A Driving Force. On the Rhetoric of Images and Power

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Unseen Memories
Exploring Imagery in Jeremy Deller's *We're Here Because We're Here* and the *14-18 NOW* Project

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Abstract This essay aims to investigate the intricate interplay between visual arts and theatrical events by conducting an in-depth analysis of how their convergence can create impactful imagery; it will deal with *14-18 NOW*, a cultural program that took place around the United Kingdom to commemorate the centenary of the First World War. Within this context, the author will particularly focus on artist Jeremy Deller's performative and participatory project entitled *We're Here Because We're Here.* This case of study is significant as it represents a 'performative apparatus' that opens to some interdisciplinary artistic practices at the turn of the 21st century.

Keywords Performance. Theatre. Interdisciplinary practice. Jeremy Deller. Commemoration. Liminal Space. Archive.

Summary 1 Introduction . – 2 A Living Memorial. – 3 Questioning the Past: The Artist as Historian. – 4 The Liminal Space: Re-shaping the Commemorative Act Through the Interference of Theatre and Visual Arts.

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1 Introduction

In 2013, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport of the United Kingdom established a nationwide cultural programme known as *14-18 NOW* to mark the centenary of the First World War, creating "Extraordinary Arts Experiences Connecting People with the First World War".[1] The intention was to involve over 400 contemporary artists, musicians, filmmakers, designers, and performers by commissioning new artworks,[2] resulting in a network of artistic projects across 220 locations in the UK complemented by online broadcasts. Artists took their inspiration from the First World War British heritage, including the archives of the Imperial War Museum and other heritage organisations. By re-shaping the commemorative act, *14-18 NOW* projects presented heritage on an individual, human scale and enabled artists, participants, and audiences to connect emotionally and intellectually with the First World War. This prompted people to be more curious about those who had lived during that historical period and inspired them to find out more.

In 2014, the British artist Jeremy Deller was asked by *14-18 NOW* to conceive an artwork to mark the anniversary of the first day of the Battle of the Somme, which took place between 1 July and 18 November 1916 and was one of the bloodiest battles in the history of the British army: on the first day of the Somme, over 19,000 British soldiers were killed and 40,000 were severely injured. The magnitude of this national tragedy could only be apprehended through the conception of a nation-wide arts project bearing witness to those who perished on that day. It constituted a traumatic national disaster, which is why Deller imagined these soldiers as evanescent figures emerging from the past, akin to ghosts immersed into the present **[fig. 1]**. The event offered a new approach to the long cultural tradition of memorialisation, and it can be asserted that the monumental nature of this project took the form of a "utopian dream" aimed at outlining an "organic community" (Pinotti 2023, 9).[3]

2 A Living Memorial

On 1 July 2016, thousands of volunteers took part in a public performative event conceived by Jeremy Deller in collaboration with Rufus Norris, director of the National Theatre in London. The project,

1 The statement appears on *14-18 NOW* website: `https://www.1418now.org.uk/`.

2 The complete list of artists is available on *14-18 NOW* website: `https://www.1418now.org.uk/artists/`

3 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the Author.

Figure 1
14-18 NOW
We're here because we're here
by Jeremy Deller and Rufus Norris,
Belfast © Johnny Frazer

Figure 2
14-18 NOW
We're here because we're here
by Jeremy Deller and Rufus Norris.
People receiving the card,
courtesy Madeline Littlejohns

Figure 3 14-18 NOW We're here because we're here by Jeremy Deller and Rufus Norris, Glasgow, © Eoin Carey

entitled *We're Here Because We're Here*, was conceptualised as a 'living memorial' (cf. Deller 2017) that did not pertain to the celebration of war, but rather to the commemoration of unknown individuals who died for their country; as well as to the need to recount aspects of human history that are lesser known in the present. It represented a counter-narrative of history providing a distinct form of commemoration and approach to memorial practices.

Among all social rituals, commemorating the dead is considered the most important by Jeremy Deller (cf. Deller 2017). In the light of this reflection, he decided to use the participants as silent soldiers who would simply appear, walking on the street or sitting in the underground, thereby creating a shocking and surprising effect.[4] Volunteers were only given a rigorous set of written rules, permitting them to perform silent actions such as establishing eye contact with the public and handing passers-by cards providing the name of a soldier killed in action on the first day of the Battle of the Somme **[fig. 2]**. As well as their names, the cards provided details of the soldiers' age (where known), date of death, and the battalion and regiment in which they had served. They also included the hashtag *#wearehere*,

4 The 'surprising effect' is what RoseLee Goldberg highlights as a key aspect pertaining to the performance, especially at the turn of the twenty-first century. She states that "Bold and highly visual, close-up and personal, performance speaks of deeply human concerns, and does so with a level of experimentation that can keep the viewer enthralled, watchful and surprised" (Goldberg 2018, 75).

allowing people to share their images and videos from their direct experience. Metaphorically speaking, this represented the equivalent of tombstones and memorial inscriptions, as a plaque at the foot any traditional monument. The card was actually an instrument representing the soldiers, not a mere object that pretended to be them.

Throughout the day, the volunteers, who were not allowed to speak, would start singing 'We're here because we're here' **[fig. 3]**, a war song dating back to the First World War trenches set to the tune of 'Auld Lang Syne', a British popular song based on a Scottish poem. The song represented a symbolic medium for establishing *pathos* and empathy within the public, serving as a form of direct interaction. 'We're here because we're here' did not have a specific theme. It was neither a love song nor a song meant to remember deceased companions. Instead, it was an expression of sarcastic resignation, much like a protest sung by the soldiers. Jeremy Deller himself highlighted that the project was a "large social experiment" based on the "unpredictability in which the participants, by their actions, took the memorial to the public".[5]

The participants, who were not trained actors, embodied the presence of the soldiers' ghosts, made real[6] (i.e., visible) by the military uniform of the First World War they were wearing. Within the context of this public artwork, the uniform could provide a powerful element belonging to imagery and identity transformation. It therefore offered a different way of remembering compared to that marked by traditional monuments "in bronze or stone that […] mark great tragedies or triumphs" (Lingwood in Guida, Pinto 2022, 274). From this perspective, the uniform does not configure an object, but rather a historically situated image that privileges the probing of the real and the historical into people, places, and practices that are lost (cf. Foster 2019). Hence, it envisages

> a different way of entangling the past with present, personal memory with shared history, of bringing a human face to a historic tragedy. (Lingwood in Guida, Pinto 2022, 274)

It is possible to claim that through the surprising effect, by avoiding a public announcement of the event, Deller further modified and manipulated not only the traditional concept of the monument per se, but also its intrinsically ritualistic function. In a seemingly paradoxical frame, he defused the memorial and revisited its relational

5 Deller, `https://becausewearehere.co.uk/we-are-here-about/`.

6 Following the analysis of Jeremy Deller's practice provided by Teresa Macrì, it is possible to affirm that "the artist's genius lies in his ability to produce the real, to make it happen" (2014, 162).

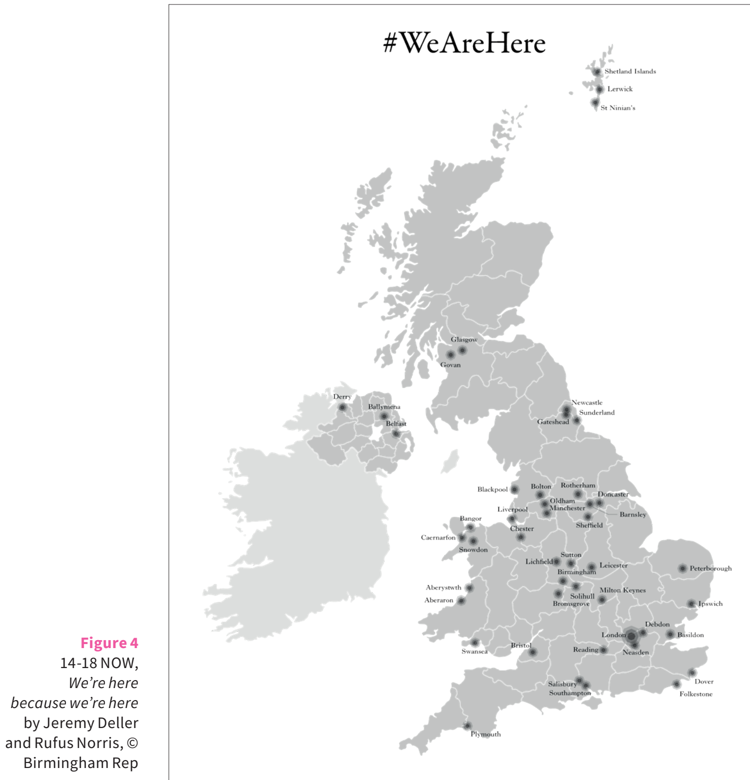

Figure 4 14-18 NOW, *We're here because we're here* by Jeremy Deller and Rufus Norris, © Birmingham Rep

component. The phase of aggregation, of shared remembrance and commemoration through the laying of devotional objects on the monument, did not occur.[7] The artist's intention was to avoid any imagery or locations traditionally associated with war commemorative events, such as churches or war memorials. Instead of specific places embodying and empowering the spirit of a nation, there was a dispersed and simultaneous commemoration made real by the presence of soldiers throughout train stations, bus stations and shopping centres across the UK [fig. 4]. Through this "visual incongruity", Deller created this "kinetic, living memorial" in order to take it to places that did not exist in 1916 (Deller 2016, 14'41'').[8]

7 Andrea Pinotti provides a few examples of rituals that are closely related to the monument and practised by visitors: "military decorations, little sculptures, flowers, flags […], but also the practice of 'stone rubbing' – which consists in placing a sheet of paper on the engraved/carved name and reproduce the letters with a pencil" (Pinotti 2023, 204).

8 See the documentary realised by Jeremy Deller in collaboration with the BBC in 2016 (https://vimeo.com/199719532).

> Chacune de ces coordonnées est un point sur la carte, qui est mis en relation avec d'autres pour constituer un ensemble dynamique, un réseau de circulations. Cet espace est donc connecté, tissé en réseau. (Kihm 2007, 249)

Each of these coordinates represents a point on the map, which is connected to others to form a dynamic whole, a network of movements. This space is therefore connected, woven into a network.

3 Questioning the Past: The Artist as Historian

Deller's dynamic network sought to foster a sense of familiarity[9] with a history that has been inherited, but not personally encountered. Hence, it enabled the audience to engage with the tangible aspects of the physical environment and directly confront the unfamiliar, while imagining and experiencing history through the lens of narrative practices. Apropos of Jeremy Deller adopting a narrative methodology, Claire Doherty pointed out that it might be possible to identify an alignment between the act of commemoration and

> the strategies of storytelling, by which a particular history of the past is sanctioned by those in the present to bring about a particular future. (Doherty 2018, 14)

This narrative framework draws attention to the role of the artist as historian and to the close connection between history and the archival medium. Given that Jeremy Deller's raw materials are people and history, his aim has always been to weave historical events, archival tension and performative reinterpretation into the present.

In this context, it is worth considering his prior historical and performative project entitled *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001) as a means of identifying the key aspects that define the artist's historical approach. The London-based artist re-enacted a confrontation that occurred in 1984 between striking miners and the police at the Orgreave Coking Plant in Yorkshire.[10] Since Deller decided

9 The use of this term is significant, as Alison Oddey noticed, in its relation to the act of walking through the landscape. Although many of the places involved in *We're Here Because We're Here* did not exist at the time of the Somme, the act of walking around the urban space while encountering ancient soldiers enabled people to create a narrative and to "re-contextualise self-identity" (Oddey 2007, 137).

10 *The Battle of Orgreave* was produced by Artangel in 2001. The event was documented by filmmaker Mike Figgis, whose film included footage of the re-staged clashes, archived material from the original event, interviews with the artist and some participants.

to use re-enactment as a medium, it is reasonable to assume that he adhered to the rules and guidelines associated with war re-enactment societies and living history museums, including rehearsal practices. This constitutes an instance of appropriating popular forms that is

> based on a popular type of reenactment immediately rooted in the American Civil War reenactments that took place during the war's centennial in the 1960s. […] These events can be seen as historicist happenings for a wide audience. (Lütticken, in Baldacci, Nicastro, Sforzini 2022, 2)

Identifying similarities between the descriptive and narrative strategies adopted in *The Battle of Orgreave* and *We're Here Because We're Here* does not aim to suggest identical methodologies and goals. Instead, this comparison intends to examine the ways in which different disciplines engage with the significant problem of "historicism: that of presenting, of making present, a past that has become problematic" (Lütticken 2022, 3). Theatrical and performative strategies were pivotal elements in the development of both projects, but it should also be mentioned that Deller employed them differently. *We're Here Because We're Here* was not configured as a war re-enactment, because the artist's intention was not to re-create the battle of the Somme, nor to re-stage it; in fact, Deller wanted to commemorate the victims through a narrative process in the form of bodies, gestures and glances. The most significant difference lies in the fact that the volunteers, unlike re-enactors, "were not acting" (Deller 2017, 63); they embodied a vehicle *representing* identity, rather than *interpreting* it.[11]

Representing soldiers from the Battle of the Somme required Deller to scrupulously adhere to the details of the original event, notably the uniforms, which constituted the primary connection between historical representation and archive research. It is compelling to consider Mark Godfrey's statement about how

> historical research and representation appear central to contemporary art. There are an increasing number of artists whose practice starts with research in archives, and others who deploy what has been termed an archival form of research […] These varied research processes lead to works that invite viewers to think about the past; to make connections between events, characters, and objects; to join together in memory; and to reconsider the ways in which the past is represented in the wider culture. (Godfrey 2007, 142-3)

11 Jeremy Deller himself was adamant that the performers should not "play characters" but "represent people" (Lim in Deller 2017, 106).

Jeremy Deller defines himself as a "cultural archivist" (*Jeremy Deller: Joy in People* 2012)[12] who seeks to create a twofold approach towards the 'archival': on the one hand, he considers the archive as his primary source to gather information, images, texts, words, and possibly photographs or video. On the other, he aspires to extend the historical event into the present times, in order to "seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present" (Foster 2004, 4) and re-connect people with human history.[13] Within contemporary art, he indeed represents a pioneer in rewriting the rules of artistic practice through collaborative interventions, merging different media and disciplines, and engaging with historical representations beyond academic history. This clearly marks a shifting moment where the artist as historian,

> coming to historical representations outside the context of academic history, and aware of the critiques made of this discipline, […] is able to work with a methodological freedom and creativity without sacrificing rigor. (Godfrey 2007, 169-70)

As for the 'rigour' Godfrey assigns to historical representations, a connection should be made with the structure that Jeremy Deller assigned to his performative project. Interweaving historical event and theatrical practice, the artist had to face a more rigorous methodology belonging to theatre rehearsal guidelines (cf. Deller 2017, 105-6).[14] Emily Lim neatly pinpoints this methodological transition in approach from visual artist to theatre artist by drawing attention to the planning phase of the project:

> A challenge at the beginning was getting into your way of thinking and understanding your position as a visual artist. Your brain felt different to a theatre brain: you wanted to avoid imposing narrative, which is something as theatre-makers we often cling to. We had to unpick together the exact feeling and experience that you

12 `https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/34189/jeremy-deller-joy-in-people/`.

13 According to Hal Foster's insights on the archival, it is possible to identify an alignment between Deller's approach to the archive and *We're Here Because We're Here*, as "the work in question is archival since it not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private" (Foster 2004, 5).

14 It was Deller who praised the methodology used in theatres. He stated that "what I learnt quickly was that the theatre in Britain is very different from the art world in that they are very good at organising people. They are not intimidated by bodies, basically, and by people moving and by enthusiasm. The art world tends to be full of slightly miserable people, pessimistic about the world" (Deller 2016, `https://vimeo.com/199719532`).

> wanted the public to have, which was a process that needed lots of time and practical testing. (Lim in Deller 2017, 105)

Having Emily Lim openly referred to narrative as an essential feature of the project, it is worth noting how storytelling represents an unequivocal feature of the commemorative act.

We're Here Because We're Here served as a compelling illustration of the non-linearity of time within historical narration, prompting a reconsideration of how the past and the future are intertwined in the present. The audience could not only witness a narrative unfolding, but also engage with a profound exploration of time challenging traditional notions of a linear temporal progression. In echoing Boris Groys' insights that further amplify this perspective, the project was in fact an invitation to contemplate the future in its perpetual state of flux, where

> the permanent change of cultural trends and fashions makes any promise of a stable future for an artwork or a political project improbable. And the past is also permanently rewritten – names and events appear, disappear, reappear, and disappear again. The present has ceased to be a point of transition from the past to the future, becoming instead a site of the permanent rewriting of both past and future – of constant proliferations of historical narratives beyond any individual grasp or control. (Groys 2009, 4)

The concept of "proliferation" as movement (Deller 2016)[15] held a central position in Jeremy Deller's work, both metaphorically and visually. This was especially conveyed through in his intention to decentralise the bodies and question time and space, transcending any geographical boundary and border, from major cities to towns, across the United Kingdom – also including Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales (fig.4).

According to Oddey, the urban landscape "for performance has always held a fascination for artists" (2007, 133); that was precisely the case with *We're Here Because We're Here,* as Jeremy Deller decided to involve his entire country in the making of his artwork, in order to rely on the audience as a witness to the event. Because the performative project was not built on a pre-determined script, the event needed to be experienced in its strict connection to time and place.

15 https://vimeo.com/199719532.

4 The Liminal Space: Re-shaping the Commemorative Act Through the Interference of Theatre and Visual Arts

The theatrical feature of this one-day event, through which the artist sought to re-evaluate the history of twentieth century art, especially comes to the fore from this perspective. It can thus be interpreted as an interdisciplinary opening within the artistic and cultural realms, as discussed by Claire Bishop (2012; 2018), Hal Foster (2003; 2019), and Alison Oddey (2007), among many others – the reification of artistic genres as well as the hermetic separation of performing and visual arts are rejected. Theatre, performance and visual arts are crucial to this case study, since participatory involvement tends to manifest more powerfully in the live encounter between embodied presences and the audience in specific contexts (cf. Bishop 2012).

The mutual influence between theatre and visual arts has been the subject of numerous pieces of research, many of which have long been institutionalised. These studies have traced the motivations and historical necessities leading to the so-called "performative turn" (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2008), which continues to characterise a highly multifaceted research domain around the ongoing debate on artistic criticism. The concept of 'performative turn' has been repeatedly discussed with reference to the visual arts, theatre, and dance. In particular, numerous academic fields such as philosophy, sociology, linguistics, and anthropology have re-examined performance as a means of addressing central issues in the social sciences, shifting their focus from a structuralist approach to the study of processes. Culture, especially in connection with ritual practices, staged situations, and the overall process of civilisation, is now regarded as a form of performance. The idea is to invert the common understanding of performance in its everyday use and to demonstrate how it now signifies a state of alteration in what has historically been systematised and known as 'performance' (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2008).

At the end of the 1950s, sociologist Erving Goffman, in his well-known *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, focused on the constitution of identity as a performative act through the discussion of the socialisation process. This implied the development of a social identity based on daily acts and modes of social interaction shaped through the contact with people's everyday environment, all viewed as a form of performance.

During the 1960s and 1970s, a number of experimental procedures emerged around the performative, with a particular emphasis on practices that expressed a plurality of forms already oriented towards the interchangeability of genres. Within this chronological frame, some performative practices started to be directed towards the analysis of their relationship with the realm of experience,

abandoning the central role of the object (i.e., both the artwork and the text). As Bishop pointed out,

> Some of the best conceptual and performance art in the 1960s and ’70s similarly sought to refute the commodity-object in favour of an elusive experience. (2012, 6)

From the 1980s onward, the performative domain has progressively and significantly broadened into areas of social, linguistic and anthropological inquiry, leading to the recognition of the hybrid and open character of performativity.

Highlighting the challenges of categorisation is therefore instrumental in identifying an opaque and composite framework, a liminal space whose apprehension is increasingly complex. Consequently, it is utterly relevant to connect *We’re Here Because We’re Here* to the notion of “liminal experience” elaborated by Victor Turner in the 1970s and further advanced by Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008, 175). The latter describes the “aesthetic experience enabled by performances in theatre and performance art as liminal experience” (2008, 175) within a conceptual sphere in which artistic and ritualistic performances differ. To this end, she underlines how as the demarcation between theatre and art grows progressively elusive, conventional dichotomies disintegrate. When one of these terms can concurrently assume the meaning of the other, attention gravitates towards the instable transitional phase and the transcendence of boundaries. This phenomenon results in an interstitial space between these opposites, identifying a state of in-betweenness[16] which is thus elevated to a privileged category. Aesthetic experience holds an immense significance within performative aesthetics, as it is closely related to the character of any event (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2008).

We’re Here Because We’re Here has thus adopted the form of the event, introducing a new approach to ritualistic commemorations within this liminal space. The transformations and social changes brought about by the liminal phase not only pertains to the transformation of the participants’ social statuses, but also transforms their perception of reality. During certain performances, individuals may step outside their everyday roles and engage in behaviours that challenge societal norms and expectations. This demonstrates the significant advancement of the anthropological thought within the performative field, redirecting the focus of artistic practices from the artwork – generally speaking, the object – to the audience.

16 See Lacy, S. (2018). *Across and in-between, 14-18 NOW* website, https://www.1418now.org.uk/commissions/across-and-in-between/.

The diversion had a strong resurgence between the two centuries. The early twenty-first century revealed a notable involvement among contemporary artists in experimenting with interdisciplinary practices, identifying "cross-art forms" that explored the intersection of "art, performance, landscape and theatre" (Oddey 2007, 42). A close alignment between performance-making, theatricality, and elements of theatre was identified, aiming to produce a "cross-pollination" (Oddey 2007, 5) with architecture, urban space and visual arts, too.

With regard to visual arts, a similar shifting from the artwork to the spectator can be identified in relation to interdisciplinary practices. It is compelling to consider Hal Foster's analysis about this tendency applied to the research field, where he identifies the subject as a "repository of social relations" (2003, 84) within an unstable artistic space defined as "formless".[17] Apropos of formlessness as opposed to any attempt at labelling, it is crucial to mention Allison Oddey's insights into the critical debate on 'new' art forms:

> The vision of the twenty-first century performance-making culture is viewed in a disintegrated world that lacks connection and integrity. (2007, 43)

This is closely tied to digital fluidity, which is a distinctive feature of contemporary art, especially in the context of experiential situations. That was precisely the case with *We're Here Because We're Here*, as it was also designed to reach the maximum impact on social media.

Conclusions

The seemingly ephemeral event thus underwent a migration into a digital project appropriated by the audience, whose essential contribution laid in their presence. People took on the responsibility for project documentation, its storytelling, and even its archiving.

Between the 1990s and the early twenty-first century, the growing interaction between the artistic medium and the audience's presence culminated in the "practice of self-documentation", which further evolved into "a mass practice and even a mass obsession", as notably discussed by Boris Groys (2009, 9). The digital turn marked a social and cultural phase following the age of industrial production

17 The concept of 'social relation' recalls both Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) and Claire Bishop's notion of "Social Turn" (Bishop 2012, 11).

and mass consumption, leading to the identification of the "post-production" era as discussed by Bourriaud (2005). This transition further marked a

> changed status in the work of art in an age of digital information […] That such a new age exists as such is an ideological assumption; today, however, information does often appear as a virtual readymade, as so much data to be reprocessed and sent on, and many artists do "inventory", "sample", and "share" as ways of working. (Foster 2004, 4)

Approaching the digital transformation, the art world confronted a shifting interest away from the artwork in favour of art documentation (cf. Groys 2008), looking for a medium that could not only display and preserve the artwork, but also capture its experiential feature. The digital therefore turned into an archival device.[18] On the one hand, the advent of the Internet and social media, coupled with the impulse towards sharing live events, has undeniably entailed a significant change in both the production and consumption of artworks. *We're Here Because We're Here* therefore represents a suitable instance of an unexpected, ephemeral, one-day long project that incorporates the idea of sharing its live experience online. On the other, digitising the original image raises identity issues, blurring the distinction between the original and its copy,[19] as well as between the ephemeral and the permanent.

Illustrating this dual perspective enables us to outline the audience's disposition and expectations towards contemporary art. In the contemporary milieu, the audience willingly embraces the opportunity to actively engage in the constructive essence of the artwork, assuming an integral role. This willingness is particularly noteworthy, given the prevalent trend in contemporary art to involve the audience in such a participatory dimension. Within this framework, the element of transience enhances the connection between the artwork and the individual even further; hence, the concept of 'ephemeral'

18 The term 'device' is currently used in connection with Giorgio Agamben's definition of 'apparatus'. In his well-known essay *What Is an Apparatus?*, he further expanded the class of Foucauldian apparatuses, claiming that "an apparatus [is] literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions. or discourses of living beings. Not only, therefore, prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, juridical measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy. agriculture, cigarettes. navigation, computers, cellular telephones and – why not – language itself. which is perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses" (Agamben 2009, 14).

19 See Boris Groys' *Insights in From Image to Image File - and Back: Art in the Age of Digitalization* (2008, 83).

enables the audience to directly address the artwork, and actively engage with it. However, the act of collecting images came to take precedence over the art event itself, leading to the creation of genuine informal archives circulating online.

The causes of these trends can be traced back to the turn of the twenty-first century, when the attention towards performative events has "not only reactivated a place for performance but also recreated a community for it" (Foster in Goldberg, 2007, 10). Therefore, many artistic, mostly performative works reached people through their immediacy, enabling them to directly perceive the image created by the interaction of body and medium. Accordingly, the performative event establishes a connection in the way of the experience between private and public bodies. As Hans Belting also noted on this subject,

> private or individual bodies also act as public or collective bodies in a given society. Our bodies always carry a collective identity […], and a particular visual environment. (Belting 2005, 311)

At the conclusion of the one-day event, a dissemination of photographs and videos in the digital space occurred, spanning across social networks, blogs, online magazines, and transforming "the artwork into documentation of a life event" (Groys 2008, 58).

It is compelling to consider two pivotal events arising from *We're Here Because We're Here*, notably the documentary conceived by Deller, filmed and produced by the BBC, and the subsequent exhibition at theatres and venues across the UK between 2017 and 2018.[20] Both the production and the exhibition of the documentary highlight extremely significant issues of contemporary relevance. Within the contemporary art paradigm, there is a call to question traditional museum settings in favour of contexts shaped by media-generated taste (cf. Groys 2008). Nevertheless, active engagement and confrontation with museums persist as crucial components of the contemporary cultural and social system, considering that

> the very idea of abandoning or even abolishing the museum would close off the possibility of holding a critical inquiry into the claims of innovation and difference with which we are constantly confronted in today's media. (Groys 2008, 21).

In conclusion, it is possible to claim that Jeremy Deller has produced a long-term project, also conceived for its dissemination and

20 In 2017, the Tate acquired *We're here because we're here 2016*, a black frame containing twenty printed calling cards mounted in a four by five grid (`https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/deller-were-here-because-were-here-p82019`).

transmission, thereby establishing *We're Here Because We're Here* as an enduring and historically significant artistic project. The archival approach is evident, and a discernible tension with the museum is perceived: within this framework – and considering the exhibition resulting at the end of 14-18 NOW project – it is worth concluding the analysis on *We're Here Because We're Here* by establishing an analogy between Deller's methodology and Boris Groys insights on the museum (2008).

The latter therefore reflects on the exhibition space as a place in which the viewers can not only reflect on contemporary artistic tendencies by producing critical inquiries, but also extend their relational experience to both the artwork and other participants. Groys reflects on how

> Art today is thus social and political on a purely formal level, because it reflects on the space of the assembly, on the formation of community, and does so independently of whether an individual artist has a specific political message in mind or not. (Groys 2008, 182)

Therefore, by analysing Deller's project through Groys' words, it is possible to affirm that relying on the space of the exhibition especially comes to the fore as it enables the audience to confront the historical, the contemporary, and their mutual influences.

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