

Moving Spaces

Enacting Dance, Performance, and the Digital in the Museum

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Introduction

Moving Spaces: Rewriting Museology Through Practice

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This volume is the first in the new series, “The Future Contemporary. Inquiries into the 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-

scopes, 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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