 26-28 June 2020 on the platforms of eleven museums and private collections in seven countries. *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death* embeds one hundred and fifty clips of Black American life into a seven-and-a-half mixture of potent, nearly unwatchable contrasts. Rife with contradictions, the short film points to the ongoing violence and racism that is foundational to US history and continues to operate in the present. And it also includes passionate, deeply-honed moments of dance performance, peppered among the imagery of disavowal and police brutality. And there is also a sun in supernova.

The short film enacts an ambitious and difficult rendering of Black dance as an activated expression of communal possibility, individual brilliance, and inexplicable diversities. Arriving in museums around the world, *Love Is the Message* aligned the difficult terms of a Black Commons with Afrofu-

tourism and Afropessimism simultaneously. The pessimistic restatement of ongoing violence, adjacent to the futuristic renderings of an otherwise way of being, in a dancing beyond the terrible here and now.

Jafa's work confirms: to dance Black in the museum, we animate the space differently. We bring energy to bear in unexpected, particular pathways burnished by collective responses to a shared past of disavowal and rampant creativity. We force each other to see the gallery spaces and their collections differently; to acknowledge that 'our presence' in relation to these works of art actually 'matters'. We change the possibilities of space and architecture, energy and time, by leaping, twisting, standing, wondering, and challenging the quiet hush that typically pervades these hallways of culture.

Dance in the museum has a long, but checkered, past. It can be difficult to consider bodies in motion as worthy colleagues to the captured and stilled creations of visual artists. Dancing bodies are porous, unpredictable, and always-in-motion; visual works remain present like sentinels, awaiting our need as viewers for their encounter. Visual work can be bought and contained in museums; owned and loaned, acquired and kept. Hopefully, these features are less possible for the Black people who dance. Dancers exert their influence, forcefully, of their own volition, and then move on to dance somewhere else another day. Museums like the idea of dance and physical presence as art, but remain wary of the actual gestures of moving bodies that might harm or even touch the ever-waiting artworks. If the dance is truly ephemeral, it contradicts the impulse to create a hall to collect - 'permanently' - outstanding gestures of creativity. What can be permanent about the dance beyond its documentation and memory? Dance is not ever really quite 'here'; it is somehow always 'just there'.

Ultimately, the challenge for dance and its consecration into spaces of museums has to do with the inevitable 'failure to contain' that circumscribes dance. When visual artists create works that disintegrate naturally - as in Ann Hamilton's *myein* (1999) created for the US Pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale - we are all invited to enjoy the specialness of our encounter with art as impermanent as a leaf falling from a tree. Kara Walker's *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby* (2014) was installed for only two months in a Brooklyn factory space later reclaimed as condominiums; the work, covered by tons of sugar, sweltered daily and dissembled to reveal its foam 'bones' before its discarding. Guests at that showing wanted to lick the grand sculpture, to taste its uncompromising specialness, even as we all knew that the work would be no more than its photographs and descriptions in a short time.

Black dance, like these examples of impermanent art, knows that it is only for the right now; its essence of performative exchange is not superseded by films or critical accounts. Black dance in the museum brings forward the tension of our varied interests: in creativity that endures, and in expression that cannot last longer than its execution, even as its activation-presences remain.

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Task by Ariadne Mikou



A casual meditation for anywhere and anytime.
Scan & Listen
or
Read below.

This is you in space



and time.

You may imagine yourself as a tiny little dot
at a specific spot on the earth,
at some point in the abyss of time.

After yesterday
&
Before tomorrow.

100 years later
2 seconds before.

You are HERE

Carrying your own [hi]story

&

Making [hi]story. At every single moment you inhabit this planet.

Your HERE & NOW surrounds you.

What do you see, hear, smell and touch?

What kind of relations among objects, humans and animal species
do you notice?

**As if being a photographer that looks at you,
take a spontaneous picture of your body with your mind's eyes.
Do not prepare the photo. Do not prepare yourself.
Be quick, efficient and press the button.**

How does your body participate in this landscape of
relationships?

How does it connect with others?
What traces does your body leave behind

in your everyday encounters?

Where you are, what does it catch your attention?
How do you think that you are being perceived
by what caught your attention?

Get closer to what caught your attention.
Change your point of view
&

Look at and sense the world from his/her/its/their perspective.

**As if being a photographer that looks at you,
quickly take another picture of your body with your mind's eyes. A wide frame
picture that captures you in relationship to what surrounds you. You are just
a part of the chain of time. A part of a landscape that shifts continuously.**

In another spot nearby, lie or rest on the ground.
Witness. Observe.

What has changed in your point of view now?

**As if being a photographer that looks at you, choose your distance
and take another picture of your resting body with your mind's eyes.**

Where you are, find the highest place that you can reach.
If you can, climb over
& look from above.

What new information do you see?

**As if being a photographer that looks at you, look up
and take another picture of your body with your mind's eyes.**

Go to the next point that previously caught your attention from above.

What is the shape of your body now?
What is the tension in your muscles?
Which body parts are in contact?
How much of your weight do you allow to pass through
the strata of the earth and
reach at its centre?
Do you sense the pull of gravity?

As you focus on the vertical axis, remember: your HERE & NOW surrounds you.

How are you being affected by what surrounds you?
How do you affect it?

**As if being a photographer that looks at you from above and where you were before,
take another picture of your body shape in space with your mind's eyes.**

What else does it catch your attention?

How far can you reach with your sight?
How wide can you see with your peripheral vision?
How deeply can you look into yourself?

Is it a tiny little thing occupying space that catches your attention?
or
a big one?

Go to that place.
Approach this being.

Change your body shape again in response to this being.
Leave your imprint on the ground
or the other surfaces that you may come in contact with.

I forgot to ask you:
What do you think is your imprint on the world?

**As if being a photographer that looks at you,
take a last picture of your body and its imprint with your mind's eyes.**

By now, you must have 6 body shapes,
6 moments of stillness in time.
Six photos taken with your mind's eyes;
blurred capturing the process of
or sharp and clear.

You may keep on going until you get tired.
It is simple:
Keep on taking different shapes in relation to
what catches your attention.

You may decide to stop here.

**As you pay attention to the sound that surrounds you and as if being
a choreographer, connect as many moments of stillness you have collected
to make a dance.**

When you finish your dance,
open your book and begin to read.

Whenever you need to shake your body,
repeat the whole task from the beginning.

Now, the score is yours.
You may amplify it
or
variate it.

*Make sure not to lose your connection
with what surrounds you.

Moving Spaces

Enacting Dance, Performance, and the Digital in the Museum

edited by Susanne Franco and Gabriella Giannachi

Into the Space of the Digital Museum

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Abstract This chapter explores the space of the digital museum, by which I refer to the space generated by digital art and the hybrid space produced in the experience of encountering collections through technology. I will showcase a number of artworks and digital platforms showing that digital museums spaces tend to be augmented, performative and relational, operating as microscopes, by bringing visitors closer or even inside artworks, and/or as telescopes, making it possible for visitors to experience remote artworks or heritage sites. These new spaces, I will explain, form deep spaces that can be encountered both inside and outside the museum, constantly renegotiating the visitor's continuous repositioning of their own presence across different temporalities and spatial configurations.

Keywords Museum. New media art. Virtual. Augmented and mixed reality. Presence. Deep space.

Summary 1 The Place of the Museum. – 2 Constructing Presence. – 3 Entering the Digital Artwork. – 4 Re-Locating Collections. – 5 Conclusion.

This chapter analyses the space of the digital museum. By space I refer not so much to the architectural space within which the museum and the collection physically reside, but the space of digital art as well as the hybrid place produced in the experience of encountering collections through technology. I use an inclusive definition of the term digital, encompassing a wide range of technologies, including virtual, augmented, and mixed reality, as well as websites and web-based mobile apps, to show how the use of digital has radically modified the space within which visitors encounter collections inside the museum and beyond.

1 The Place of the Museum

Over thirty years have passed since Eilean Hooper-Greenhill explained in *The Space of the Museum* (1990) how internal and external museum spaces frame the way in which collections are grouped and exhibited, thereby defining how learning takes place. Ten years later, John Falk and Lynn Dierking's *Learning from Muse-*

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ums (2000) shows that learning in the museum is highly subjective and dependent on situated socio-physical contexts which include the before, during and after of the visit (2000). Building on Hooper-Greenhill's suggestion that knowing in the museum is grounded in "the three-dimensionality of the knowledge-environment" (1990, 29), Falk and Dierking showed that physical context not only informs what happens in the here and now of visiting but also shapes long-term memories of the visiting experience (2000). This chapter expands on both texts by looking into what becomes of the space of the museum when the museum experience is digital, by which I mean that the museum may be online, or that the artwork experienced may be digital, or that a non-digital collection may be experienced through a range of digital platforms.

The fact that over the last forty years, museums have become increasingly invested in digital and new media art, terms which I will use here interchangeably, has led to the integration of often complex hybrid works into exhibitions and/or collections, as well as the establishment of organisations exhibiting and/or preserving primarily digital and new media artworks, such as the Ars Electronica Center in Linz (1979), which hosts a permanent collection and a yearly festival; the ZKM Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe (1989), which also hosts a collection, as well as yearly events and exhibitions; LIMA (2013; previously known as NiMK), which acts as a centre for the documentation, preservation and distribution of digital artworks; and Rhizome (2003), an organisation championing born-digital art and culture through commissions, exhibitions and preservation projects. This shows that organisations have been created that solely exhibit and preserve these kinds of works. Innovation in the field has had such a significant impact on the sector that it transformed not only *what* and *how* museums exhibit, but also *where* audiences experience and, to some extent, coproduce these works.

Museums not only host digital and new media artworks, but they also promote active participation in their collections through the use of a range of digital platforms, both in the galleries and online. This has led to a shift in the museum sector from technologies and discourses of the gaze to technologies and discourses of immersion and presence. Visitors are no longer just meant to look at a collection; they are encouraged to experience, document and share it. How they construct their presence in these exhibits then becomes of paramount importance even in considering the design of new museum spaces. Moreover, museums have become increasingly networked, often using third party platforms for dissemination as well as for exhibition, both inside and outside of the museum. Building on findings in new museology (Vergo 1989), a new field of study has emerged, devoted almost entirely to the analysis of virtual, augmented, mixed reality, net-based, and mobile museum experiences. These studies found that museums are now literally both "physical and virtual, fixed and mobile, closed and open" (Bautista, Balsamo 2011). They are both places for individual visiting, and social spaces of interaction and participation, increasingly invested in the delivery of audience-centred experiences (Simon 2010, 2). These, in turn, encourage visitors "to contribute their own ideas, objects, and creative expression to the institution and each other" (iii). In this sense, museums are becoming increasingly "distributed", consisting of off-site programmes in libraries, community spaces and schools (Bautista, Balsamo 2011). They no longer occupy just one but multiple spaces. Their place is complex and mul-

tifaceted, not only from a learning perspective but also from a social perspective. Visitors are no longer just encountering collections inside the museum, they access them anywhere and at any time. Acting as prosumers, visitors play a much more active and pervasive role in the functioning of the exhibitionary apparatus.

Building on sociologist Michel de Certeau's distinction between place, implying "an instantaneous configuration of positions", and space, formed by "vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables" (1984, 217), which led to the well-known statement that "space is practiced place" (217), I suggest that some of the most interesting qualities of the digital museum space are augmentation, performativity and relationality. Thus, the digital museum is 'augmented' in that it overlays different and sometimes remote places, in which visitors re-construct their presence by moving between archival or imaginary spaces; it is 'performative' in that visitors activate these spaces, literally becoming the performers of the work; and it is 'relational' in that visitors document and share their experiences of multiple works with others, both in the galleries and through social media. By exploring what becomes of the visitors' presence in this context, I show that these augmented, performative and relational spaces are reshaping not only how visitors engage with art and heritage but also how they construct and think of their own presence spatially and temporally. Crucially, within these spaces, the digital operates as a microscope, by bringing visitors closer to or even inside the artwork, or as a telescope, by making it possible for visitors to experience remote artworks, offering, therefore, access to sites which would otherwise, for various reasons, be inaccessible. These complex hybrid spaces do not exist per se but are practiced through the continuous reconfiguration of the visitors' sense of presence within them, and the subsequent physical and mental movement involved in achieving this.

2 Constructing Presence

The concept of presence is crucial to understand the operation of the digital museum, for presence literally facilitates the visitor's inscription within the complex hybrid spaces formed by the experience of digital and/or new media art. Presence has been researched in a wide range of contexts and disciplines, including computer human interaction, which is most pertinent to this study. Conventionally, the functioning of presence in virtual environments indicates the degree to which participants feel that they are somewhere other than where they physically are while experiencing a computer-generated simulation (Sheridan 1992a; 1992b; Slater, Usoh 1994). It follows that the concept of presence in virtual reality is not so much concerned with aura or awareness of self or other, but rather with "the *illusion of being here or there*" (Biocca 2001, 550; emphasis in the original).

While presence may be linked to immersion, it is important to note that presence and immersion do not coincide. Mel Slater and Sylvia Wilbur describe immersion in a virtual environment as a quantifiable aspect of a display technology, while presence refers to "a state of consciousness, the (psychological) sense of being in the virtual environment" (Slater, Wilbur 1997, 604f). For Slater, the experience of presence is "a human reaction to immersion" which means that, given the same level of immersion, participants may still experience presence in different ways (2003). Moreover, it

is known that it is not necessary for users to feel completely immersed to perceive presence, suggesting that “low immersive technology can create high presence” (Seichter in Wang et al 2009, 48).

There is evidence that presence may also be produced in response to mediations generated by artefacts, both physical and conceptual, “between actors and between them and objects both near and remote” (Mantovani, Riva 1999, 541). This proposition constitutes an understanding of presence that is “relational and interactive” (541). What is particularly interesting in this context, is that virtual, but also augmented and mixed reality environments in which presence is experienced can consequently be described as “networks in which people and things construct themselves mutually” (541). Such networks suggest that a sense of presence may therefore be a response to behaviours and relationships that arise within an ecology in which the actor, or participant, defines and co-constructs, with and in relation to others, their place in the world.

Presence is a key measurement not only for virtual but also for mixed reality environments. By comparison with virtual environments, mixed reality environments present a higher complexity in that they tend to be composed of multiple displays and adjacent spaces (Benford et al 1998). One of the most common factors affecting presence in mixed reality is the co-habitation of physical and simulated elements, and the transitions from one to the other. Another is the presence of multiple entities and people. When reflecting about presence in mixed reality, versus presence in virtual reality, it is therefore important to note a shift towards “social action, interaction and construction of meaning”, as multiple and often “interacting users” inhabit environments with material objects engaging a range of senses (Wagner et al 2009, 249). Social presence, the feeling of being with another person and presence, the feeling of being in a place, brought together, have been described as producing co-presence (Ijsselstein, Riva 2003), and it is co-presence that is a very important parameter for the understanding not only of what users experience in mixed reality but also how they co-operate in playing along with the illusion generated through it in the increasingly collaborative space of the digital museum. Thus, ultimately a sense of co-presence is a crucial parameter not only for the augmented, performative, and relational aspects of visiting digital museums, but also for connecting museum visitors to each other.

3 Entering the Digital Artwork

Digital and new media art comprise a wide range of artworks which include computer art, net art, interactive art, film, photography, synthetic music, telepresence, augmented, mixed and virtual reality, bioart, robotic art and cyborg art, among others. In investigating how best to exhibit and preserve these works, curators have made significant discoveries about these works’ characteristics and behaviours. Among others, they found that the preservation of these works tends to be reliant on their “network of care” (Dekker 2019). This, more and more often, includes artists and curators as well as audiences who are not only viewing or participating in the artworks but also sometimes literally contributing to generate them. Hence, digital art should be viewed as a hybrid space inhabited by users who can be variously asked to act as a participant, spectator, consumer, prosumer, explorer, visitor and

even a curator or conservator of the work. The visitor of the digital museum often adopts multiple roles, sometimes over prolonged periods of time.

The space produced by the digital artwork is complex, hybrid, and multiple, consisting of the site in which the work is placed, which may be a building, a city, or a browser; the space in which the work is activated and in which the user is present; and the legacy-space in which users share the work with others, and which survives the live phase of the work. A good example is Blast Theory's *Day of the Figurines* (2006), a massively multiplayer game for text messages set in a fictional town in which players respond to tasks often based on locations in the game and to each other over a period of 24 days in the attempt to stay alive. Another is *Rider Spoke* (2007), also by Blast Theory, in which riders cycle across a city while searching for hiding places in which to leave personal recordings for others to listen to. Both works produce an augmentation of the world of the user who switches between being a listener, a spectator and the protagonist of the work.

Digital artworks are often activated or even defined by the user's input, as in Mark Napier's multi-user space *P-Soup* (2001), which uses algorithms to generate graphics when visitors click the artwork, and Andy Deck's *Open Studio* (1999) which consists of a common interface where users can work in real time on the same image (Paul 2008, 61). The fact that the input is generated by users explains why digital art tends to produce highly subjective experiences in which users operate as performers, actively consuming and producing the content of the work. In this sense, the space of digital often coincides with the space of the viewer.

Many digital artworks take place online, as is the case of Erica Scourti's *Life in AdWords* (2012), which exposes how Google uses algorithms to translate personal information into consumer profiles that advertisers pay access for, or Amalia Ulman's four-month Instagram and Facebook performance *Excellences & Perfections* (2014) in which Ulman fabricated a relatable fictional persona whose stories unfolded through social media over a period of time. Comments by the public, which in Ulman's case was unaware that it was witnessing a performance, contribute to producing the environment of the work. In this sense, these kinds of works often generate multiple audiences who variously spectate, perform, interact with and for each other.

A work that responds not just to one but multiple visitors by capturing and replaying their presence live is Raphael Lozano-Hemmer's *Zoom Pavilion* (2015). Developed in collaboration with the architect Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Zoom Pavilion* is an interactive audiovisual installation featuring thirteen computerised surveillance cameras analysing the public's behaviour through facial recognition software and projecting their images on three walls [fig. 1]. For Lozano-Hemmer, the work is "at once an experimental platform for self-representation and a giant microscope to connect the public to each other" (Lozano-Hemmer, n.d., 3). The landscape which is produced by the visitors' presence is formed by wide shots as well as close-ups, in a "fluid state of camera movement" (3), so that visitors are always present *twice*. Not only are visitors within the exhibition space, they have also *become* the exhibition space. Simply *being* in this space, however, is not neutral - visitors here are treated as suspects, their proximity is detected, even though the charge is unknown.

The world captured in Lozano-Hemmer's *Zoom Pavilion* shows what may become possible through the metaverse, the persistent shared digital world in which people work, socialise, play sport in, under a condition of permanent surveillance. As museums too are entering the metaverse, future vis-



Figure 1 Rafael Lozano-Hemmer in collaboration with Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Zoom Pavilion*. 2015.
© Rafael Lozano-Hemmer

itors will most probably be able to encounter, purchase, create or even preserve art in the metaverse. Operating simultaneously in the metaverse and the physical world, visitors are likely to become present across multiple physical and digital spaces, performing several roles, often in collaboration with others, forming part of different on- and off-line communities. Art produced in the metaverse might require new types of exhibition, curation and conservation strategies. Metapurse, for example, the NFT funded Singapore-based cryptocurrency Metakovan, is planning to build a virtual museum as a home to Beeple's (aka Mike Winkelmann) *Everydays: the First 5,000 Days* (2021), the first standalone NFT (non-fungible token) artwork to be sold at auction (Stoilas 2021). Here, people would not only be able to access the work through a browser but also experience it in virtual reality, showing how future digital museums may emerge in response to or as a consequence of the creation of a digital artwork.

To sum up, digital artworks often consist of augmentations, whether of an everyday space (*Day of the Figurines* and *Rider Spoke*), or a museum gallery (*Zoom Pavilion*), superimposing digital and physical spaces. These augmentations are activated by visitors who become the performers of the work. What is exhibited is no longer an object, but an environment (*P-Soup*, *Open Studio*, *Zoom Pavilion*), which responds to one or multiple users who often find themselves literally inside the artwork. These environments may disclose important findings about the technologies that form them (*Day of the Figurines* and *Life in AdWords*), shedding light on how these technologies shape our presence and construct how this is interpreted by others (*Zoom Pavilion*). The overlay of physical and digital environments makes it sometimes difficult to disentangle art from life itself (*Day of the Figurines*, *Rider Spoke* and *Excellences & Perfections*) and to differentiate between the object of art and its circulation (*Excellences & Perfections*). The fact that some of these works are archival in nature (*Rider Spoke*, *Excellences & Per-*

fections, *Zoom Pavilion*), occur online (*P-Soup*, *Open Studio and Excellences & Perfections*), and take place outdoors (*Day of the Figurines* and *Rider Spoke*) has inspired museums to redefine their collection and exhibition practices by looking specifically at the relationship between the collection and the archive, the galleries and the web, the inside and the outside of the museum, the work of art and the metaverse, the self-referential universe in which museums are increasingly also exhibiting themselves exhibiting.

4 Re-Locating Collections

In addition to hosting digital artworks and engaging with their documentation and conservation, museums have also been exploring novel ways of encountering non-digital collections which have often involved the use of virtual, augmented, and mixed reality, and, in more recent times, artificial intelligence (AI). Here, I show how these practices have led to novel forms of visiting which are immersive, performative and encourage relationality, making it possible to visitors to encounter artworks under different spatio-temporal conditions and reconstruct their presence in these contexts.

From a technical point, virtual reality can be delivered in three ways: firstly, in an immersive or inclusive way (through goggles, gloves or data-suits). In this case, the participant feels as if she or he is inside the graphic, or virtual world. Secondly, it can be delivered through a desktop virtual reality, which involves viewing the 3D world through a window or a screen. The third way of delivering virtual reality is through third-person virtual reality, in which one views and steers an image of oneself interacting with other elements in the virtual world (Tice, Jacobson 1992, 281). All three delivery systems, which are concurrently used in the museum sector, refer to three-dimensional visual worlds in which a viewer can interact with the environment and the avatars or agents this may contain as if he or she were present “inside the image” (Robins 1996, 44; emphasis in the original).

Some museums have embraced the term ‘virtual’ to describe a wide range of practices which span from the introduction of digital and primarily web-based to the use of immersive practices taking place in virtual and, increasingly, augmented and mixed reality. One of the first museums which called themselves virtual was the WebMuseum in Paris, founded online in 1994 as the WebLouvre. This was the first of a number of initiatives in Europe, the USA, Canada and Asia which showed the potential of web museums to make visible vast quantities of items in their collections. Subsequently Google Arts & Culture, established in 2011, started to take high resolution images from galleries from all over the world to create novel forms of engagement with collections and to make it possible for them to bring together dispersed artworks. This was the case in their collaboration with the Mauritshuis Museum (2018), and subsequently seventeen other museums, in which the Google Arts & Culture high resolution images were used to create a virtual exhibition of Johannes Vermeer’s work.

Virtual museums can engage different or even all senses. Thus, Wendy Mackay in her 1998 study of virtual reality applications in the museum context talks about the early use of head mounted displays in the late 1960s through which users could “hear and touch artificially created objects and become immersed in virtual computer environments” (Mackay 1998). One of the earliest examples of virtual reality, *Sensorama*, conceived by the Amer-

ican inventor Morton Heilig in the 1950s, was called an “experience theatre” (Mackay 1998). An immersive, multi-sensory machine, the *Sensorama* involved different senses. Viewers could watch films such as *Motorcycle*, sense the movement produced by steering, hear the sound of traffic, feel the breeze of the wind and even smell the pollution. Museums have since continued to explore the creation of multi-sensory experiences aimed at widening visitors’ encounter with art from a phenomenological point of view. An interesting example is the Shitang Village created in the Taizhou Museum (2016) whose *People at the Seashore* exhibit of a typical fishing village in Shitang, Taizhou, shows local houses and immerses visitors in “the sound of waves, the touch of sea breezes, the odor of fish mixed with breezes and flavour of small dried fish” (Wang 2020, 4). The *Shitang Village*, like the *Sensorama*, constitutes increasingly life-like immersive stages onto which visitors become the performers of the work.

Increasingly, virtual reality is used to create a sense of immersion in habitats or environments which no longer exist, so as to enrich gallery spaces or to literally make it possible for visitors to penetrate the artwork and explore it from within. An example of the former is the *InstaVR* platform which was used in the Renwick Gallery at The Smithsonian in Wonder 360 (2015) to show a collection of site-specific, gallery-sized installations produced by nine artists. An example of the latter is the Shanghai Museum’s *China’s Treasures: Episode 5; Ancient Chinese Landscape Paintings* presented in VR (2020), which allows visitors to meander within ancient Chinese paintings.

A number of museums have used virtual reality from a conservation point of view, to provide contextual information about the lives of artists or to preserve sites at risk of destruction. An example of the former is Tate Modern’s *Modigliani Retrospective* (2017), in which visitors could explore a 3D model of Modigliani’s studio in Paris and learn more about the artist’s life and technique. An example of the latter is Sarah Kenderdine’s *Pure Land: Inside the Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang* (2012), which immerses visitors into the heritage of Dunhuang’s Buddhist grotto temples, letting them inspect the paintings in great detail and, thanks to a collaboration with the Beijing Dance academy, even watch the painted dance scenes come to life [fig. 2]. The work, which was shown in VR, AR, HMD and full-dome, showcased how this technology would work for presentation as well as for conservation.

More and more often, especially after COVID-19, museums have started to create exhibitions to connect remote audiences to their collections and each other, exploring, for example, the possibility that visitors at the Tate could experience the collection of the Shanghai Museum and viceversa, facilitating intercultural exchanges during the visiting experience either through the use of apps or immersive environments (Benford 2020). For both museums this kind of project makes it possible to generate new audience experiences, relating to different art histories while also supporting novel forms of engagement.

Increasingly, museums have started using augmented and mixed reality as a way to enable access to elements in the collection which are difficult or impossible to access. Both are often used in conjunction with gameful components, to enable the connection between the experiential and the interpretative aspects of learning. The terms come from Paul Milgram and Fumio Kishino’s taxonomy of mixed reality displays, which includes the “virtuality continuum” that covers a spectrum of different forms of mixed reality from purely physical environments at one extreme to purely virtual, or digital, en-



Figure 2 Sarah Kenderdine and Jeffrey Shaw in collaboration with the Dunhuang Academy, *Pure Land Inside the Mogao Grottes at Dunhuang*, 2012. Photographer: Catherine Leutenegger for the Laboratory for Experimental Museology. © Sarah Kenderdine

vironments at the other. In between these two extremes lie augmented reality, i.e. physical environments that are enhanced with digital information, and augmented virtuality, in which virtual environments are superimposed with physical information (Milgram, Kishino 1994). With the advent of the HoloLens, Magic Leap and other similar devices, it is most likely that in years to come digital and physical exhibits will cohabit and digital versions of both could be experienced in multiple locations, including the visitors' own homes. Crucially, augmentation through mixed reality enables visitors to inhabit multiple worlds concurrently and to experience elements of the collection that are not visible to the naked eye, or that have deteriorated or been destroyed.

An interesting use of augmentation allowed audiences to learn from a curator figure about the use of complementary colours in a painting by the French artist Jean Baptiste Camille Corot. This included the sight of a 'pentimento' in the work which could not be seen without the augmentation (Tillon 2010, 69). Likewise, at SFMOMA's *René Magritte: The Fifth Season* (2018), a project developed in partnership with Frog Design, the final room in the exhibition was designed to be an augmented reality gallery, which allowed visitors to interact with digital reinterpretations of Magritte's works. Interestingly, this augmentation required no smartphone or headset and instead used stand-alone windows which contained depth- and motion-sensing cameras integrating images of the viewers within Magritte's paintings (Kraus 2018). Another compelling example of an augmented museum is *The Met Unframed* (2021), a mobile only experience which offers immersive access to digital galleries augmenting some of the most famous artworks at The Met. Using Verizon 5G Ultra Wideband, *The Met Unframed* features over ten galleries which evoke The Met's actual galleries, and nearly fifty artworks, inviting visitors to play games that unlock augmented reality versions of the work that could be then exhibited at home for 15 minutes. The games include

trivia, riddles and a 'zoom and sport' challenge and a game called 'analysis', using The Met's infrared and XRF conservation documentation scans, which give users a glimpse of underdrawings and other hidden details of well-known Met paintings. These encourage close observation and disclose elements in the works which are not visible to the naked eye. Interestingly, *The Met Unframed* offers some of the most complex experiences of augmented visiting and has shown to produce fairly sustained engagement (Davis 2021).

Museums nowadays also often take advantage of visitors' own devices by offering self-paced tours on smartphones. Thus, *Streetmuseum*, created in 2010 by the Museum of London, is a location-based application that allows users to overlay physical locations with historical photographs as they travel around London. Among the most interesting and widely used tours are those hosted by Google Arts & Culture which were developed with partner cultural organisations all over the world. Thanks to their collection of high resolution images, Google Arts & Culture offers 'microscope views' which means people can zoom into masterpieces and analyse a feature or a hidden detail in great detail, explore a virtual gallery 'in your pocket' and so literally wander around some of the best known art at home, as well as have various encounters which, for example, allow users to create selfies to study their resemblance to well-known works, solve artistic jigsaw puzzles, and bring culture and specimen to life with augmented reality. These initiatives are aimed at bringing visitors into closer contact with the art, facilitating playful engagement with the collection and (re-)building their sense of presence in relation to it.

Of course, much of the future of the digital museum is likely to depend on innovation brought on by research in AI. Google's use of AI to recreate historical streetscapes using deep learning and crowdsourcing can give people the feel of what it was like, for example, to walk through Manhattan in the 1940s (Kiveris 2020). While Google Street View allows people to explore a terrain or map, Google's latest experiment allows users to travel back in time through the browser-based toolset *rē*, an open source scalable system running on Google Cloud and Kubernetes that reconstructs cities from old maps and photos. *Rē*, which intends to refer to principles of "reconstruction, research, recreation and remembering" (Kiveris 2020), could therefore potentially allow visitors to re-enact past experiences or experience an environment that is far away as if they were present within it.

AI is also used to explore personalised tours of collections through chatbots and to research archives, recognise features, track audiences and even reintroduce visitors to artists who may have died long ago. Thus, the *Dalí Lives*¹ at the Dalí Museum, created in partnership with Goodby Silverstein and Partners in 2019, uses AI to allow visitors to interact with a life-like Salvador Dalí on a series of screens through the galleries in the museum. As pointed out by Jeff Goodby, the Co-Chair of the company, what we see is not an actor or a person wearing makeup, but Dalí himself (*Dalí Lives*) whose uncanny presence is reconstructed from a series of photos and films.

In the future, AI might become a strategy for curation. A pilot project used a robot to develop 64 different curatorial statements based on data from the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Liverpool Biennial (Cascone 2021). The project, hosted on Artport, the Whitney's portal dedicated to commis-

1 <https://thedali.org/exhibit/dali-lives/>.

sioning and displaying web-based art which has been curated by Christiane Paul since 2001, is a collaboration with art collective Ubermorgen, digital humanist Leonardo Impett and the curator Joasia Krysa. Upon entering the site, each click produces “a new biennial universe” (Cascone 2021), showing the creative potential of AI not only to create art, or to preserve it, but also to curate displays and exhibitions using works from different museums.

5 Conclusion

These examples illustrate how museums have been experimenting with a range of technologies to generate novel kinds of encounters with artworks and heritage, so as to develop more participatory immersive experiences. Some of these experiences augment the world of the viewer by relocating them to places which no longer exist, or are too remote, or dangerous. Others encourage them to experience an artwork from within or see elements of it which are not visible to the naked eye. Some encourage them to relate an exhibit to the physical world or offer a multisensory experience. Others yet make it possible for them to adopt multiple roles and even create and/or curate their own exhibits. Some platforms use all these strategies concurrently, turning the act of visiting into an active experience in which visitors become the performers of the work, often in collaboration with other visitors.

As a consequence of the introduction of digital art and/or digital platforms, museum spaces are not only changing, but they are also literally characterised by shifts and movements. Museum spaces, overlaid with exhibition spaces which have conventionally been constructed as sequential (chronologically or by school or artist or theme), with a clear beginning and end, and an intended order (Hein 1998, 27; Black 2005, 148) as well as, more recently, relationally (Bourriaud 1998) to facilitate exploration and meandering, are being overlaid with augmented, performative, and relational ‘deep’ spaces. Within these deep spaces, which are occupied not only in the museum but also, increasingly, in the metaverse, outside of the museum, visitors continuously reposition themselves in time and space, recreating their presence, and so their *self in the world* accordingly.

In conclusion, the space of the digital museum acts both as a microscope and telescope. It augments, enlarges, brings closer, lets visitors penetrate the work of art or the item of heritage so that they can become part of it. The space produced by the digital museum is hybrid and continuously shifting. It is a space that constantly changes, relocating visitors interacting with artefacts and each other between the physical and digital world. Here, visitors do not only learn about art or heritage, but also adopt multiple roles through which they coproduce that art or that heritage. What is at stake here is not only the art or heritage but their own act of ‘presencing’ in relation to them. It is important to remember that while these spaces are said to be accessible to all, a large part of the world population still has no access to computers or the web. Hopefully, the digital museum of the future can address this inequality so that being present in these new kinds of *deep visiting spaces* becomes more of a right and less of a privilege. These new spaces could then be used to create novel histories of art, bringing to the fore new collections or even art and heritage which has not yet been collected that will help visitors to rewrite not only the history of art or even history more broadly but also their presence within that.

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Task by Masako Matsushita

1) WELCOMING

Dear visitor-reader,

Welcome to this space of experience. The following text will guide you through an evocative journey that you may practice in any room of the museum you find yourself in or in a place you dwell.

This is a list of tools you need to prepare in order to start:

- an A4 piece of paper or a note-book
- a pen or a pencil
- a compass
- a smart phone
- headphones (if you choose to listen to music)
- a camera app or a camera photo device
- some music (for example a playlist you like)
- our bodies and the place you decide to discover and activate
- 30 minutes of availability.

2) LET'S START

- suggested duration 3 minutes -

I invite you to find a place where to start from and to take a comfortable position.

I focus on listening to my body

I pay attention to the breath

I inhale deeply and exhale, deflating my lungs, the rib cage, the abdomen

I repeat this breathing pattern three more times and if I need, I close my eyes

I inhale ... and exhale relaxing the jaw, the temples, the facial muscles,

inhale ... and exhale

inhale and ... exhale

I feel the oxygen flowing and passing through the body

I bring my palms to eye level and place them gently on the eyelids

I pay attention to the texture of the skin and feel the temperature of the face

I also feel the texture of the hair with my fingertips

Gently the palms are lifted from the face and calmly

I begin to blink to adjust the pupils to the light that surrounds me until they open completely and

I begin to look around observing where I am

I try to release the tension that I can feel in the neck, the shoulders, the breastbone.

Then I join the palms of the hands at heart level and rub them together with a vigorous and energetic rubbing that generates heat.

And slowly the palms are distanced from each other and I approach the piece of paper.

3) PERIMETER

- suggested duration 5 minutes and/or play a song in the meantime -

I take a pen or a pencil and try to draw inside the sheet the perimeter of the room where I am
Possibly marking the exits and entrances, windows and doors
and any other relevant details
I take my time and observe what surrounds me

4) CARDINAL POINTS

- suggested duration 10 minutes and/or play 3 songs in the meantime -

Now I open the compass application on the phone or I take the compass
I place my body in the center of the room and I discover the directions of the cardinal points
Looking at the compass, where is North, South, East, West?
I choose one of the 4 cardinal points
Once I have decided, I go towards that point orienting myself thanks to the compass
Once reached, I observe what I find
What do I meet in this point of the room?
What is that? What material is it made of?
How is it made and what characteristics does it have
Can I sense its temperature? Is it hot, cold, lukewarm?
How is it compared to body temperature?
What consistency does it have? Is it smooth, rough, porous, metallic...?
What is its name and how would I call it otherwise?
If I wanted to give it an identity with which words would I describe it?

According to the cardinal point chosen, how does the sunlight illuminate the place where I am?
How does it get filtered through the windows?
I observe
If there are no windows, can I imagine my position in relation to the sun and the earth?

I approach the paper sheet again and try to orient myself also on the drawn perimeter. I try to somehow trace the cardinal point on it. Compared to the perimeter drawn, where is this cardinal point?
And letting myself be influenced by the memory of the discovery that took place a little while ago, I write the name or the words that came to my mind.

5) CHOOSE AND TAKE A PICTURE

- suggested duration 5 minutes in silence -

Now with the camera app on my phone, I approach the chosen cardinal point again I photograph it by choosing the portion of space to be included in the frame and maybe I include a part of the body into it.

Now I take a look at my surroundings and look for a point in the room that is the least inhabited, the least used, perhaps the most neglected or empty?

And I ask myself what does an empty space, a less lived-in space mean for me?

Could it be a corner, a hidden place behind a piece of furniture, a crack ... I don't know ... I think about it for a moment and once found it I take a second picture

And now I move to a third place which on the contrary represents the most lived-in place, the one that carries the most weight, where more people gather, where the gaze gets busy the most.

I observe it and maybe there are memories that get awake, and again I focus on it and take a picture.

6) WORD MOVEMENT

- suggested duration from 5 minutes up to 10 minutes beginning in silence -

Once these photos have been taken

I go back to the paper sheet and within the drawn perimeter I find a space to write what the word MOVEMENT means to me, without thinking too much and in a stream of consciousness.

I take my time and write everything that the word MOVEMENT suggests to me

Like a river, words flow and the meaning reveals itself

And when I think I have finished writing what the word movement means to me, I revisit the artworks that inhabit the space in which I am, and I try to think of a movement, an action, a gesture, a shape that has caught my attention and I select one.

I try to draw it in the sheet of paper by choosing another place within the drawn perimeter, I try to leave a trace without judging my painting skills or the chosen movement.

The movement becomes traced and it is the trace that moves on the paper

Now play a song with a rhythm you like to dance to, put headphones on and put the volume up.

I imagine my body making that movement. Could I become one? How would my body move when thinking about that action? When embodying that movement? My whole body becomes that movement. I stand up or I already am, and I dance that small or big movement, I feel that it expands throughout the body, I feel the body transform and dance and I dive myself in the rhythm. I dedicate this dance to the artworks around me, I let myself be watched by them and I look at them too

7) ARRIVAL

- suggested duration 3 minutes and/or play a soft and calm song to accompany you -

Slowly the movement is reduced until it disappears and I stop in front of the source of the movement, the art piece
of departure perhaps,
I concentrate on listening to my body
I feel the oxygen flowing and passing through it, I pay attention to the breath
I inhale deeply and exhale, deflating the lungs, the rib cage, the abdomen
I do relax the muscles of the face
I find a place in the room to position myself.
I make myself comfortable in a welcoming place, it could be the armchair or someplace on the floor, I follow what
the body suggests to me. I stop to remember and to rethink to echo the experience just lived.
I re-visit the places I have just crossed or I simply listen to the state I am in and if I feel the need
I close my eyes.

8) ENDING

We have come to the conclusion and I thank you for your participation
I invite you if you like to send me the photos you have taken and also the photo of the piece of paper you have filled
in at the following email address matsushitamasako@gmail.com
Thank you again for your time. I wish you a good visit and reading.

New Approaches to Documenting Performance in the Museum: Value, History, and Strategy

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Abstract This chapter shows how over the past two decades the relationship between the museum and performance has undergone a radical shift with the acquisition of performance-based artworks into the collection, shifting the role of the museum from that of a repository to that of a vital participant in the activation of the work. This chapter reflects on the new value this turn affords to documentation, and on how it is being used to support the effective activation of performance-based artworks in the museum. It reflects particularly on Tate's development of documentation practices that address these new institutional needs and on how these navigate both immediate and potential future value.

Keywords Value. Performance. Museum. Documentation. Conservation. Activation.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Re-valuation of Performance Documentation: From the Ontological to the Practical. – 3 A Brief History of the Value of Performance Documentation in the Museum: Archives, Programmes, Exhibitions, and Beyond. – 4 Developing New Processes of Documenting Collection-Based Performance Artworks. – 5 Interconnected Documents. – 6 Documenting Context. – 7 Continuous Documentation. – 8 Conclusion – The Future of Performance Documentation in the Museum.

1 Introduction

The relationship between performance and documentation, particularly in the context of the museum, is complex, full of shifting practices and re-evaluations of the documents collected, archived, and displayed. Recently, there has been a pronounced move towards considering performance documentation in the museum in relation to the acquisition of performance-based artworks¹ into the permanent

¹ This chapter focuses particularly on practices around performance documentation which have been developed at Tate over the past five years. As such, I will be using terms such as 'performance-based' and 'activation' which are in keeping with the glossary developed at Tate around these practices (Lawson et al. 2021).



collection. There has also been a collective sense of the need for reflection, analysis, and expansion of the institutional practices of documenting performance as the role of the museum in relation to performance alters from repository to producer. Here, through a consideration of the wider history of museum-based approaches to documentation and a close analysis of my own contribution to the development of a museum-based documenting practice at Tate, I reflect on some of the ways institutions have responded to this and have asserted the place of performance in the museum.

A recurring lens applied throughout this analysis will be that of *value*: what (type of) value does performance documentation have within the museum? This approach, which is informed by John Dewey's *Theory of Valuation* (1939), suggests that by considering actions – what we *do* with performance documentation – we can understand what individuals, departments, and institutions value. Dewey suggests that we can understand what an individual values by observing their patterns of behaviour (51), and the value someone attributes to something. Dewey states, “is not in what they say about it but the care he devotes to obtaining and using the *means* without which it cannot be attained” (27; emphasis in the original). This chapter also draws on Elizabeth Anderson's assertion that “our evaluative experiences, and the judgements based on them, are deeply pluralistic” (1993, 1) and that drivers behind valuation are complex, and, therefore, the value attributed to objects can be changeable and variable. It is this variation in value that this chapter explores. Analysing value is not about judgement of quality, but rather about reflecting on how the thing the museum values – in this case, performance documentation – meets its needs. Through reflection, it may be possible – as the case study here demonstrates – to adapt and adjust museum practices to ensure both an immediate and a future value for performance documentation.

2 The Re-valuation of Performance Documentation: From the Ontological to the Practical

A reassessment of the value of performance documentation has taken place in many fields beyond the museum; it is worth briefly touching here on how this reconsideration has led to a move away from an acceptance of performance documentation's subjugation to the performance moment, towards an assertion of its own sense and type of value. This allows a consideration of whether performance documentation can have a practical value, rather than being subject to the ontological value of performance.

Peggy Phelan, perhaps the most cited critic of performance documentation, asserts that “performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented [...] once it does so, it becomes something other than performance” (1993, 146). For Phelan, documenting is a process of “inescapable transformation” (148), and through that transforming of the live moment, documentation is seen to be of less significant value to those addressing the performance moment. Others question the effectiveness of performance documentation in (re)presenting performance beyond the performance moment. Erika Fischer-Lichte claims that documentation is “bound to fail” due to the lack of material remains in performance (2008, 75), while Adrian Heathfield suggests that documentation has a difficult task as performance “disappears fast and leaves the scarcest trace for historical record” (2001, 105). RoseLee Goldberg has cited the “anti-materialist points of view” (2005, 110) of

artists in the 1960s and 1970s as a reason for resistance to commodifying a work through documenting it, while Matthew Reason suggests that performance's transience could be considered an "aesthetic value in its own right" (2006, 11) which could be undermined by documentation. Artist Mary Oliver has gone even further to condemn the act of documentation as a way to "mummify [performance] and plasticize it" (2014, 15). These criticisms of performance documentation privilege the performance-moment; documentation becomes mere representation of something "whose 'real' existence lies elsewhere" (Copeland 1990, 35).

Others have reframed the actions of representing, transforming, extending and considered how they might be of value; these approaches consider what it is that documents can do, rather than what they are. Art critic Boris Groys states that "it has become increasingly evident that the art world has shifted its interest away from the artwork and toward art documentation" (2012, 209), and he considers the potential within documentation to provide access for viewers to ephemeral works. In contrast to her views on documentation as commodification, Goldberg acknowledges that documenting different aspects of a performance may "provide a fuller explanation of a performance than was evident during the actual presentation" (1998, 34). Amelia Jones also asserts that

while the experience of viewing a photograph and reading a text is clearly different from that of sitting in a small room watching an artist perform, neither has a privileged relationship to the historical 'truth' of the performance. (2012, 203)

Performance artist Kira O'Reilly also considers how documentation might give a performance "another life" (2001, 117). Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks similarly suggest that the value of documentation might lie in how it engages the viewer with the performance in the present (2001). Many of these thoughts are crystallised in the work of Rebecca Schneider, who considers the ways in which our encounters with performance documents - often photographs - might constitute a form of imaginative re-enactment. Schneider suggests documents do not just point to a past moment but demonstrate a potential future for the performance as they are used, in "collaborative exchange with viewers, reviewers, reenactors, re-performers, or re-photographers" (2007, 34). Christopher Bedford's intriguing notion of the "Viral Ontology of Performance" (2012) resonates with this in that he considers how reproduction, analysis, and discussion activate performance documents, creating a similar sense of encounter and experience beyond the performance moment. Both Bedford and Schneider consider the potential value within documentation to expand performance beyond the singular moment, through our creative and imaginative interactions with it.

Where we consider what it is that documentation might 'do' to enable activity around performance, we begin to understand how active practices of documentation within the museum may come to have value. For those working within the museum, whether they be curators, conservators, archivists, or artists, documenting performance has become a practical answer to the problem of how to enable performance-based artworks to enter the spaces of the institution. For museums, the discussions around the practices of documenting are less to do with 'if' they should document performance, and more to do with 'how' they should.

3 A Brief History of the Value of Performance Documentation in the Museum: Archives, Programmes, Exhibitions, and Beyond

The museum has engaged with performance documentation across many decades, and museums and galleries are increasingly interested in reflecting on this institutional history. Much of this engagement and the value institutions place on documentation, it has become clear, is predicated on the space(s) in which this documentation is collected, stored, and used. One such space is that of the archive. Perhaps one of the most significant early archives of performance documentation is the Dance Archive at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, an archive established in 1939 after a donation from Lincoln Kirstein, which contained “books, pictures, sculpture, costumes, drawings, documents of all kinds” (MoMA 1941, 3). Those collecting archives of performance frame the practice as an active one; the 1941 *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* states that the objects collected are “intended to serve as source material for contemporary and future inspiration rather than as a musty record of the past” (MoMA 1941, 3). Michelle Elligott and Claire Bishop both note the progression from the archive being housed in the library to its promotion to the Department of Dance and Theatre Design from 1944-48 (Bishop 2014; Elligott 2015). The framing of the intention for the archive and its promotion to its own department suggest that documentation had a value in the museum in making historical performances accessible to contemporary audiences.

Documentation has also long featured in exhibitions at museums and galleries internationally. Associate Curator for Performance and Film Frank Smigiel identifies the history of performance at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) as having started “with the exhibition *Sawdust and Spangles* (1942)” which involved “circus props, posters, and clown costumes” (in Giannachi, Westerman 2017, 35). At Tate, some thirty years later, in 1974, the exhibition *Two European Artists* also included documentation of performance-based works by Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni – including a copy of the infamous *Leap into the Void* (1960) printed in Klein’s faux newspaper. More recently, there has been a varied programme of exhibitions within museums internationally which have included performance documentation in various forms. RoseLee Goldberg explicitly stated that her exhibition *One Hundred Years of Performance Art* at MoMA in 2009 became “a fascinating history of documentation” (in Giannachi, Westerman 2017, 63) and that the history of performance and documentation are intrinsically tied together (64). While these documents are not afforded artistic value, they have a clear value as displayable historic remains, giving audiences access to a history of art which includes performance-based artworks.

Interestingly, there have been occasions where performance documents have been attributed artistic value, and this has often been linked to their inclusion in museum collections. At Tate, *Four Blackboards* (1972) by Joseph Beuys, used in the 1972 work *Information Action* (Westerman 2016a; Finbow 2017), were acquired by the museum following the performance. However, they were only moved into the collection in 1983 (Finbow 2017, 21-2), suggesting a reconsideration of their artistic value. Performance documents, specifically those made by artists themselves, have increasingly been acquired as collection artworks by museums. Photographic documentation works by Lynn Hershman Leeson of her *Roberta Breitmore* performance (1973-78), for example, are included in the collections of Tate and MoMA,

and according to records at Tate, the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, UK, acquired an entire *Roberta Breitmore* archive.

Finally, performance documentation created within museums is often dispersed widely across the departmental spaces of the museum. Projects such as the AHRC-funded *Performance at Tate: Collecting, Archiving and Sharing Performance* (2014-16) have relied on the identification of performance documents from across diverse departments - marketing, education, curatorial, conservation, institutional record depositories - to trace institutional histories of performance. At Tate, Catherine Wood, Senior Curator for International Art (Performance), states, "I take photos of what we do for educational reasons, for publicity reasons, and because artists want it" (in Giannachi, Westerman 2017, 31). There are also examples of tailored documentation practices around programmes of performance works: in parallel with Boris Charmatz's major dance programme *If Tate Modern was Musée de la Danse?* held across Tate Modern in May 2015, a tailored documentation practice was designed and implemented by the *Performance at Tate* team. Each aspect of this documentation presented a new layer of understanding and information about the relationship between the works, the museum, and the visitors/audience (Tolmie and Benford in Giannachi, Westerman 2017, 173-6; Giannachi, Tolmie, Finbow 2018). There is a strong sense here of the information value that exists within this wide, dispersed body of documentation created by the museum.

Though this is far from a full survey of the relationship between the museum and performance documentation, in these brief observations we can begin to draw parallels in the museum between the space in which the performance-based artwork resides, and the space and value that is assigned to the performance document. The entry of performance-based artworks into the space of the collection has caused a similar shift in the valuation of performance documentation: documentation becomes vital not only to the existence of these works within the collection, but also to their installation and activation in the exhibition spaces of the museum.

4 Developing New Processes of Documenting Collection-Based Performance Artworks

The collection of performance artworks which can be activated within the space of the museum without the direct input of the artist is still a relatively new practice. Catherine Wood states that Tate first began collecting live works with Roman Ondak's *Good Feelings in Good Times* (2003), and notes that MoMA also began collecting around the same period (Wood 2014, 128 fnn. 2 and 3). It is against this backdrop that numerous research projects, networks, and conferences have sought to address the challenges of collecting and conserving performance-based artworks. These have included the research network *Collecting the Performative* (2012-14), involving museum-based professionals and artistic practitioners from the UK and the Netherlands; the cross-institutional conference *Media in Transition* (2015) hosted by The Getty Research Institute, The Getty Centre and Tate; *Documentation and Conservation of Performance* (2016-21), a project at Tate in which I was directly involved, and most recently *Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum* (2018-21), a major research project at Tate into the impacts of new and complex media artworks on the museum.

Knowledge sharing and collaborative, inter-institutional, practical research has been a common thread across this shift in museum practice. The Whitney (Wahbeh 2016), Guggenheim, New York (2012), and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Time-Based Media Working Group 2017) have all publicly shared examples of the documents and processes that they use around collecting time-based media artworks. Others have presented a closer consideration of individual instances of collecting and documenting performance-based artworks. Philip Bither, of the Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, has described the “experimental acquisition” of Ralph Lemon’s *Scaffold Room* (2014) into their collection, in which memories and experiences of “curators, performers, the audience, the guards” were documented through interviews which “will end up functioning as a score” (in Giannachi, Westerman 2017, 55) for its future activations. At MoMA, Nancy Lim has both explored the process of collecting Simone Forti’s *Dance Constructions* (1960-61) and noted the constellation of documentary materials this has generated (Lim 2016).

It is against this backdrop of changing practice and collective reflection that Tate, through the *Documentation and Conservation of Performance* project, has developed its *Strategy for the Documentation and Conservation of Performance (Strategy)*. What I offer here is a reflection on my experience, as an embedded museum-based researcher of performance documentation at Tate from 2014 to 2018 who has been involved directly in the above projects from 2016 to 2019, in supporting a practical response to this moment of change and reflection. I became involved in this period of redevelopment in 2016 during my role as a pre-doctoral research assistant on the *Performance at Tate* team, in which I closely analysed – through the lens of value – Tate’s historic and current practices of and around documentation. This included tracing the institution’s activities around creating, collecting, archiving, and using performance documents. This point in time also marked the beginning of a period of reflection on practices of documentation in the institution, which had manifested in the *Live List* documentation practice developed during the *Collecting the Performative* project (Berndes et al. 2014). The *Live List* consisted of a series of interrogative questions, designed to capture information about a performance-based work as it enters a collection. I began, in collaboration with Louise Lawson (Conservation Manager, Time-based Media, Tate) and after consultation with Pip Laurenson (Head of Collection Care Research, Tate), Catherine Wood and Isabella Maidment (then Assistant Curator, Performance, Tate), to repurpose the framework of the *Live List* to create the first iteration of a new documentation process. The resulting documentation practice, known as the *Performance Specification*, kept a similar format, using headings linked to facets of the artwork under which a series of interrogative questions captured information about the work in more depth.

This also offered an opportunity to reflect on the intersection of different existing documentation practices within Tate as an institution. I began to test the *Performance Specification* in two ways: analysing existing documentation and observing performance-based artworks being activated at Tate. The staging of five performance-based works from the permanent collection at Tate in 2016 – Roman Ondak’s *Good Feelings in Good Times* (2004), Amalia Pica’s *Strangers* (2008), Tino Sehgal’s *This is Propaganda* (2002), David Lamelas’ *Time* (1970) and Tania Bruguera’s *Tatlin’s Whisper #5* (2008) – allowed me to spend several days observing the works in their activated form

in the museum, making notes on space, time, audience and so forth. I was also given access to documents produced by the curatorial team around the production of the work.² In tandem with this, I also accessed existing documentation of the works from previous activations – photography, film, reviews, programme materials – and from the acquisition process – interviews with the artist, conservation reports, acquisition reports.

A further stage in the development of Tate's new documentation practice began with a reflection on progress so far which led to the development of the *Strategy* (Lawson et al. 2021). This period of development followed the conclusion of my own doctoral research, and I participated in the project periodically as a specialist in performance documentation, working primarily on the continued testing of our new templates on the five key works performed in 2016 and considering, with others in the team, issues around loaning performance-based works. By the end of my involvement with the project, the documentation practice had expanded to incorporate three separate documentation practices – the aforementioned *Performance Specification*, the *Activation Report*, and the *Map of Interactions* – and an institutionally applicable glossary of terms (Lawson et al. 2021). There was continued testing and adjustment of these documentation practices as questions arose in preparing works for loan, as newer activations provided additional information, and as existing documentation was considered.

Since I finished working on the project in 2019, the team at Tate has also continued to expand its work on documentation practices, with Hélia Marçal developing the additional *Material Histories* document which captures the changes and evolution of the work across its life in the institution. Work on Tony Conrad's *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plane* (1972) as part of the *Reshaping the Collectible* project (2018-21), for example, included testing the effectiveness of documents created in activating a complex work. The *Strategy* continues to be tested, expanded and developed. More about the specificities of the *Strategy* and the three documentation practices implemented in 2018 can be found in the paper "Developing a Strategy for the Conservation of Performance-Based Artworks at Tate" (Lawson, Finbow, Marçal 2019). Explanations of the four documentation tools, along with downloadable templates of the *Performance Specification* and the *Activation Report*, an outline of the *Strategy* and the *Glossary* were made publicly available in May 2021 (Lawson et al. 2021). There are also many papers available which explore the continued expansion and development of many of these processes after my involvement with the project ended (Lawson, Marçal forthcoming; Marçal, Lawson, Ribeiro, forthcoming; Lawson et al forthcoming).

Having reflected here on my involvement in the development of the *Strategy* in its initial stages, what follows is not a close analysis of individual documentation practices. Rather, it is a short exploration of three key features of the larger *Strategy* which I contributed to developing, drawing on aspects of my own findings on Tate's historical documentation and practices, which demonstrate an effective reflection on the needs and valuations

² It is particularly interesting to note the involvement at Tate of a Production Manager in activating the works. The production manager, among other roles, works particularly on the physical realisation of the performance-based works shown across Tate's varied programme. For example, during the 2016 activations of some of the performance-based works from the collection I liaised with the Production Manager about performance schedules, artist visits, and the potential performance sites.

of the museum. Rather than analysing a completed institutional documentation practice, it reflects instead on how an institution might effectively respond to new institutional needs around performance and documentation.

5 Interconnected Documents

A key observation I arrived at during the *Performance at Tate* project – as noted above – and in my own analysis of Tate’s historic relationship to documentation (Finbow 2018a) was that documents relating to performances tended to be widely dispersed across the institution, often making it complex to locate them without, knowing that they exist. Therefore, the centralisation of a documentation process became a key driver for me in the development initially of the *Performance Specification* and then of the wider *Strategy*. This did not mean that a single department would become responsible for documenting, resulting in a narrow focus, but instead we intended to find a way to effectively integrate multiple existing institutional perspectives on the artwork in a way that made the information easily accessible and communicable. This would, it was hoped, mean that the documents produced would have value not just for those in the Time-based Media Conservation team, but also more broadly for those engaging with the work in different ways such as in curating, archiving, lending, or researching the work. It was also intended that in bringing together many different perspectives, through different layers and forms of knowledge about the work, the information value contained within it could again be realised in the future, by those without first-hand knowledge of how to activate the work; for this a balance of richness and accessibility was key. A particularly interesting aspect of the *Strategy* for me was to consider this in relation to my research into the way in which Rebecca Horn and curators at Tate had negotiated the display of her *Body Sculptures* through the presentation of different types of documents – drawing, film, photography, objects – in order to create an experience of the work for the viewer (Finbow 2018b).

The intersecting of documents was framed, in the early stages of development, through the initial discussion with members of the Curatorial and Time-Based Media Conservation teams, and later in the holding of workshops involving individuals from both these departments, along with other researchers based at Tate working on documenting artworks and members of other intersecting Conservation teams. This allowed for the feeding in of multiple perspectives on what performance documentation needed to do for those involved in the activation of the work. It highlighted the different use values that would underpin these documents: whether it would be for internal installation and activation, for loaning the work, or for researching its art historical significance. It became clear that potential information and use value would be best supported and realised by a documentation process which was accessible and usable, with searchable information, but also captured information which was thorough and integrated multiple institutional perspectives; it was particularly where with works which involved the use of props or objects. An example for this is Amalia Pica’s *Strangers* (2008), which involved input from those specialising in paper conservation at Tate to help us document the bunting used in the installation and activation of the performance. The Met and the Whitney have both also shared their documentation processes, which integrate multiple documents focus-

ing on different aspects of the work (Time-Based Media Working Group 2017; Wahbeh 2016).

Initially, I experimented with linking to existing documents through the *Performance Specification* documentation process. However, the realisation that the documentation process would need to be accessible to those outside of the institution expanded the documentation process from the single *Performance Specification* to a series of intersecting documentation processes, which drew information directly from existing documents without requiring the user to access them directly. By the end of my involvement in 2019, the *Performance Specification* was used to document the full dimensions of the work, with space for a written description of the work and photographic documentation; the *Activation Report* was used to document the specific dimensions of historical, and potentially future, activations of the work; and the *Map of Interactions* was used to document the network of relationships which constitute and influence the work; the map records not only those human agents - curators, conservators, installation teams, the public - who interact with the work, but also technologies, such as AV equipment or mobile phones, which have an impact on how it is activated. By tying these together through the overarching *Strategy*, they become a larger multiplicity of documents whose value is greater than the sum of its parts. This development of a documentation process which did not seek to streamline a complex work into a single document, but instead integrated different perspectives and understandings of it, closely considered the value of a rich, accessible document of information about the work, both in the immediate moment and for those accessing it in the future.

6 Documenting Context

In both the initial *Performance Specification* and the *Strategy*, I was careful to acknowledge that these were institutional documentation processes and would differ in focus from the types of documents that others relating to the work, such as the artist, a photographer, or a viewer, might create. The importance of capturing the work not as fixed or finalised, but as influenced by and shaped by its context became increasingly clear during the development stages, particularly as I looked at different activations of the work. This highlighted the importance of a documentation approach which not only captured the dimensions of the work itself, in keeping with an understanding of the artist's intention, but also the context and fluidity of the work, focusing particularly on the influences of the museum as its site of activation and the roles those around it might have in that activation.

Creating a record of what in the work was in flux' and what was 'constant' (Lawson et al. 2021) became a significant part of developing the *Strategy*. There was a need to understand the complexity of these works by not just documenting the artwork, but by documenting the artwork 'in the museum', by capturing the activities and actions being carried out around it. This drew on the wealth of documents I had received from the Curatorial department during the 2016 testing period, which demonstrated the practical and logistical aspects of activating works: timetables of performances, adverts for performers, remuneration discussions. The response to this was the *Activation Report*, which built on an existing *Installation Report* used

by Tate's Time-Based Media Conservation team.³ The *Activation Report* interrogates the work through questions which were designed to capture information about the choices and decisions made around an individual activation. The intention is, therefore, that an *Activation Report* can be created for each historical activation of the work, using existing documentation to capture the specificities of the work at that point in time and – where possible – reflect on how and why those choices were made.⁴

These documentation processes were developed deliberately to avoid fixing the work at a particular moment within its broader life. The documentation processes not only record the specific, individual dimensions of the work, they also record the decision-making processes around activations: space is provided for reflection from those involved in the activation of the work to capture this. Attention is paid to capturing perspectives on where an activation is seen to fundamentally push the perceived boundaries of the work, to try and understand the impact of this. Video documentation of an activation of an edition of David Lamelas' *Time* (1970) at MSU Broad in 2018, for example, allowed me to directly compare the space, duration, activity, audience participation and so on between this and other activations at Tate, giving extra dimensions to an understanding of the individual contexts and decision-making process; this fed information back into the *Performance Specification* through my use of the *Activation Report*. In paying close attention to these moments of change and constancy, the documentation process sites the artwork specifically within the space of the museum and considers what this does to the dimensions of the work. This aspect of the *Strategy* therefore not only considers the immediate information value that could be provided by documentation, which focused closely on realisations of the work, but also what use value this might have in the future for those activating the work and reasoning with the same set of decisions. Rather than seeking to record what the 'work' is, these documents explored what the 'museum' does to the work. These documents are intended to support the navigation of the work in context.

7 Continuous Documentation

The continued development of the *Strategy* demonstrates a final key element of the documentation process: it is never complete. With each version of the *Performance Specification*, and the addition of the *Activation Report* and *Map of Interactions*, the format responded to newly understood needs of the institution. Reflection particularly on works which had already had flux built into them – Tania Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper #5* (2008) is a key case (Westerman 2016b; Wood and Laurenson in Giannachi, Westerman

³ Other museums have similarly considered the need to document individual instances of a performance work. At the Guggenheim this resulted in the *Iteration Report*. At Tate, the term 'activation' was chosen over 'iteration' to adhere to an understanding of each performance not as a separate version of an 'original' artwork against which it could be measured, but as part of a continuous whole. This also avoided the use of 're-' terms that would similarly suggest an origin point or a 'correct' version.

⁴ It was noted by the project team that the practicality of carrying out the *Activation Report* for all future activations of the work may be bound to the resources available and might not always be possible. However, the value of documenting activations remained central to my own approach to applying the *Strategy*.

2017) - allowed consideration of what might therefore need to be built into the documentation process to address this. The layering of information-rich documents and the focus in the documentation process on capturing context began to address some of these issues, but it was only in the practical application of these processes that the value of continuation became apparent.

I had noted in my own research the unfixed nature of value in the museum, and this resonated with me throughout the development process; new needs in the museum shifted approaches to creating, collecting, archiving, and using performance documentation. Testing the *Activation Report*, and noting those points of confluence and diversion, allowed me not only to understand better what the documentation processes needed to capture in terms of the boundaries and dimension of the work, but also how the process of documenting might, itself, be part of understanding the work. I used findings from the *Activation Report* to reflect on the *Performance Specification* where I found my original narrative on the work to now have altered slightly, providing a fuller understanding of how the work might be activated in the future. These shifts in the input into the work and the forces which both alter it and respond to those alterations can also be traced within the *Strategy* in the work of the *Map of Interactions*. Narratives of change, new points of understanding, or notes about contextual shifts in the work are intended to be captured and communicated through the intersection of documents; no information is overwritten, as such, but instead should become entangled within our new understandings of the work as its life in the museum progresses.

As such, when collaborating on developing the *Strategy*, I never felt we were seeking to create a canonical group of documents which might come to represent the work in full. Nor was it intended to capture a single instance of the work in history. Instead, through this continual process of creating new documents - the multiple *Activation Report* and the display history of the work - and integrating new findings with the *Performance Specification*, the process is better able to help those in the museum understand and approach the work in providing access to information through the documents and enabling them to carry out the process of documenting the work. The value of documentation, in this case, is found not only in the document that is produced, but also in the way that the practice is applied; the work is now so intertwined with the practices of the museum that a continual documentation process which records this complexity becomes an institutional necessity.

8 Conclusion – The Future of Performance Documentation in the Museum

What has been explored here, briefly, is how the practice of documenting performance has institutionally become an increasingly integral one. In particular, the museum has embraced documenting performance as an active way to respond to the role that it is taking, in essence, as a long-term producer of the performance-based artwork. The *Strategy* at Tate, and the other institutional documenting processes which have been explored here, have demonstrated the way in which those working within the museum are increasingly considering the importance of ‘doing things’ with documents, whether this be integrating them into displays and exhibitions, or using them to support the activation of works. Through exploring perceptions of value and value judgements as tied into these actions around documentation, it has been possible to demonstrate that documentation as a process is not just rooted in an immediate reaction to the performance-based artwork entering the collection, it also always needs to be considered who might be using these documents and documenting processes in the future. In doing so, it has been possible at Tate to design, test, and refine a documentation process which creates documents which are both of value in the immediate moment and have an imbedded potential value for those using them to understand and activate the works in the future.

It is impossible to anticipate all the ways in which the relationship between performance and the museum might continue to shift and change in the future. However, by reflecting on what has been done with documentation, how it has mediated the relationship between the museum and performance historically, and what, in the present moment, institutions need documentation to do, we can grapple with the importance of continuous reflection on and development of institutional performance documentation processes. The analysis here should not be considered as a comprehensive reflection on the *Strategy* at Tate – as this continues still to develop – but instead as a moment of reflection on what has shaped that documentation process during my own period of interaction with it; what I believe to have been innovative and effective within it; and how its value in the future has been a central concern. Rather than claiming the *Strategy* as an example of best practice to be widely adopted, I have suggested how institutions might use reflections on value to approach developing and applying effective and useful documentation processes that speak to and anticipate individual institutional needs around performance-based artworks in their collection, both now and in the future.

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Moving Spaces

Enacting Dance, Performance, and the Digital in the Museum
edited by Susanne Franco and Gabriella Giannachi

Notes on Contributors

Quim Bigas Bassart was born in Malgrat de Mar and he lives between Barcelona and Copenhagen. He is an artist working within the fields of choreography, dramaturgy and documentation practices. Since 2018, Quim has been a Lecturer on Choreography and he is also one of the coordinators of the MA on Choreography at Den Danske Scenekunstsolen in Copenhagen. Between 2018 and 2020 he has been a selected artist for the EU project *More Than This*. In 2019, Quim premiered DV (*Desplaçament Variable*) in Mercat de les Flors and he has been involved in a series of performative lectures around abandoned archives (*Desplega Visions*). He also keeps on touring his previous works *MOLAR*, *APPRAISERS* and *THE LIST* and he continues his long-term collaboration as a dramaturge with Aina Alegre. He has been an associate artist with Fundació Mirò (Barcelona) and Mercat de les Flors (Barcelona) for the Creative Europe project *Dancing Museums. The Democracy of Being* (2018-21).

Ingrid Berger Myhre is a Norwegian choreographer and performer based in Brussels. She holds an MA in Choreography, Research and Performance from ex.e.r.ce at the Choreographic Centre in Montpellier and she later deepened her practice in dance at P.A.R.T.S' Research Studios. Since 2015, she has been developing her work as an associate artist at Dansateliers Rotterdam and recently with the support of the Dutch Performing Arts Fund's Nieuwe Makers Regeling (2019-20). Language and semiotics are central elements to Ingrid's artistic work. Her curiosity for how we read and understand dance comes together in unpretentious and humorous performances. The solo *BLANKS* (2019) and the duet *PANFLUTES AND PAPERWORK* introduced her work internationally under the support of Caravan Production (2020) and the advancing performing arts project (APAP) network. She has been an associate artist with Dansateliers for the Creative Europe project *Dancing Museums. The Democracy of Being* (2018-21).

Thomas F. DeFrantz is Professor at Northwestern University who specialises in African diaspora aesthetics, dance historiography, and intersections of dance and technology. Books include *Routledge Companion to African American Theater and Performance* (with Kathy Perkins, Sandra Richards, and Renee Alexander Craft, 2018); *Choreography and Corporeality: Relay in Motion* (with Philipa Rothfield, 2016); and *Black Performance Theory: An Anthology of Critical Readings* (with Anita Gonzalez, 2014). DeFrantz received the 2017 Outstanding Research in Dance award from the Dance Studies Association. DeFrantz acted as a consultant for the Smithsonian Museum of African American Life and Culture, contributing concept and a voice-over for a permanent installation on Black Social Dance that opened with the museum in 2016. DeFrantz directs SLIPPAGE: Performance|Culture|Technology, a group that explores emerging technology in live performance applications, and believes in our shared capacity to do better and engage creative spirit for a collective good that is anti-racist, proto-feminist, and queer affirming.

Acatia Finbow is an independent researcher working in the areas of performance, documentation, conservation, and museums. Her research considers historical and contemporary valuations of the practices around performance documentation within institutions. She completed her PhD in 2018 through a collaborative doctoral award with the University of Exeter and Tate, during which she was a member of the research team on the AHRC-funded project *Performance at Tate: Collecting, Archiving and Sharing Performance* (2014-16). While working as a pre-doctoral researcher at Tate, she also contributed to the project *Documentation and Conservation of Performance* (2016-21) and the Horizon-funded project *A Cartography of Socially-Engaged Participatory Art Practices* (2016-17). She has been a member of the Theatre and Performance Research Association's working group on Documenting Performance, and has published in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, *Journal for New Music Research*, and the *Journal of the Institute of Conservation*. She is a research assistant on a forthcoming publication on the history of the National Theatre, London and Events Producer in the Research Forum at The Courtauld, London.

Susanne Franco is Associate Professor in Dance, Theatre and Performance Studies at Università Ca' Foscari Venezia. She is the Principal Investigator of the international research project *Memory in Motion: Re-Membering Dance History* (Mnemedance 2019-22) and has coordinated the Ca' Foscari Unit for the international research project *Dancing Museums: The Democracy of Beings* (2018-21, EACEA, Creative Europe). She has directed the book series "Dance For Word\ Dance Forward. Interviste sulla coreografia contemporanea" (2004-11), and she is the author of *Martha Graham* (2003), *Frédéric Flamand* (2004) and the editor of *Ausdruckstanz: il corpo, la danza e la critica* (special issue of *Biblioteca Teatrale*, 2006). With Marina Nordera she co-edited *Dance Discourses: Keywords in Dance Research* (2007); *Ricordanze. Memoria in movimento e coreografie della storia* (2010); and *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Memory* (forthcoming), and with Cristina Baldacci she co-edited *On Reenactment: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools* (forthcoming). As a curator, she collaborates with Fondazione Querini Stampalia (Venice), Foundation Pinault-Palazzo Grassi (Venice), Lavanderia a Vapore (Turin), and she was in charge of the dance events for the Hangar Bicocca (Milan, 2009-11).

Gabriella Giannachi is Professor in Performance and New Media and Director of the Centre for Intermedia and Creative Technology at the University of Exeter. Her most recent book publications include: *Virtual Theatres* (2004); *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts*, edited with Nigel Stewart (2005); *The Politics of New Media Theatre* (2007); *Performing Presence: Between the Live and the Simulated*, co-authored with Nick Kaye (2011); *Performing Mixed Reality*, co-authored with Steve Benford (2011); *Archaeologies of Presence*, co-edited with Nick Kaye and Michael Shanks (2012); *Archive Everything* (2016) and *Histories of Performance Documentation*, co-edited with Jonah Westerman (2017). She has collaborated with museums in the fields of new media and performance documentation (e.g. Tate, The Photographers Gallery and LIMA) while also developing novel digital platforms for the creative experience of collections in collaboration with computer scientists at University of Nottingham, Tate and Royal Albert Museum and Art Gallery.

Monica Gillette is a dramaturge and choreographer, with expertise in artist driven networks, participatory projects and transdisciplinary research. As a dramaturge she accompanies the EU funded projects *Migrant Bodies – Moving Borders*, *Empowering Dance* and *Dancing Museums. The Democracy of Beings*, as well as the *Museum of Human Emotions*, a collaboration between artists and networks in Europe and Asia. She collaborates with Yasmeen Godder Company on the *Practicing Empathy* project, which grew from their co-artistic directorship of *Störung/Hafra'ah* that brings together people living with Parkinson's Disease, professional dancers and scientists to collaboratively research movement.

Ananya Jahanara Kabir is Professor of English Literature at King's College London. For her innovative work in the Humanities, she was awarded the Infosys Humanities Prize (2018) and the Humboldt Research Prize (2019). Author of *Territory of Desire: Representing the Valley of Kashmir* (2009) and *Partition's Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia* (2013), she has researched the connections between African-heritage dance, modernity, and creolisation through an ERC Advanced Grant for the project *Modern Moves* (2013-18). She is currently

working on a monograph drawing on that research, entitled *Alegropolitics: Connecting on the Afro-Modern Dance Floor*. Her new research project is on *Creole Indias*. In May 2020, she and the Franco-Tamil writer Ari Gautier co-founded the cultural platform Le thinnai Kreyol to disseminate their vision of a creolised, plural, and archipelagic India. From 2020-21, she assembled and led the curatorial team for the digital publication *Carnival in the Making*, the culmination of a three-year project *Echoes of the South Atlantic*, funded by the Goethe-Institutes of London and São Paulo, and involving 12 transatlantic artistic collaborations; the publication went online in April 2021.

Ariadne Mikou is a Greek-born artist-researcher and dance scholar who is currently residing in Italy. With a background as an architect, dance performer, and choreographer, her research is located at the crossover between corporeal, spatial and screen-based arts. Her projects explore alternative modes of archiving (“unstable archives”), as well as liminal spaces and in-betweenness, transformation processes, community making and site interventions. In 2018, she was awarded her fully-funded PhD Degree in Interdisciplinary Choreographic Research from the University of Roehampton (UK). Currently, she is a Fellow Artist for Creative Europe’s *mAPs-migrating Artists Project_Challenging Dance and Cinema Across Europe* and a Research Fellow at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice for the action-research project *Dancing Museums. The Democracy of Beings*. She is also a Research Assistant for the SPIN project *Memory in Motion. Re-membering Dance History* and she collaborates as an editor for the global theatre portal The Theatre Times.

Masako Matsushita is an Italian-Japanese movement artist. In her choreographic projects and performative installations, she explores the presence of the body in time and space by activating sensory perceptions and investigating methods of archiving and transmission that connect past, present and future. Winner of the Prospettiva Danza Award 2018, she has presented her work in national and international festivals and is one of the founders of 4bid Gallery Amsterdam. She collaborates with the Norwegian artist Ingvild Isaksen with whom she has formed the artistic duo A MasIng Productions. She has also been an associate artist with Centro per la Scena Contemporanea (CSC) at Bassano del Grappa for the Creative Europe project *Dancing Museums. The Democracy of Being* (2018-21).

Ana Pi is a choreographic and imagery artist, ‘extemporary’ dancer, researcher in urban dances and teacher. Ana Pi’s practice is situated between the notions of movement, displacement, belonging, superposition, memory, colours and ordinary gestures. *O BANQUETE, COROA, NoirBLUE, DRW2* and *Le Tour du Monde des Danses Urbaines en 10 villes* are her pieces which combine choreography, speech and installation. *CORPO FIRME; danças periféricas, gestos sagrados* is the practice that she has been sharing since 2010. Currently, she is developing *The Divine Cypher*, a project in Haiti funded by MoMA-New York and Cisneros Institute. She is also developing the trio WOMEN with Annabel Guérédrat and Ghyslaine Gau and Rádio Concha with the philosopher Maria Fernanda Novo. *RACE* with @Favelinhadance and Chassol premiered in 2021. She has been an associate choreographer with La Briqueterie for the Creative Europe project *Dancing Museums. The Democracy of Being* (2018-21) as well as an associate artist at the production office Latitudes Contemporaines.

Gerald Siegmund is Professor of Applied Theatre Studies at the Justus-Liebig University in Giessen, Germany. He studied Theatre, English and French literature at Goethe-University in Frankfurt am Main. From 2005 to 2008 he was assistant professor at the Institute of Theatre Studies in Berne, Switzerland. Among his research interests are theatre and memory, aesthetics, dance, performance and theatre since the beginning of the 20th century. Between 2012 and 2016, Gerald Siegmund was president of the German Association for Theatre Studies (GTW). He is currently a member of the editorial board of *Dance Research Journal DRS*. He has published widely on contemporary dance including the work of William Forsythe. His most recent publications are: *Theater- und Tanzperformance zur Einführung* (2020); *Jérôme Bel. Dance, Theatre, and the Subject* (2017); and together with Rebekah Kowal und Randy Martin *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Politics* (2017).

Eleanor Sikorski is a dancer and choreographer based in Nottingham, UK. She grew up and studied in London (LCDS 2006-10). Her performance work spans dance, comedy, cabaret and music. She co-runs Nora with fellow dancers Stephanie McMann and Flora Wellesley Wesley; together they invite choreographers to make work for them to perform (most recently by Eleanor Bauer and Deborah Hay) and they advocate for dancers' working rights. Eleanor has worked as a dancer for artists including Eva Recacha, Else Tunemyr, Seke Chimutengwende, Igor & Moreno and William Hunt. Eleanor is a filmmaker and has made films for artists Es Morgan, Sue MacLaine, Seke Chimutengwende and Feet Off The Ground. With her partner, dance artist Lewys Holt, she co-hosts *Two Left Feet*, a Youtube show about dance and leftist politics. She also works as a choreographic assistant and mentor, and since 2020 has been making comics. She has been an associate artist with Dance4 for the Creative Europe project *Dancing Museums. The Democracy of Being* (2018-21).

Jonas Tinius has a PhD in Social Anthropology (University of Cambridge) and is currently coordinator of the ERC project *Minor Universality. Narrative World Constructions After Western Universalism*, and Associate Member of the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin/Saarland University, Deutschland. His long-term ethnographic research grapples with the tensions between art, nation, migration, and colonial legacies in Europe, focusing on institutionalised forms of public cultural production (theatres, museums, galleries) and the reflexive agency of artistic and curatorial work. In cooperation with the New Alphabet School at the HKW, he coordinates the Minor Universality residency programme. He is also research coordinator of the PostHeimat theatre and migration network funded by the German Cultural Foundation (2019-21) and was founding co-convenor of the Anthropology and the Arts Network of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (2017-20). He is editor of *Across Anthropology. Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial* (with Margareta von Oswald, 2020) and *Der fremde Blick. Roberto Ciulli und das Theater an der Ruhr* (2020).

This collection of essays investigates some of the theories and concepts related to the burgeoning presence of dance and performance in the museum. This surge has led to significant revisions of the roles and functions that museums currently play in society. The authors provide key analyses on why and how museums are changing by looking into participatory practices and decolonisation processes, the shifting relationship with the visitor/spectator, the introduction of digital practices in collection making and museum curation, and the creation of increasingly complex documentation practices. The tasks designed by artists who are involved in the European project *Dancing Museums. The Democracy of Beings* (2018-21) respond to the essays by suggesting a series of body-mind practices that readers could perform between the various chapters to experience how theory may affect their bodies.



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