

REFLECTION

Permanent Collection

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MUNCH museum, Monumental Hall, 2021. Ingunn Rimestad & Jens Trinidad

Introduction

In this reflection, I have set out to articulate a set of concerns and themes that have grown in importance during research carried out over the past three years. Some of these concerns were already present in a scattered fashion in the last ten years of my art practice. But thanks to the time afforded by this research period, I have had the opportunity to go deeper and elucidate my thoughts about them.

Some of these themes are more politically minded. I thought it was urgent to address them in relation to art practices and in relation to the world we live in at the present time. In some way, I felt that I had a duty to formulate thoughts not only concerned with myself and my practice (what I did, read, tried out, etc.) but also to look at broader contexts and problems that might concern other practitioners and cultural workers.

I chose to take the term ‘reflection’ rather literally and reflect on my working process, always keeping in mind a broader picture of the field within which we work and produce. Questions such as “how do we produce?” touch on political and economic realities that merge into the thinking around the artistic process I have been going through.

I am not claiming that I have managed to give an exhaustive account of my research but rather I am offering a selection of topics for contemplation, ones that seem pressing and relevant in terms of how I see art practice in my field at the moment of writing.

During these last three years, the world has been transformed once more and has been subject to a number of crises. We have seen a continuous deterioration of the public

sphere under the pressure of yet more privatization agendas in Europe. Research funding is threatened even in the wealthiest parts of the world. Populist and nationalist discourses are ever more present in our daily politics. The precarization of work is weakening the social contract we once took for granted.

Working with live performance, in which the body is central, must necessarily address questions of solidarity, alliance, the fragility of the body, exclusion, and the economic. It is in consciousness of these conditions and circumstances that I have produced this reflection.

My background is that of an artist without prior art history or other academic training. It is through the experience of a practice that I am writing. I am aware that writing is not the medium I have trained in but nevertheless I am happy to attempt to formulate my thoughts and experiences through which I hope to provide an insider view of my modes of production and artistic thinking. This is not meant to be a disclaimer but rather an honest account of my position in the art world and academia.

With this reflection, I have tried to acknowledge and weave together both the concrete working methods underpinning my research project and theoretical reflections on its context, production, politics and economy.

Acknowledgments

The making of the works presented here and the artistic research process owe a great deal to a range of friends, colleagues, teachers, writers and others. One is never alone in making. Making is always informed by the production of others.

Permanent Collection owes much to the support and insights during more than two decades of artistic life spent together with choreographer and dancer Brynjar Ábel Bandlien.

Permanent Collection follows on from and is indebted to a previous work, *Public Collection*, which I made in collaboration with fellow artist Alexandra Pirici.

Permanent Collection is also informed by a long-term research project, *Collective Exhibition for A Single Body*, made in collaboration with curator Pierre Bal-Blanc and the Kontakt Collection Vienna. I have applied many of the research methods I learned through this fruitful collaboration with Pierre Bal-Blanc.

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Handbook (Instruction Manual)

Framework and general concept

“Solid things can be nomadic but never movement”¹

Mykki Blanco

“I found my drive to diversify permanent collections. They are the beating heart of the art world. If you can change the collection, you can change the public story of art.”²

Helen Molesworth

“Performance is about movement, it demonstrates the provisional nature of culture, and it includes the viewer within the frame. This seems important, both aesthetically and politically.”³

Catherine Wood

¹ Mykki Blanco, African American queer rapper.

² Helene Molesworth, former chief curator of MOCA Los Angeles.

³ Catherine Wood, Art Historian and Director of Programme, Tate Modern

At first glance *Permanent Collection* makes a simple research proposal: to attempt to construct a permanent collection collectively by means of a movement-based practice usually associated with impermanence or ephemerality.

My hope is to use the contradictions inherent in this title and research proposal to mobilize critical thinking about the category of the permanent. In so far as it plays a role in artistic politics and production today. I will go into some of these aspects along the way of this reflection.

“One of the aims is to underscore the impermanence of what is deemed permanent in the museum context, as this notion has been forged by Western museological conventions, partly based on the need to preserve plundered artefacts in order to establish canonical representations of world art and the history thereof.”⁴

Permanent Collection is also a meditation on the museological paradigm of permanent care juxtaposed with notions of temporary labour (the worker and the performer), as I will try to demonstrate. This is a speculative idea that took shape while I was researching *Permanent Collection*: long-term care versus short-term working contracts, long-term relations with an institution, places, people etc. versus precarity, the gig economy, and self-exploitation under the pressures of a neo-liberal world view. Is there a way to re-imagine the permanent from the point of view of care and labour rights?

At the same time, the category of the permanent in its western-centric and colonial dimension is another matter that demands attention. For example, in their publication *Permanent Temporariness*, Alessandro Peti and Sandi Hilal, of Decolonize Architecture

⁴ Art historian Magda Radu, in conversation with Manuel Pelmus, discussing *Permanent Collection*.

(DAR) state that “The colonial project has worked to convince people that the only valid and valuable culture is the permanent one.”⁵

So, my proposal is to interrogate ideas about the permanent collection in order to challenge traditional notions of ownership, preservation, heritage, as belonging to one institution or nation (or both).

Enactment and embodiment have been used as a performative strategy (method) that addresses the context of specific places and institutions, moving “undisciplined”⁶ between strict classification categories and notions (concepts) of ownership, **suggesting the possibility of an embodied, movement-based, commonly shared heritage.**

A collective heritage of gestures that belongs to everyone.

These enactments address the relationship between subject and object by blurring the distinction between the living and the non-living, human and non-human, subject and object.⁷ Various performers enact and embody different materials, undergoing transformation into different mediums, to open a space for questioning and moving between different categories.

From the earliest days of the project, to manifest the idea of a commonly shared heritage, I envisaged the construction of a performative protocol of collaboration, of literally moving together simultaneously, linking small entities and independent spaces, in an endeavour to co-create and simultaneously experience a constellation of memories, affects and knowledge.

⁵ Alessandro Petti & Sandi Hilal, *Permanent Temporariness*, Royal Institute of Art Stockholm / Art and Theory Publishing, Stockholm, 2019, page 55.

⁶ Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Duke University Press, 2011, page 6-15.

⁷ BAU Agency: Art & Nature, 2016. Exhibition text for Manuel Pelmus & Alexandra Pirici, *Untitled*, 2016

My aim was to collaborate with a range of independent spaces and institutions, creating an ongoing network of distinct temporalities that co-exist and insist on accumulation through transformation. This would produce a situation in which institutions and non-institutions of very different scales and contexts would co-operate and act together in order to present their ‘permanent collection’ simultaneously.

Museums and art institutions in general have widely dissimilar permanent collections. Historically speaking, many permanent collections were constructed through acts of plunder and were instrumental in instituting symbolic acts of cultural domination, securing the status of the institution by displaying ‘the most valuable and unique art works.’ In my proposal, all the participating institutional and non-institutional spaces would exhibit the same permanent collection simultaneously. I wish to initiate an operation that generates (unusual) alliances rather than competition.

Constructing a protocol for moving together across time and space was an early formulation of what would become an essential tenet of *Permanent Collection*: the unification of collective experiences through the imaginative and corporeal medium of performance, as I will try to describe in detail.

Although there is no visible link between the presentation spaces, the knowledge of these shared movements connects audiences from city to city, opening a territory of participation, linking the performers and the public in a fluid, open-ended alliance, co-present in a time-space that is both imaginary and real. A horizontal monumentality.

I am here using ideas drawn from Judith Butler’s book *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*,⁸ in which Butler asserts that embodied ways of coming together,

⁸ Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Mary Flexner Lectures of Bryn Mar College), Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2015.

including forms of long-distance solidarity, imply a new understanding of the public space of appearance that is essential to politics.

I have a background in choreography prior to moving into the visual arts. In my practice, I insist on a hybrid or “undisciplined”⁹ display format that mixes the temporalities of theatre and exhibition, in the hope that this might produce a space for negotiating and re-imagining existing categories. The etymology of the term choreography means literally ‘writing the chorus,’ the circle dance. This explicitly addresses the way we organize moving together, with each other, with other non-human entities, with contexts, environments, etc. For me, this is also a political task – imagining ways of being and acting together through embodiment. It is also the explicit task of *Permanent Collection*.

Another key intention for proposing a protocol for moving together simultaneously across different locations in time and space is a desire to subvert the logic of a totalizing and ‘complete,’ or ‘unique,’ event by forming a display structure that would allow the works to co-exist in a heterogenous and non-linear (queer) temporality. Rejecting canonical and patriarchal blood lines, in search for other types of kinships. Or queering the canon.

Queerness is imagined here, not exclusively in terms of representation, but also in an expanded notion of queer to upset and re-think dominant and hegemonic/normative structures.

In the same sense my aim is to realize my initial proposal of embodying long-distance forms of alliance at the level of content, also at the formal level of exhibition/display, which I believe also encompasses (at times problematic) politics.

⁹ Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Duke University Press, 2011, page 6-15.

“Art exhibitions also frequently adopt linear models to represent historical flux and the relationship between past art and recent production. To be sure, there is a correspondence between the linearity of these narratives and their tacit – or implicit – totalizing will... The ideological effects of these types of exhibition strategies are well known: the consolidation of an artistic canon, and therefore the staging of a series of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that assures its permanency.”¹⁰

Other important aspects I have explored are to do with the relationship between bodies and the construction of collective memory, acknowledging that even when one acts or moves alone these acts are always animated collectively in relation to other humans and non-humans, materials, multiple histories, etc. I endeavoured to make this visible through a set of gestures and references embodied by different performers in various configurations, temporalities, and places, so that one becomes many, and many become one through a feedback loop of moving together through the material of *Permanent Collection*.

Remembering by doing.

Throughout the research project, I have explored many different ways of constructing and displaying the protocol of moving together in multiple configurations, varying temporalities and modes of visibility and presence.

I will exemplify some of the results of this protocol in the following chapters and give concrete examples.

One of my main tasks was to find a direct way of embodying these theoretical ideas; a way of making them visible at the level of presence and gesture in time and space.

¹⁰ Carlos Basualdo, “The Encyclopaedia of Babel,” in *Documenta 11*, Platform 5: Exhibition, 60, Ostfildern-Ruit : Hatje Cantz, Stuttgart/Berlin, 2002.

Another important aspect of this research project is to explore how ideas of liveness and movement are invested in reimagining political, collective, and social forms of organization; how they relate to reconfiguring the public sphere in the sense of forms of community, and to notions of memory and collective history.

In this sense, *Permanent Collection* functions as a trigger or a starting point for addressing the current international debate in the arts about how the recent *performance turn* of dance and choreography “is invested in contesting late modernist formulations and structures, and how it re-evaluates discourses of institutional critique, queer theory, postcolonial theory and relates them to un/writing of history, often by means of radical choreography.”¹¹

Live works in public space and exhibition space possess a potential for instituting different regimes of attention through the use of different temporalities, reconfiguring the public sphere as a more communal and collective experience. They can rethink notions of spectatorship and relationships within institutions. I believe that the tension produced by juxtaposing ‘theatre time’ and ‘exhibition time’ brings conventions of spectatorship into negotiation.

Another core element of the research deals with collective memory and history. I am interested in exploring how knowledge is passed on from bodies to bodies, the body’s role in constructing historical narratives and counter-narratives. Remembering by doing.

Performance is about movement, and this challenges the way we are inclined to fix and frame the world through history and institutionalization. By being produced anew each time, live works in an exhibition context propose a different notion of preservation,

¹¹ Ana Janevski and Cosmin Costinas, (Eds.), *Is the Living Body the Last Thing Left Alive? The New Performance Turn, Its Histories and its Institutions*, Sternberg Press, London, 2015, page 7.

which keeps representation open. I want to propose a notion of embodied history and memory in transformation and open to change, rather than fixed and taken for granted. Through embodiment and the convention of “collecting,” I wish to conjure a new idea of public ownership.

Whose stories are allotted a permanent place?

Joanna Zielińska writes in the introduction to the recent book entitled *Performing Collections*: “The transfer of knowledge from body to body seems to be one of the essential practices in the process of collecting performance and becomes a prerequisite for keeping a performance work alive. For these purposes, Otobong Nkanga has developed the concept of the breathing archive. The artist considers orality and body memory necessary conditions for the existence of an artwork. Through ‘oxygenation,’ the exchange of bodies, histories and knowledge, the artwork can come into being in the museum collection. The traditional, static model of the Western Museum reproduces colonial strategies of isolating and preserving objects. Performances are alive. They combine the local and the geographically distant. They have intimacy and emotion, and are sensitive to temperature and time of day, but in a very different way to traditional art objects. How can a museum go about collecting such sensitive, ephemeral works?”¹²

In the course of my research, I investigated different modalities and materials for constructing a movement-based permanent collection. Its structure and content are not

¹² Joanna Zielińska (Ed.), *Performing Collections*, e-book, L’internationale, 2022, page 9-21. Viewed 7 February 2023, https://www.internationaleonline.org/library/#performing_collections

fixed but informed by the specificity of each location, responding to particular elements such as context, history, background, etc.

Art historian and curator Magda Radu writes in a reflection note based on our long-term conversations, *Permanent Collection* is not “simply colonizing these institutions via a generic choreographic project; on the contrary, the project itself is enhanced by the objects and artworks presented in the galleries/spaces it works with.”¹³

I decided to write this reflection from the position of what I call “the language of practice.” This means that I am using a more narrative and descriptive mode of writing. I sometimes felt that this might be less well regarded in the hierarchy of academic writing. I hope to give this ‘language of practice’ equal status to academic writing, showing that it possesses its own categories for producing knowledge.

In order to make this decision explicit, I chose the title *Handbook* or *Instruction Manual*. I wished to offer an insight into my working methods and to consider how theoretical or conceptual reflections are translated into practice and vice versa.

As a choreographer and artist, my approach was not to become an art historian, attempting to expound what happened in the past accurately, but rather to use performative strategies – both subjective and speculative – in order to imagine unusual narratives and alliances capable of producing a transhistorical and non-linear take on permanent collections.

¹³ Magda Radu, personal note based on conversations with Manuel Pelmus.

Context

Permanent Collection is a research project situated in the art field concerning the debate surrounding the so-called ‘new performance turn’ in the arts. It addresses matters related to the recent migration of dancing bodies into exhibition spaces – from black boxes into white cubes – critically, considering the political, artistic, and economic implications of this recent ‘turn.’

I am fully aware that the notion of ‘new turns’ in the arts is problematic. It always presupposes the demand for the next ‘new turn,’ correlating with a capitalist mode of understanding artistic production and society. However, I chose to use the terminology here, as it has been pervasive in debates around dance and performance in the museum over the past years.

The project encompasses multiple reflections, critiques, affirmations, and writings on the ‘new performance turn’ over the past two decades. These include Catherine Wood,¹⁴ art historian and Director of Programme at Tate Modern, who explores the potential of live works in exhibition spaces to radically challenge the art institution’s functioning mechanisms and the entire notion of what collecting means by implementing hybrid forms of temporality and spectatorship.

Then, Dorothea von Hantelmann¹⁵ traces the economic and historical aspects of the exhibition display. Referring to the 1943 essay by anthropologist, feminist and feminist Margret Mead entitled “Art and Reality: From the Standpoint of Cultural Anthropology,

¹⁴ Catherine Wood, *Performance in Contemporary Art*, Tate Publishing, 2019.

¹⁵ Dorothea Hantelmann, What is the New Ritual Space for the 21st Century? “The Experiential Turn”, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, web log post, viewed 3 November 2020, <https://theshed.org/program/series/2-a-prelude-to-the-shed/new-ritual-space-21st-century>

1943,”¹⁶ she shares Mead’s critique of the exhibition format for its hierarchy of the senses that prioritizes the visual. Hantelmann argues for a contemporary ritual that could address *being* in its entirety and argues that what constituted a highly individualized ritual must now be updated into a more collective experience in response to the different political reality of the 21st century. She suggests that time and temporal modalities derived from theatre could be employed to radically redefine the exhibition format.

On the other hand, I also discuss critiques of ‘the new performance turn’ formulated by theorists and writers such as Bojana Kunst¹⁷ and Sven Lütticken,¹⁸ among others, who analyse the problematic aspects of the proximity of performance and capital within today’s neoliberal predicament. They argue that performance has often been instrumentalized by visual arts institutions as an element of today’s experience economy, producing precarious working conditions for performers that maximize visibility at a low cost to service a pervasive “event economy.”

In a recent article entitled “Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention,”¹⁹ art historian Claire Bishop sums up these critiques of the ‘new performance turn.’ Nevertheless, she does not entirely disagree with their diagnosis, considering them somewhat reductive in their conclusions and “blinding us to other operations that take place when performance enters the museum.” She concludes by arguing that “what the migration of black box into white cube *can* offer, however, is a zoom lens onto the conflicts underlying technology’s reshaping of our sensorium. Dance exhibitions are a strange hybrid: both a *symptom of* and *compensation for* the

¹⁶ Margaret Mead, “Art and Reality: From the Standpoint of Cultural Anthropology,” 1943, viewed 10 January 2022, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15436322.1943.10794985>, page 119-21.

¹⁷ Bojana Kunst, *Artist at Work, Proximity of Art and Capitalism*, John Hunt Publishing, 2015.

¹⁸ Sven Lütticken, *Dance Factory*, Mousse Magazine no. 50, October 2015.

¹⁹ Claire Bishop, “Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention,” in *The Drama Review*, Volume 62, Cambridge University Press, 2018, page 22.

virtualization of perception. While insisting on a largely de-technologized and stripped-down approach to production that foregrounds the intimate proximity of the human body, they nevertheless carry the negative imprint of digital technology in their very structure. By asserting the inextricability of immediacy and mediation, however, dance exhibitions problematize the way in which contemporary attention — and thus the contemporary subject — is configured at this particular historical moment. This is a subject caught between competing notions of public and personal, subject and object, physicality and virtuality, being institutionally shaped and being self-constituted.”

I also situate this research project in dialogue with other art practices. I am thinking here of Musée de la Danse²⁰ initiated by choreographer Boris Charmatz in Rennes in 2009, a project which reflected on how a museum of dance might work in relation to the visual arts. Eszter Salamon’s series of living monuments entitled *Monument (2014-ongoing)*. Then, Meschac Gaba’s travelling and shape-shifting *Museum of Contemporary African Art*,²¹ which uses the conventions of Western Art Museums to inscribe different histories and question the boundaries and classification systems at work within the western art system. *L’Internationale*, a confederation of art institutions collaborating and sharing practices and resources, offers a good inspiration for thinking artistic production towards cooperation rather than competition and individualism. Mette Edvardsen’s *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*²²; a group of people/performers memorize a book of their choice and together form a library consisting of living books. And the

²⁰ Boris Charmatz, Musée de la Danse, Rennes: “Born from an antinatural crossbreeding between museum, place of preservation, dance, art of motion, and choreographical centre, place of production and residence, the Dancing Museum is a paradox which draws its dynamics from its own contradictions: an experimental space for thinking, practicing and pushing further the borders of this phenomenon called dance; and an operation that brings itself to date with each of its new events. It is a place, situated in Rennes, but the Dancing Museum is also a nomadic idea, which can move elsewhere...” <https://www.borischarmatz.org/?musee-de-la-danse>

²¹ Meschac Gaba, *Museum of Contemporary African Art*, nomadic museum and ongoing art project, inaugurated in 2019.

²² Mette Edvardsen, *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*, 2010-ongoing.

work of artists such as Maria Hassabi,²³ employing time and formulations of the exhibition evolving through time. These are also points of reference for me. Not least, the performance-based works produced by historical avantgarde artists from Eastern Europe – Sanja Ivekovic, Anna Daucikova, Julius Koller, Katalin Ladik, Jiri Kovanda, Tomislav Gotovac, Ion Grigorescu & Geta Bratescu, among others, with which I am familiar – constitute an important point of reference in thinking from a less canonical and western-centric art historical perspective.

Then there is the conference (in which I participated) and subsequent book entitled *Is the Living Body the Last Thing Left Alive? The New Performance Turn, its Histories and its Institutions*, organized and edited by Ana Janevski and Cosmin Costinas: “...the choreographic turn in the visual arts from 1958 to 1965 can be identified by the sudden emergence of works created by very different visual artists in very different places—artists such as Allan Kaprow, Robert Morris, Carolee Schneeman, and Robert Rauschenberg in the United States; Lygia Pape and Hélio Oiticica in Brazil; the Gutai group in Japan; and Yves Klein in France. Each explicitly or implicitly used dance or choreographic procedures to reinvent, reimagine, and reimage how the visual arts produced and conceived its images and objects—and therefore conceived itself both as practice and as discourse. Dedicated to the renewed encounter between dance and performance and the institutions of global contemporary art, *Is the Living Body the Last Thing Left Alive?* proposes that a ‘new performance turn’ has emerged in the second decade of the century and looks at its correlations with other shifts in practices, discourses, and broader society. The new performance turn is closely related to, on one hand, the increasing tendency to bring contemporary dance into the museum, with more artists working in and around dance, and more museums, art centres, and biennials

²³ Maria Hassabi, exhibition works.

striving to deepen their commitment to performance in order to develop new aesthetic forms and new modes of production; on the other hand, this ‘turn’ is also related to specific developments in dance and choreography that took place in the mid-1990s.

This publication tries to think about performance as more than a medium, beyond its liveness and ephemerality, and rather as a series of questions and reflections about how art mediates social relations among people.”²⁴

Moreover, I cannot ignore the context and backdrop to the present reflection. A new condition has emerged in the wake of the crisis produced by the Covid-19 pandemic, which is also a crisis of the body and the way we interact with each other.

I began my fellowship and artistic research at The Oslo National Academy of the Arts during a period in which ‘the artist is present’ and live events had a strong presence at art events, exhibitions, biennales, art in public space, etc. Only a few months after I began my research this condition changed completely and we entered a long period of ‘the artist is absent,’ whereby live works in physical space almost vanished for a period of about two years. A new set of reflections around the living body, how we move and act together, how we relate to public space and form social relations entered my practice. I had to reconsider my research strategies and think deeply about how to use my experience and the artistic tools developed over years of practice to approach this new reality.

The fragility of bodies and their impermanence (sic) were even more evident. Questions of solidarity and togetherness, imagining new alliances and moving across borders and overcoming spatial/social restrictions, became even more urgent.

²⁴ Amdré Lepecki, *Dance, Choreography, and the visual: Elements for a Contemporary Imagination*, page 13. In Cosmin Costinaş, Ana Janevski (Eds.), *Is the Living Body the Last Thing Left Alive? The New Performance Turn, Its Histories and its Institutions*, Sternberg Press, London, 2015.

Suddenly the protocol of moving together simultaneously across time and space gained a new meaning. But at the same time, the impossibility of meeting up with other people created other challenges. Producing live art works always presupposes a certain level of collaboration with others, with places and contexts. I have tried to imagine solutions and strategies to allow these collaborations to continue to happen using knowledge and skills derived from my choreography practice. These strategies entered my research project unplanned but nevertheless played an important part as I will try to show in the examples that follow.

In this way, intuition, the imaginary, as well as capacities for sensing and imagining the presence of the other gained more space in the construction of *Permanent Collection*. Despite the difficulties, what I value most from this experience has been a renewed belief in a sense of trust in others, in capacities for producing knowledge that are sometimes beyond what we can see and identify as proven straight away. During a major part of the western modern era, only what could be seen, demonstrated and proven rationally was deemed worthy of validation. Intuition, magic, superstition, were depreciated, relegated to inferior categories by western modernity, just as dance and the body in motion have been “subtly denigrated to the domain of raw sense: precognitive, illiterate.”²⁵

Letting go of that control and trusting other senses such as the tactile, sensorial, the imaginary, the unseen, was an invigorating experience partly engendered by the pandemic. This produced a very different approach to research and its multiple possibilities.

²⁵ William Forsythe in: Stephanie Rosenthal (Ed.), *Move. Choreographing You*, MIT, Cambridge MA, 2011, page 8.

So, in *Permanent Collection*, I wish to make a contribution to the art field by imagining new ways of addressing and formulating the debate around the ‘new performance turn.’

Preview

“In live performance, the potential for the event to be transformed in unscripted ways by those participating (both the artists and the viewers) makes it more exciting to me. This is precisely where the liveness of performance art matters. Of course, a great number of performances do not approach this potential at all, and many spectators and performers have no interest in this aspect of the live event. But the possibility of mutual transformation of both the observer and the performer within the enactment of the live event is extraordinarily important because this is the point where the aesthetic joins the ethical. The ethical is fundamentally related to live art because both are arenas for the unpredictable force of the social event.”²⁶

Very early on in my research, I had the opportunity to test some of the research premises I have outlined above. In October 2019, I was invited to participate in a group exhibition during the Europalia Biennale at BOZAR, Brussels. The exhibition was entitled simply *Brancusi*, after the sculptor Constantin Brancusi, born in Romania, who became famous in early 20th century Paris for his ground-breaking contribution to modernist sculpture.

The exhibition introduction states:

“The flagship event of EUROPALIA ROMANIA is a prestigious exhibition devoted to Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957), one of the most influential sculptors of the 20th century. This will be the first time a solo exhibition highlighting the work of this

²⁶ Marina Abramovic, “Witnessing Shadows,” in Peggy Phelan, *Theatre Journal*, Volume 56, Number 4, December 2004, pp. 569-577.

particularly versatile artist will take place in Brussels – the last retrospective was organised in Paris almost 25 years ago.”²⁷

The exhibition was curated by Doïna Lemny and aimed to bring together most of Brancusi’s “masterpieces.” I was invited to create a live work which would be displayed in one of the main exhibition halls housing the sculptor’s famous, so-called ‘muses,’ such as *Sleeping Muse* and *Leda*. I chose to focus on an early work, *The Wisdom of the Earth* (1910), which was for decades part of the permanent display at the Gallery of Romanian Modern Art, part of Bucharest’s National Museum of Art. Later reclaimed by the descendants of its former owners, the work became the subject of a heated debate in Romania and a public subscription campaign was launched by the government in 2016 to buy back the sculpture (at a lower price than its supposed value on the international market). This small, enigmatic, carved limestone sculpture is a schematic representation of a female figure sitting on the ground and hugging her torso. The modesty of her appearance places the piece in stark contrast with the grandiose works that constitute the politicized consensus about what an appropriate representation of official culture and nationhood should look like.

I invited two performers, Maria F. Scaroni and Cristina Toma, to take part in this live ongoing action. One of the detractors of the sculpture, arguing against the acquisition of the sculpture by the Romanian government had stated that “it is just a stone,” lacking aesthetic quality. I decided to title the live work *I’m just a stone. A luxury we cannot afford (Wisdom of the Earth)*.

²⁷ Doïna Lemny and Dirk Vermaelen, *Brancusi: Sublimation of Form*, Europalia and Snoeck Publishers, Ghent, 2019.

I was interested in reviewing the figure by drawing attention to her potentially critical voice and by exploring the relationship between object and subject; playfully switching between objecthood and subjecthood, without fully settling on one or the other. I wanted the two performers to enact the living sculpture simultaneously in two different spaces. One in the main hall, in full light and visibility, among the other famous Brancusi sculptures. The other performer would operate in an adjacent room, submerged in total darkness, and so invisible, voicing questions about what is made visible and what invisible by the processes of history. The two performers were to perform every day for two hours starting and finishing at the same time. Both performers were to start from the original position of Brancusi's sculpture, sitting on the floor and covering their torsos with their arms.

Maria and I devised a set of gestures constituting a personal and subjective (hers and mine) collection of references that linked the *Wisdom of the Earth* to other female figure representations in art history. From *Olympia* by Edouard Manet to Mary Wigman's *Witch Dance*, from Orlan to Cicciolina, Meg Stuart and Gina Pane, to offer a few examples. A set of transhistorical, choreographed gestures embodied by Maria F. Scaroni united these women in a sort of open-ended alliance stretching across time and history but stripped of any clear linear narrative.

In the adjacent room, kept in total darkness, Cristina Toma recited a litany of self-definitions and self-identifications that were endlessly expansive and at the same time contradictory. This monologue could be understood as a poem that undid the fixity and the boundaries of her identity. My aim was to give the sculpture a voice and agency within *her* representation in history.

The twin, simultaneous performances were an early try-out for the protocol of moving together across space and time that I wanted to explore in research for *Permanent Collection*.

Historically speaking, the exhibition space is conceived and designed to prioritize the sense of seeing (as Margaret Mead remarked²⁸). I wanted to upset this hierarchy of the senses by constructing a live work which was both seen and unseen. A reading of the piece required other senses – hearing, touch, imagination – and so engendered a broader means of producing knowledge.

When we first entered the exhibition space, we noticed that the works were installed rather conservatively in such a way as to exalt the male gaze. Brancusi's 'muses' were installed on high pedestals, enclosed in glass vitrines, evading potential critiques of the depiction of female subjects by a male 'genius.' The sculptures seemed totally lifeless, valuable objects, without any sort of agency, displayed before the gaze of a predominantly white, upper middle-class audience.

The performers and I decided to place all the live action at floor level in order to disrupt and challenge the politics of the gaze configured by the design of the display and the context of the exhibition hall. In order to watch the live action, the audience had to lower their gaze to follow the moves taking place at some distance below the sculptures on display.

²⁸ Margaret Mead, "Art and Reality: From the Standpoint of Cultural Anthropology," 1943, viewed 11 October 2021, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15436322.1943.10794985>



BOZAR, Brussels, 2019. Maria F Scaroni

(I later used the same strategy for the presentation of *Permanent Collection* at the MUNCH Museum). So, this constituted a temporary re-negotiation of the space of representation at a specific time (the duration of the performance).

Together with the performers, we worked on a constructed choreography, carefully alternating between moments of stillness, action, slow motion and movements, through which Maria F. Scaroni could break with her 'role' and look the visitors straight in the eyes, move closer to them, and challenge their perception. In this way, we developed a movement sequence which would give Maria agency as a performer and allow her to decide – according to the changing situation in the space – when to step out of her 'role' and confront the audience, engaging audience members with a quotidian and raw presence. This negotiation of proximity to the audience and what is permissible in the exhibition space was intended to overcome the lack of agency of the sculptures on show, encaged in vitrines, destined to be forever silent.

In the dark room, Cristina Toma recited a continuous monologue that broke the sculptures' silence and asserted *her* representation in history.

Meanwhile, Maria's choreography transitioned from sculptural ('sublime') gestures, mirroring the sculptures exhibited, to violent ('abject') movements of the body that disrupted the accepted codes of the exhibition space. We decided that Maria should wear an outfit that she had worn to the queer techno rave parties she had co-organised in Berlin: a pair of kick boxing shorts, sneakers, and a shiny silver T-shirt.



BOZAR, Brussels, 2019. Maria F Scaroni

This made a stark contrast with the sublimated representation of Brancusi's muses. Here was a living sculpture enacting a mundane interpretation of the still and silent sculpted figures.

This was intended to constitute a critical position with regard to this exhibition's largely uncritical display, which failed to question the modernist canon of the male genius. Instead, we imagined a live version of these sculptures, one that did not always

‘behave,’ insisted on agency and enacted defiantly *vis à vis* established representations of female subjects. Defiant muses perhaps.

The two performers and I worked carefully to elaborate a choreographic score that allowed them the freedom to decide where and how to move within the exhibition space according to each situation, how to use the space, what timing would be the most appropriate given a certain situation arising at any given moment. My aim was not to be in total control of the piece’s outcome, but to offer these two performing subjects the possibility of empowerment and determination that was entirely up to them to deploy and yet follow a script we had all contributed to and agreed on.

When I look back at this first attempt to organise choreographic material within a protocol of moving together simultaneously, I believe the exhibition space, and subsequently the temporary social sphere generated by our actions, did have a potential for upsetting and transforming a pre-established problematic. This produced a more open-ended situation, in which negotiation between our position, the viewers’ position and political and historical conditions could take place. We did not entirely succeed in capturing the visitors’ full attention in the space, or in constructing a completely new situation in which the audience would spend much longer watching our performance than they would otherwise spend contemplating the sculptures. This happened only briefly, when a number of visitors chose to follow the ongoing action, some for the entire two hours, constructing a different public space within the gallery.

After presenting the work at BOZAR, Brussels, we were invited to show it again in Bucharest, Romania, in late November 2019. As a research exercise, it was a good opportunity to imagine and test my ideas in a very different venue, one that would transform the initial work and perhaps offer a new understanding of the project. I

refused to show the work in a white cube/gallery, and instead chose the National Geology Museum of Bucharest, host to some 80,000 samples of rocks, fossils, and minerals from around Romania.

Here, the title of the work: *I am just a Stone: a luxury we cannot afford (Wisdom of the Earth)* became literal. Our live sculpture would become a stone amongst other stones, emphasizing the relation between the living and the non-living. Hundreds of unique stones and minerals are exhibited on shelves in the central hall of the museum, cohabited by Maria's body through a set of subtle movements.

We worked to adapt the original choreography presented at BOZAR and introduced long moments of sculptural stillness so that the live action acknowledged the presence of the stones, minerals, and objects in the room. This was about constructing an alliance between the living and the non-living, between object and subject, so that no single element would be the sole centre of attention but rather an equal part in symbiotic conjunction.



National Geology Museum Bucharest, 2019. Maria F Scaroni

I installed the simultaneous live action with Cristina Toma in an adjacent room situated in the basement of the Geology Museum, where a set of fluorescent minerals and stones are displayed. Here, the living sculpture operated in a darkened space, the only light produced by the glowing stones. It was the stones that gave materiality and dim visibility to the living sculpture. The performer's monologue began with the words "I am just a stone," instating an alliance with the stones in the room and referring to the original material of Brancusi's sculpture. Here, my aim was to blur the boundaries between what is seen, what is not seen and what is imagined. To reverse the hierarchy of the senses by proposing a live presence that must be listened to in order to be seen.

Audiences at the National Geology Museum of Bucharest are very different from those at BOZAR, Brussels. The museum visitors are mostly grandparents bringing small children to see the stones and minerals. The atmosphere in the exhibition was much more playful and relaxed. Children sat for a long time watching the living sculptures, copied their movements and compared them to organisms moving in the sea. They sat down on the floor, spoke out loud, laughed, commented on what they were seeing, which generated an atmosphere of enthusiasm in stark contrast to the disciplinary regime of the white cube at BOZAR, where visitors are supposed to keep quiet, behave, not touch anything.

The strong presence of the rare stones and minerals juxtaposed with living bodies acting as stones, or entering into dialogue with the stones and minerals, blurred the separations and classifications that the museum both designates and exploits.

So, the new version implemented an alliance between different materials, living and non-living entities, and explored stillness through a decelerated tempo. These elements

informed further explorations for *Permanent Collection*, in terms of how one can procure agency and transform the sensory regime in each space and situation.

A third and final testing ground for these research premises took place a few days later, when I selected a third venue for, *I am just a Stone: a luxury we cannot afford (Wisdom of the Earth)*” – the Craiova Art Museum, in a small city, west of Bucharest, the first city in the region of Muntenia.

A major attraction of the museum is the gallery dedicated to Constantin Brancusi, exhibiting six of his early sculptures (including variants of his best-known works): *Vitellius* (1898), *Miss Pogany* (1902), *The Vainglory* (1905), *Boy's Head* (1906), *The Kiss* (1907) and *Woman Torso* (1909).

All the Brancusi sculptures belonging to the museum were on loan to the BOZAR retrospective in Brussels.

I proposed that we would literally replace those sculptures with the living sculptures. Journeying in reverse, the actual sculptures had travelled from Craiova to BOZAR, while our living sculptures moved from BOZAR, Brussels to Craiova, Romania, replacing the absent collection and giving it a different temporality and materiality. For several days, visitors to the Craiova Art Museum found the gallery dedicated to Brancusi's masterpieces inhabited by 'immaterial' versions of the works. Sculptures moved, spoke or stood still. What had been the space occupied by a fixed display of 'national treasures' became an embodied, subjective and playful place of transformation configured by two women performers.

Again, simultaneous actions were located in a brightly lit room and another kept in darkness, dissolving the boundaries between sound installation and live performance.

After the show, the visitors asked many questions about the ‘originals’ of these sculptures, raising an interesting and lively debate about what is considered original and what a copy.

I also held a workshop for teenagers aged 12 to 15 from the local art school. This attempted to embody a transition from ownership of an object towards sharing it collectively. On the last day of our exhibition in Craiova, I worked with the students on a series of crafted gestures, filling the gallery dedicated to Brancusi’s sculptures with enactments of the absent sculptures in a one-hour performance loop. Each participant was free to select which sculpture they would enact, producing sometimes two or more versions of the same piece. From a single sculpture, we had now multiple versions.

During the one-hour performance, the display of living sculptures changed many times, becoming a less rigid and more playful display than visitors were accustomed to. This produced a pluralistic version of a familiar display, re-configured by the teenagers’ gestures.

Through these three different iterations of the project, I tried to test the parameters of my initial research proposal: how reorganizing the temporality of the exhibition space with live works can challenge and upset established institutional categories. And how varying contexts will transform the work and its relation to temporality and the temporary community/public sphere it constructs.

As I have described, the choreographic project did not simply colonize the space but entered into an open dialogue with the history and socio-political aspects of the exhibition and its context. The rhythm, careful choice/use of spaces, responded to and challenged the pre-existing structures and protocols of each space where the work was

enacted. So, the work was characterized by the decision not to settle for one condition or form, but was adapted or transformed in relation to a critical reading of each venue.

Duration and temporality were adjusted according to circumstances, and the work had an open-ended nature that allowed it to articulate the live and collective aspects of the work as a constant to-ing and fro-ing between viewer, object and the artists' intent.

It allowed the performers agency, so that they operated not simply as instruments translating the maker's intentions, but had control over how the work was constructed and then evolved in response to each particular situation. A sort of composition in real time that embodies notions of liveness, not in the sense of simply a live act performed for an audience, but as liveness produced through interactions between place, audience and object.

In conclusion, I agree with writer and artist Bojana Cvejic that "an exhibition offers a whole new set of possibilities for organizing time and the individuation of the visitor: an encounter between the visitor and the dancer which can be regulated by a looser protocol outside of the mirroring contract of the theatre stage; and a varying scale of not only anonymity and massiveness, but also proximity and intimacy in the circulation of visitors."²⁹

It was the first time I had played so extensively with the parameters of a live work, its temporalities and the redistribution of agency between performer and audience. I hoped to generate a communal experience in the sense of Xavier Le Roy's observation about the nature of the live works: "By their very nature, live works presented in exhibition spaces can challenge the traditional temporality of museums, their opening hours, the

²⁹ Bojana Cvejic, "European Contemporary Dance, before Its Recent Arrival in the Museum" in *Is the Living Body the Last Thing Left Alive? The New Performance Turn, its Histories and its Institutions*, Sternberg Press, London, 2015, p. 33.

length of their exhibitions, and the amount of time visitors spend in front of individual artworks and in the museum as a whole.”³⁰

The “looser protocol” Bojana Cvejic refers to allowed for a reorganization of the temporary public sphere each time we performed anew and introduced different temporalities and elements into the initial presentation protocol.

This early experimentation with some of my research premises extensively informed the way I approached the future of *Permanent Collection* in its three subsequent phases/places: Oslo, Timisoara and Vienna. In my original research application, I proposed to develop one work per year. Each work would build on the previous one and conclude with a final presentation in which all three works would be presented simultaneously in three different places and cities. This would be *Permanent Collection's* research outcome, a protocol for moving together across time and space, as described at the beginning of this reflection.

But very soon after I began my research, the pandemic arrived. All projects were postponed, and the pandemic re-configured the schedule and time frame for the presentation of these three different works. By chance, it turned out that all three venues in Timisoara, Vienna and Oslo would be available during October 2021. I decided to accept this situation and work with the, until then, unforeseen and unplanned correlation between these three spaces. I would have to overlap and adapt my initial proposal to perform *Permanent Collection* at these three locations. The overlap was not absolute or simultaneous (as in my initial proposal) but since I had lost so much time waiting for the institutions to re-open after the pandemic, I decided to go ahead and experiment with this new condition. I will now try and explain how this experiment unfolded.

³⁰ Xavier Le Roy in *Is the Living Body the Last Thing Left Alive? The New Performance Turn, its Histories and its Institutions*, Sternberg Press, London 2015, p. 81.

Generally speaking, my research was interested in exploring a specific quality and potential of performance and live events, as described by Catherine Wood in these terms: “Understanding what performance in art today means is less about fetishizing liveness as defined by the presence of the living body, as much writing on performance has done, and more about considering a broader state of changeability or instability that is live: to consider how subject and object positions might be destabilized, and how subjectivity and society might be reciprocally shaped.”³¹

³¹ Catherine Wood, *Performance in Contemporary Art*, Tate Publishing, London, 2018, p. 23.

Permanent Collection

I began my research for *Permanent Collection* in Oslo, in October 2019. From the beginning, I wanted to reflect the local context and my surroundings in Oslo. These included the city's history, institutions, and environment. This starting point would inform subsequent iterations of the work.

Soon after I began my fellowship, I was contacted by the head of public programs at the new MUNCH museum in Oslo, Ingrid Moe. After a short meeting and presentation of my research project, Ingrid commissioned *Permanent Collection* for the opening of the new MUNCH museum's live program, entitled *MUNCH Live*. This provided an excellent opportunity for me to embed the project in a local context and work within a museum that houses the permanent collection of Norway's most famous visual artist. It was also an ideal opportunity to apply my initial premises – questioning ownership, historical narratives, nationhood, the politics of display, etc. – which could be developed against the backdrop of this newly built, major public institution.

The new MUNCH museum contained all the elements I wished to reflect on critically in *Permanent Collection*. History in the making; we had a chance to interfere in and modify this newly written history by proposing new modes of instituting and enacting the parameters of both the institution and the official history it propounds.

In December 2019, I was invited to visit the site of the new museum, then under construction. Wearing protective clothing, I was accompanied into the building. Upon arrival in the hallway, next to the museum's elevators, I noticed a strange thing – the walls of the elevators were all painted black. But one could nevertheless make out small inscriptions scratched on the elevator walls, like the ones children sometimes scratch on

their school desks. I could decipher a swear word in Romanian – my mother tongue – and several others written in Slavic languages. It was obvious they had been made by the builders working on the museum, many of whom came from Eastern or Central Europe. Temporary workers. These inscriptions caused some embarrassment to the museum staff as they were a minor disruption of the proper conditions required when welcoming the first wave of visitors to an art institution named after Norway's foremost modern painter.

This offered a first layer in the creation of an 'embodied history and memory' inscribed in this particular institution, pointing to the invisibility of the bodies engaged in constructing and maintaining 'institutional infrastructure' in its most basic sense.³²

I asked my tour guide why the walls of the elevators were painted black? He answered that when the museum received VIP visitors, such as officials or special guests, they felt it was inappropriate or embarrassing to have these tags scrawled on the walls of the elevators. I immediately thought that these were the first artworks to be exhibited in the new museum, created by the people who built it. And they were already subject to an act of censorship. This living memory and history of the workers was not to be remembered or represented, let alone celebrated.



Anonymous inscriptions by construction workers inside the elevators of the new building of the Munch museum under construction, 2019.

³² Magda Radu, personal note based on conversations with Manuel Pelmus.

It made me think: what if the National Museum of Norway, or any other museum for that matter, got rid of its permanent collection and invited you to build a new one from scratch? This would mean deciding which artwork, artefact, document, event etc, would be the first to enter the new permanent collection. This choice, I imagined, would then set the tone and direction of the subsequent collection, just as the title of a work of art informs and produces its future destiny.

In the course of the teaching we received during the fellowship program at DIKU, we were told that, if anything, we must be rigorous. I wanted to be rigorous but since this was an art practice research program, I also wanted to be intuitive and take a more organic approach to research. Therefore, I decided that this little anecdote, involving production by the construction workers who built the new museum, should be the first reference in the live *Permanent Collection*. A reference which would inform and help construct the rest, one that hinted at labour conditions, temporary or seasonal employment, solidarity, alliances.

In the months following this first encounter at the MUNCH museum, I researched the histories of several workers' movements, women workers' movements, union movements in Oslo. Along the Akers Elva River, where the Academy of Fine Art is located, I discovered the Labour Museum (Arbeider Museet) and public monuments dedicated to women workers, for example, the factory girls' (Fabrikjentene) monument situated in front of the labour museum. Slowly but surely, I envisaged a vocabulary of gestures depicting instances of resilience and resistance.

Then, I began to broaden my research to include international references to instances of solidarity and alliance making connections and narratives that connected the local with the global. I found out that a group of students and a professor, Dora Garcia, at the Oslo

National Academy of Fine Arts where I am a fellow, had formed a collective artistic persona named *Rose Hammer*³³ and produced a theatre play, in which at one point they sang the popular, Italian protest song *Bella Ciao*. Looking into the song's genealogy, I found out that this international, anti-fascist anthem was originally sung by seasonal workers, mostly women, known as *mondinas*, in the late 19th century, and that it originally had a different title and lyrics.

The presence of the *mondinas*, their legacy of resistance and defiance prompted me to select the song as a reference to the temporary workers who had built the MUNCH museum – the first component of *Permanent Collection*. We were going to perform the song with the original lyrics to represent workers' struggles everywhere in the world, past and present:

“In the morning I got up

oh *bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao* (*Goodbye beautiful*)

In the morning I got up

To the paddy rice fields, I have to go.

And between insects and mosquitoes

oh *bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao*

and between insects and mosquitoes

a hard work I have to do.

The boss is standing with his cane

oh *bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao*

the boss is standing with his cane

³³ Rose Hammer, 2019: <https://www.oslobiennalen.no/participant/rose-hammer/>

and we work with our backs curved.

Oh my god, what a torment

oh *bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao*

oh my god, what a torment

as I call you every morning.

And every hour that we pass here

oh *bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao*

and every hour that we pass here

we lose our youth.

But the day will come when us all

oh *bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao*

but the day will come when we all

will work in freedom.”³⁴

Afterwards, thinking about this first reference, I understood that maybe my choice was not as haphazard as I had initially thought, and that there was a connection (which I had not seen at the start) between choosing the *Mondinas* and the Oslo National Academy of the Arts building, where I have my studio and where I mostly work. Opened in 1856, the building used to be called ‘Christiania Seildugsfabrik.’ It was a factory producing textiles and sails and most of its workforce were women who worked under very harsh

³⁴ Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bella_ciao

conditions. Maybe this piece of history had crept into *Permanent Collection* subconsciously.

At a later point in my research, I was invited by Ingrid Moe to select a space inside the new MUNCH museum for the presentation of *Permanent Collection*. I visited the site again and chose the museum's Monumental Hall, specially designed to host Edvard Munch's biggest and most ambitious art works. I felt that this space would offer an interesting context to confront.

The hall was to be inhabited by five bodies who, in relation to the vast scale of both the room and the art works, could perform a sort of 'de-monumentalization' – a human scale in relation to the huge art works on the walls, the presence of bodies which are at once both fragile and forcefully present.



MUNCH museum, Monumental Hall, 2021. Ingunn Rimestad & Jens Trinidad

Together with the performers, we worked on additional references and movements, often enacted at floor level. Laying down, sitting, kneeling, configuring body

formations on the floor. We wanted to challenge the viewing protocols existing in the room by re-directing the gaze down towards the floor in defiance of the very high ceiling and Munch's massive art works. Again, this sparked an interplay between the sublimated and the mundane, between the aura of these exceptional paintings and the immediate reality of living bodies. Moving, breathing, sweating, presence. A negotiation between the protocols and conventions established in and by the exhibition hall and demands made on the audience to pause and take time to watch the ongoing action, looking down instead of up.

We set out to achieve this by carefully designing a vocabulary of movements that was slow paced, centred on intimate gestures, playing with suggestions of stillness, sculpture, alternating instances of objecthood and subjecthood. All the references included, which I will describe later, were enacted keeping in mind the space, slow rhythms, the history of the place, in relation to the other art works exhibited in the Monumental Hall.

This was not about a negation of Munch's paintings but rather about building a relationship with them that modified the space and its narrative, moving towards a more pluralistic assembly of works and a multiplicity of narratives.

This was a huge museum dedicated to a single, male artist temporarily occupied by a living permanent collection made up of multiple authors – mostly women and queers.

We offered a new reading of both the room and the museum, from the perspective of a multitude enacting a collective production of meaning.

During our ongoing action, the visitor numbers and the flow of people through the hall was massive. During rehearsals, we had established strategies for inhabiting the space of the Monumental Hall, working on spacing, presence, relation to time and temporality.

But every day, the reality of the live event and our encounters with huge numbers of visitors made us re-think and adapt the performance to each new situation. The ‘liveness’ of the work was not just due to the fact that we performed it live, but also because it inhabited a space of encounter with live audiences, so had to re-shape itself and form a new space of encounter each time. Every day we had to find new ways to configure a space within the pre-existing space, to engage attention, to use time to ensure that our presence would resonate in this noisy, and at times disorderly, room; to pause and wait for a moment of calm where we could insert a particular enactment, to take control of the space, to ensure our visibility, or at other moments simply to disappear.

We often succeeded in making the visitors ‘slow down,’ after which we would follow on with actions chosen to keep their attention focused on our presence rather than on the paintings. Sometimes we actively chose a particular area of the room, consciously ‘disturbing’ the arrangement of the room by inserting our bodies in a given situation that would introduce a different relation to viewing and experiencing the space. Negotiating proximity and distance, intimacy and rhythm, constructing an alternative mode of being together, watching or being watched.

I would say that, in the course of ten, four-hour, daily presentations, *Permanent Collection* succeeded in operating as a set, albeit one that continuously shifted and modified itself in relationship to the public and each situation that unfolded in the exhibition space.

At times, it was difficult for the performers to sustain the action. Nevertheless, they were provided with a variable level of agency, which allowed them to intervene, disrupt, contradict or challenge the flux and real-time conditions in the exhibition room. We

tried to avoid direct confrontation or any aggressive form of engagement but rather to follow, add, and intervene with our bodies and presence in the reality. The goal was to re-imagine this place of encounter as the site of a more communal and multiple experience.

The skills and knowledge of the performers were fundamental to operating and performing under these conditions. We approached the material and the space from the perspective of choreography, while keeping in mind the specific temporality and conventions of the exhibition display. So, *Permanent Collection* moved between the temporality of sculpture and that of the live event but refused to settle fully on one or the other.

Another aspect of the piece was our wish to transport or translate the legacy of the old MUNCH museum at Tøyen to its new location. When I researched the former MUNCH museum building at Tøyen, it became clear that one of the aims of the old building at Tøyen had been to attend to the working-class demographic of East Oslo. The museum had been conceived as a building that was not dominating or intimidating to its visitors, a social space that entered into dialogue with local communities and populations. It was a socially minded building, correlating to a more social-democratic view of society, one that aimed to include and benefit the surrounding neighbourhood.

We wanted our action at the MUNCH museum's new manifestation, situated in an expensive, contemporary, high-rise district of the city, to act as a reminder of that former collective, inclusive history at Tøyen. To act as a vehicle transporting that past to the new narrative being created. This would be an act of unforgetting, through an embodied, non-object-based technology of remembrance.

We set out to do this by enacting a series of references grounded in movements of solidarity and togetherness. At the level of representation, these re-mediated instances of struggle, alliance, workers' and protest movements, as well as certain art works and cultural artefacts that embodied instances of collectivity, acting together across history and across geography.

I will introduce and describe some of these references in the following chapters.

Last but not least, the ongoing action unfolded and developed in a timeframe of long duration: four hours every day. My intention was to “despectacularize performance as opening event.”³⁵ To infiltrate the event logic with a slow tempo persisting over a long period. This makes demands on audiences in terms of long attention rather than providing an object for fast and easy consumption. My desire was to give audiences time and to take up their time – time to observe, time to spend together. Even though *Permanent Collection* does not promise the permanence of paintings on display, it can nevertheless insist on persistence and on its value as a 'fleeting' entity that we cannot fully own or possess like any other object.

The living entity proposes a different economy/ecology of attention, as something that appears and disappears in a persistent loop. This is a notion of heritage derived from the performing arts whereby material repeats, reappears and is re-mediated across time and space; preserved within the constant movement between past, present and future, and becoming increasingly porous as its limits become less stable and predefined.

In this way, attention, both the audiences' and the performers', and the way it is actively constituted in a space became a major concern in our work. In addition to the technical

³⁵ Hendrik Folkerts on Instagram feed:
https://www.instagram.com/hendrik_folkerts

skills of the performers in *Permanent Collection*, it was the issue of attention and the means of directing and attending to the shifting relationships with audience members as each presentation unfolded that demanded work that was both unceasing and intense. How to construct a ‘we’ within the room that would act and move together. Collectively.

In his book entitled “The Ecology of Attention,”³⁶ Yves Citton analyses the politics of attention within today’s attention economy. Citton argues that attention must be understood as transindividual: neither individual nor collective but manifest at the point where both the individual and the collective are constituted. Attention, like affect or desire, is a point where the most intimate individuation intersects with collective conditions and relations. By shaping and designing attention, we construct and transform the way we care and pay attention to each other collectively. “An attention ecology, Citton argues, can create the conditions for new collective intelligence.”³⁷

“The notion of “flow” – as popularized by Czech psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi and as applied, for instance, by Guerino Mazzola to the area of free jazz improvisation – invites us to understand our most successful performances, less as a form of movement initiated by our individual will and sustained by our personal strength, than as a process borne by a transindividual wave of agency we precariously manage to ride upon.

“I” can be credited as performing amazing gestures (as a speaker, an artist, an athlete) only insofar as “a power stronger than itself”—usually a “we”—sets in place a configuration of movements of which I find myself in position to benefit. British anthropologist Alfred Gell has described in very general and convincing terms this “distributed agency” which manifests itself in our encounters with shamans, sorcerers,

³⁶ Yves Citton, *The Ecology of Attention*, Polity, Cambridge, 2016.

³⁷ Jason Read, *The New Inquiry*, review, New York, December 18, 2014,

gurus, sacred rituals (in so-called “traditional” societies), as well as during art performances and through objects of art (in “modern” societies). Independently of the “author” who produced it, a painting, a photograph, a tale, a film, a song or a dance have an agency of their own, by which we are carried when we act upon them. All forms of ritualistic and aesthetic encounters rely on complex entanglements of such agencies, distributed among the various “actants” (human and non-human) involved in them—including, of course, that of their “spectators” who count among their most necessary participants.”³⁸

Many visitors returned several times during the daily four-hour presentation. Encountering the work at different points. Creating a non-linear narrative of time-space, with no clear beginning or end.

The references we enacted did not have labels and playfully mixed different periods in history and very different mediums, opening onto a less ‘disciplined’ reading of the works exhibited and of the display conventions deployed by the museum.

³⁸ Yves Citton, “Learning to Derive,” in *Movement Research Performance Journal*, No. 51, New York, Spring 2018, page 54.

HERITAGE

“The notion of heritage is the image of the capitalist national state as well as the notion of canon. It is urgent to imagine thus and produce a new kind of legacy that does not have legitimate heirs, widows and sons. We have to get rid of the idea that we are the legitimate heirs of this. Obviously, if we are not the legitimate heirs of a collection, we should invent new sorts of narratives. We should imagine a narrative that is not related to property (in Spanish *patrimonio* - meaning belonging to the father) or exclusive genetics. We should claim the legacy of the bastards. The legacy of anybody, disregarding national frontiers or the flux of global capital.”³⁹

Jesus Carillo

“For some, heritage freezes time, space, and culture, reducing buildings to spectacular objects for contemplation and consumption. Yet conservation also pertains to the contested space in which identity and social structures are built and demolished. Heritage has become a battlefield where the understanding of culture, history, and aesthetics has been and continues to be reshaped. Who has a right to define what constitutes heritage?”⁴⁰

I mentioned in the introduction that one core element of this research project was to reflect on how knowledge is transmitted through bodies, and the significance of the body in the construction of collective memory and history. When I started gathering

³⁹ Jesus Carillo, Lecture, Glossary of common knowledge, L'internationale, 2017.

⁴⁰ Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, *Permanent Temporariness*, Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm / Art and Theory Publishing, Stockholm, 2018, page 11.

references to be enacted and transformed through *Permanent Collection*, I imagined a less canonical sequence of references.

The MUNCH Museum is a museum dedicated to one single, male artist. I thought it would be important to propose a sort of counter-narrative to this position, and almost all the references I selected are by women artists, queers and/or collectives. I did contradict this method of selection at times, by including several male artists, because I did not want the collection and the collecting method to become over-prescriptive.

I also decided that most of the references should be representations of groups or multiple subjects rather than individual subjects. Again, I contradicted this method once or twice for the same reason.

The main criterion in this subjective selection process was to seek instances or depictions of togetherness and solidarity, in the manner of the first reference *Bella Ciao* dedicated to the temporary workers who built the museum. I imagined that some of these references would also form the core of ongoing action performed at other venues in different cities and countries. This would suggest the potential for a shared heritage not belonging to a single institution or nation but rather shared and belonging to many, beyond national borders or the “exclusive genetics,”⁴¹ acknowledged by Jesus Carillo. Or at least to imagine and suggest this possibility.

The simultaneous enactment of *Permanent Collection* in three (or more) different cities would literarily enact or embody the idea of sharing, while simultaneously allow for difference and transformation through interpretation.

⁴¹ Jesus Carillo, Lecture, Lecture, Glossary of common knowledge, L'internationale, 2017.

I was particularly inspired by a statement made by choreographer Eszter Salamon, a fellow colleague at the National Academy of the Arts in Oslo, who stated, referring to a piece she performed with her mother, that “these movements don’t belong to us. They are there to be taken and interpreted by others.”⁴² I thought this touched the core of my proposal in the sense that the gestures and movements which would become part of *Permanent Collection* do not belong to me exclusively but are to be inhabited, transformed and changed through interpretation by multiple performers to multiple ends. They would be (potentially) endless, and would question notions of ownership as they are transmitted to other bodies, places and situations. A collection and heritage which can be re-imagined and transformed each time it is (re-)performed.

Ownership is of course central to understanding heritage and preservation. And what we tend to value most in our western model are static things, which can be acquired and promise permanence. Fleeting gestures, movement, temporary manifestations of presence tend to be less valued in our art and economic systems.

In a quote found online, senior art critic for the New York Times, Holland Cotter, states: “Acquisition is everything. Short-term shows come and go. Their presence can signal a genuine change in an institutional direction or merely paper over entrenched habits. The only solid gauge of commitment is when something is brought into the collection and put on view in the permanent galleries.”⁴³

⁴² Eszter Salamon, --- video interview for Reina Sofia museum, Madrid. Viewed, 4 February 2020, <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/multimedia/monument-07-mothers>

⁴³ Holland Cotter, “MoMA, the New Edition: From Monumental to Experimental” in *New York Times*, Feb. 6, 2019: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/05/arts/design/moma-expansion.html>

This statement makes very clear that the real deal is when a work of art is acquired and enters the permanent collection – the main guarantee of value and seriousness.

On the other hand, *The Mobile Academy* in Berlin, initiated by Hanna Hurtzig, poses a very different question for one of the Academy's recent projects: "The clearing out of colonial things and beings from their archives poses interesting questions for museums: What will replace the objects in the empty museum of the future? Can their digital revenants create new narratives, instead of transgressing the collecting mania into the digital?"

What procedures will speed up the process of return? What encounters and dialogs will find a place in the museum, when halls and basements become vacant and are no longer needed? What cultural techniques and non-object-based ways of remembering can be invented?"⁴⁴

So, the implementation of "cultural techniques and non-object-based ways of remembering"⁴⁷ has been another concern in *Permanent Collection*. The movement-based permanent collection set out to challenge and subvert the established value system endorsed by art institutions, and how this system is constructed and reproduced.

Philosopher, dramaturge and performance theoretician Bojana Kunst writes in a very recent publication by L'internationale: "Many discussions today concern the role of the museums in the history of imperial plunder. Ariella Azoulay writes how museums are part of the construction of imperial citizenship, where preservation of the past is part of the vast enterprise of destruction conducted at the expense of the destroyed world. In the

⁴⁴ Hannah Hurtzig: <https://mobileacademy-berlin.com/en/the-immobilized-part2/>. Viewed 3 November 2020.

process of preservation, the past consists of discrete documents and objects, and this methodology of separation and extraction is one of the imperial operations of power executed over the objects belonging to the living world. That the museum is now open to being a space of live performances can also be approached from this perspective – with how art institutions in the West themselves confront their own past, with their own entanglement in violent history. Every collection is embroiled in a multiplicity of living worlds. From this perspective, the arrival of the performance (and the body) in the museum can challenge the institution’s isolation from the living world and dedicate itself rather to the entanglements of living kinship and genealogies, to embodied experiences and poetics of communities, to invisible and contradictory histories. Otherwise, it is only another continuation of imperial methods.”⁴⁵

Can a dance phrase be acquired and enter the permanent collection? Can a repeatable movement performed potentially by an endless number of performers constitute heritage? Can something ‘immaterial’ be preserved and taken care of with the same level of importance as a static object?

Can the performers receive care and working conditions that are ‘permanent’ rather than reproducing precarity? What kind of institutional imagination and shift in policy would be necessary in order to achieve this? What hierarchies at play within the art system and society might be reconfigured from the vantage point of the living?

⁴⁵ Bojana Kunst, *Performing Collections*, e-book, L’internationale, 2022: Viewed 7 February 2023, https://www.internationaleonline.org/library/#performing_collections

Labour

“What labour is needed to have a performance collection? Should we – besides the restorers – also employ performers? How do we transport a performance collection? Should we develop kinships between different biospheres and scenes where the works are shared? How to keep performance alive as a relational field, not as a nostalgic repetition? All these questions we can also ask about objects, and that is why a performance collection is so interesting. And how to keep these collections in such a way that they would belong to all, and would continuously change in order not to succumb to exclusionary authorship? Especially if we keep in mind that the performance is a process and work of many; it belongs to the many.”⁴⁶

Bojana Kunst

I have described above how the encounter with the temporary workers who built the new MUNCH Museum suggested the first reference in *Permanent Collection*. I have also mentioned critiques of the “new performance turn in the arts” related to the precarious conditions of the performers’ bodies that populate dance exhibitions. Most of these performers are seasonal workers, on short term contracts, without the benefits or social security that permanent contracts usually offer. We know that this condition of precarity and the gig economy has become widespread during recent decades of neo-liberal, privatization and austerity policies. Working conditions are ever more vulnerable and fragile for many people and secure employment is increasingly rare. There is a link between performers’ and temporary workers’ labour conditions, which institutions often fail to address. It is supposed that the performers are respected as

⁴⁶ Bojana Kunst, *Performing Collections*, e-book, L’internationale, 2022, page 47.
https://www.internationaleonline.org/library/#performing_collections

first-rate artists, but at the end of the day those bodies must eat, pay rent and make a living. Sometimes in the art world, huge budgets are deployed producing or conserving massive infrastructure. But for live works, there is often a budget shortfall, and little will to secure more stable working conditions for those producing them. I mean this in a general sense. Some institutions, such as the MUNCH Museum, pay performers well. Nevertheless, the question of the sustainability of performers' livelihoods remains open. I felt that it was my responsibility to address this issue and try to prescribe some minimal solution as a part of my research.

You may remember how, in the wake of the first lockdown produced by the Covid-19 pandemic, debates about a guaranteed basic income developed, only to be forgotten once things had opened up again.

I made a modest attempt to address this economic issue in 2017 for a live work I made in London at "The Showroom", during an exhibition curated by the women's' collective "WHW" from Zagreb, entitled *My Sweet Little Lamb*, in honour of artist Mladen Stilinovic. I was allotted a budget to pay a performer for the one-month duration of the exhibition. It was a quite modest sum. So, I proposed to the performer, Jonathan Burrows, who lived in the London area, that he could receive the fee for the entire exhibition time, but it would be left up to him when and for how long he would attend and perform. I also included the possibility that he would not show up at all. I imagined, perhaps naively, a different relation between work input and the money I was able to pay him. He could pass by on his way into London or whenever he felt like, for as little time as he wanted in exchange for the fee. It turned out that Jonathan decided to perform several times according to his schedule. To my mind, this was a fair exchange of labour and wage.

After the opening week at the new MUNCH museum, which was correctly remunerated, I made the following proposal to the museum:

Permanent Collection would be performed one day a month by the local performers, for a shorter duration, for which they would receive a fee of about 500 euros. This is not a high fee, but I imagined it to act as a sort of basic income guaranteed for several years. this would be paid by the institution in exchange for a reasonable number of hours of work – a long-term commitment by the institution and a secure income for the performers.

This would also mean that *Permanent Collection* would persist as a work that would become a permanent display, even though it would not operate quite like the objects on display in the museum. The three-year period I proposed could be extended indefinitely and the relation between the institution, the live work and the performers could become permanent.

At the time of writing, the museum has not yet taken a final decision, but as part of my research project I believe it is essential for me to at least imagine and propose ways of ensuring decent working conditions for performers.

This is maybe not much but could be a step in the right direction and possibly a model for the future. Ideally, performers would be hired by institutions on permanent contracts, stabilizing their professional activity and livelihood. I proposed this simple model because I thought there was a real chance that the host institution might accept it. A strategic choice.

I am in no position to make decisions about budgets or institutional policy, and my proposal is not meant to adopt a polemical position in opposition to the institution. But I feel that to envisage how the work of performance might operate within an economy of

fairness and care constitutes a task that seeks attention in the present research project and in future work.

I believe institutions are places that enact long-term politics that address what we value in society and how we are to go on living together. Institutional action can do much to change the way we live and care for one another. I don't regard this idea as separate from artwork but as an integral part of any work concerning the ethical components of live performance.

Performers/Participants

Permanent Collection has been developed in relation to a group of performers who gradually turned into becoming friends. Over the years, I have been interested in the idea of permanence with regard to an ethics of collaboration. Dancers' and performers' lives are usually rather precarious both economically and socially. I have always tried to work with the same performers over long periods of times, for the sake of continuity and spending time together. I have collaborated with some of these performers in various instances for over ten years. In *Permanent Collection*, my aim was to form a core group of performers in various locations, who would be involved throughout the whole research period. This was 'permanence' as a practice, building long term relationships with people, places, material, contexts, etc. A political as well as artistic decision.

The political aspect is related to the questions I have gone into earlier of how, together, we produce, work and care for each other. Moving from new project to new project, constantly employing or auditioning new performers is something I have attempted to resist over the years. As many of our institutions or funding organizations have become more fragile, we need to imagine a network of relationships and solidarity that underpin our work, as well as providing a basis for a more sustainable future. The logic of the art world is often quite punishing in terms of always wanting sexy new ideas, people, faces, positions etc. In the past, we could afford much longer periods of time for developing and thinking about a work together. This has changed quite drastically over the last decade, and the norm is now to hold short rehearsal periods, many 'new' projects in one year, gigs, increased 'flexibility' and availability.

Permanent Collection is imagined as a continuous, long-term project, in the aim of confronting this tendency toward acceleration critically. *Permanent Collection* set out to embody these concerns – I do not see a separation between the formal aspects of the work and its conceptual framework.

The artistic element is concerned with transmission, more precisely, inter-generational transmission. Between people, bodies, performers with different knowledges, experiences, and backgrounds. It is also a reflection on ableism and ageism in dance, and at times performance practices. For a long time, the world of dance (my background) has had a big problem when it comes to the body types represented on stage and elsewhere. Until very recently, the default preference was for young, athletic, flexible, and very able bodies. Older performers in particular tend to be largely absent from dance productions. This is changing – each step towards greater inclusion is an act of defiance – but we still have a long way to go to fully acknowledge and overcome the ableism and ageism present within our art field.

The idea of transmission, and intergenerational transmission in particular, became an important research element. I invited performers belonging to different generations, ranging from their early twenties to early seventies, from diverse backgrounds, career paths, and educations. The main idea was for the core material and gestures in *Permanent Collection*, to be passed on, interpreted, and transformed by this back-and-forth transmission between generations of performers, which could lead to actualizations, evolutions and new ways of imagining the material.

Artist's Insert

The first lockdown kicked in almost as soon as I had begun my research. It was impossible to meet up with performers and hold rehearsals. I started to think up an alternative means of sustaining our practice and imagined a series of “telepathic” rehearsals. This was inspired by a work of art by Robert Barry entitled *Telepathic Piece* (1967). This was conceived for telepathic transmission, devoid of image or language. I had selected this work for enactment in an earlier work, *Public Collection* (in collaboration with Alexandra Pirici).

I organized monthly evening sessions for students at the Fine Art Academy in Oslo, calling them *Evening Classes*⁴⁷ (after an event organized by *Salonul de Proiecte* in Bucharest, Romania).

However, in April 2020, the Academy managers prohibited any gatherings, even in the open air, due to the pandemic restrictions. In response, I designed an exercise for being together at a distance through telepathy. This protocol later became a way of rehearsing the material in *Permanent Collection* during the second lockdown. I will describe how the telepathic rehearsals worked later on.

The exercise for the *Evening Classes* was as follows:

1. Monday at 9pm, exit whatever building or space you are in and enter public space. Find the nearest spot where you can sit down.
2. At 9.05 pm we will read together the following text by Alina Popa, entitled “The Second Body and the Multiple Outside.”⁴⁸ Read it out loud to yourself.

⁴⁷ Bojana Cvejić, Ana Janevski, Isabella Maidment, Manuel Pelmuş, Magda Radu, Jimmy Robert, *Evening Classes*, Salonul de Proiecte, Bucharest, 2018.

⁴⁸ Viewed 8 October 2019, <https://ia800705.us.archive.org/26/items/Bezna4/Bezna4.pdf>.

3. At 09.15pm we will all perform *Telepathic Piece* by Robert Barry.

The three instructions take five minutes each. Perform each one while standing, changing your position for each of the three.

The aim is to communicate the piece and the thoughts associated with it to each other telepathically, but you may also communicate the piece with any chance passers-by. Here is the piece:

Robert Barry - *Telepathic Piece*, 1969

We will now try to communicate telepathically a work of art, the nature of which is a series of thoughts which are not applicable to language or images.

A great desire

A state of great concern

A series of particular feelings

4. At 9.30pm, we all turn to our left and start walking together in silence for 10 minutes.
5. At 9.40 the evening class ends. Please communicate the experience to a friend, colleague or anyone else you wish.

I do not know exactly how many students attended the evening class, but I know for sure that several did. I hoped that we would establish feelings of mutual trust in one another, trusting the invisible and supporting one another through moving together even though we were separated by distance. Acting together through a protocol of trust and solidarity.

Permanent Collection Vienna

Permanent Collection's second presentation took place in Vienna at Kunsthalle Wien. The invitation arose through a collaboration between Tanzquartier Wien, which was celebrating its twenty-year anniversary, and Kunsthalle Wien. It was programmed for October 2021, almost the same time as the presentation at the MUNCH Museum in Oslo.

I decided to transmit the material and references between Oslo and Vienna, adding specific material for Vienna related to the local context. Two performers, Elizabeth Ward and Benjamin Boar, participated in both iterations of the work, realizing a bodily transmission of material between Vienna and Oslo.

I did not want to simply reproduce the spatial conditions at the Munch Museum again in Vienna. I hoped the work could be transformed in response to the challenge of the different displays, content and location of Kunsthalle Wien. Instead of performing in the gallery rooms/white cubes of Kunsthalle, I chose in-between spaces, outdoor space, hallways, ticket office and the corridors leading up to the main galleries. These are semi-public spaces, not ticketed, shared between several institutions (Kunsthalle Wien, Halle G and E, TanzQuartier Wien and Festwochen). I wanted to give my original intention (to produce a shared permanent collection) a literal manifestation through the choice of performance space. The four institutions had to negotiate with one another in order to approve our presence and agree to host our live exhibition in these shared spaces.



Kunsthalle Vienna, 2021. Sabina Holzer, Elizabeth Ward, Ezra Fieremans, Jack Hauser, Mzamo Nondiwana & Manuel Pelmuş

The corridors, hallways, outside space, ticket office etc. are spacious, rambling and extensive. Under these new circumstances, the choreographic material changed quite a lot from its iteration at the MUNCH Museum. Each enactment and its transition from one space to another took a long time to unfold and the ongoing action developed towards becoming a live installation. We experimented with longer durations, much longer phases of stillness, providing more time for viewers to gather and re-group around us. Moving slowly, waiting for the audience to follow or to guess which space we were going to occupy next.

Unlike the Monumental Hall at the MUNCH Museum, the in-between spaces at Kunsthalle Wien are also used by people transiting from one area to another, making their way to the toilets, entering and exiting the elevator, buying tickets, or having lunch in the restaurant on the upper floor. This produced a much more ambiguous situation of spectatorship, encompassing people who had grouped into an audience and people who just happened to pass by for other reasons and encountered the action randomly.

Negotiating these different intentions and different types of audience informed our performance strategies and transformed the relationships with space and time in ways that were quite different from performing in a white cube gallery space. Public space is subject to very different rules of behaviour and attention, a complex situation that informed the performers, temporality and actions.

It also produced different levels of audience attention/concentration. Many spectators followed our actions for long periods. Some even stayed for the entire four-hour duration. Following, walking, guessing where we were going to install the next action. This sparked a game in which both performers and audience participated, and so a more pronounced feeling that we were producing a space together. That we were supporting each other. A strong sense that we were mutually involved in the realization of the work through the attention and effort invested by both performers and audience, close attention generating a common body. This created an intimate space of encounter in which a relatively small audience was committed to experiencing the live action over a long period.

Because of diverse interferences, such as visitors coming in to buy tickets, or on their way to the bathroom, there was an element of unpredictability, which we learned to play with and accommodate, and which brought new improvised rhythms to our actions.

The intimacy between audience and performers fluctuating over a period of several hours gave a very different meaning to spatial and social relations forming in the space. The experience provided a good testing ground for our material and for the initial premises of my research project relating to notions of temporality and the construction of a more communal and collective experience inside a given space/situation.



Kunsthalle Vienna, 2021. Ezra Fieremans & Mzamo Nondiwana

Permanent Collection Timisoara

A third presentation of *Permanent Collection* took place in Timisoara, Romania, as part of the Art Encounters Biennale curated by Mihnea Mircan & Kasia Redzisz, programmed for the entire month of October 2021. Overlapping with the iterations in Oslo and Vienna, it provided an excellent opportunity to test and research the protocol of moving together across time and space, introducing a very different context and geography: Eastern Europe.

The venue I selected for *Permanent Collection* was the local Public Transport Museum *Corneliu Miklos*. The museum occupies a vast depot, exhibiting vintage tram cars from Timisoara's long-running transport system.



The „Corneliu Mikloş” Public Transport Museum Timișoara.

I chose this venue because it suggested a dialogue with the region's history of labour, making a link with my initial research into diverse labour histories in Oslo and at the

MUNCH Museum. Specific labour movements and struggles were embedded in the museum space, and told the story of work and workers, their protests and collective memory stretching back in time.

I invited a single performer, choreographer and dancer Mihai Mihalcea, to enact and embody the references in *Permanent Collection*. I wanted to emphasize one of the initial premises of my research: that the body is never one – it is a collective expression. Even when one acts or speaks alone, actions are always animated by the production of others.

I transferred the material and references to Mihai Mihalcea and explained some of my intentions to him and how the material/components acted as a vehicle for them. I proposed that he was to perform subjective interpretations of the material. The conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic in Romania at that time made it very hard for us to meet, so development of the new iteration in Timisoara took the form of long-distance collaboration, an attempt to be together through gestures, time and performativity.

I also designed and wrote a sound installation to back Mihai's performance, which was played for the duration of the exhibition over the loudspeakers of the museum's public address system, which had never been used before. The intention was to introduce an additional element to the piece, also as a precaution against the eventuality that Mihai's physical presence would not be possible due to the pandemic.

The sound installation comprised a series of instances of solidarity and protest from around the world, including the story of a recent protest in Timisoara by transport workers demanding fairer working conditions. The sound was designed by Ion Dumitrescu, and constructed in sync with the stories, so that it literally moved around the space, using alternating speakers.

Mihai imagined a continuous choreography moving through the entire exhibition space past the objects on display. The space is huge, and the contrast between the sheer enormity of the space and a single body in motion expressed both the vulnerability of the body and yet its capacities for resistance.

We connected the three ongoing actions in Oslo, Vienna & Timisoara through a spoken statement made at the beginning and throughout the work, announcing the time in Oslo, Vienna & Timisoara, reminding spectators that the performers in the respective locations would be moving together through *Permanent Collection* for the duration of the performance. However, due to the pandemic, it was not possible to organize simultaneously the three actions this time.

In Mihai's interpretation, the material became a more abstracted version of the work. Slow paced, with long periods of stillness and a strong sense of intimacy.

The positions of his lone body in space were added to the those of the group of five performers in Oslo and Vienna, forming invisible lines of connection and suggesting the performative, imagined presence of the others. Constructing relations over time and space, an abstract but also real togetherness. Mihai's slow rhythm provided time for imagining the other bodies and actions in Oslo and Vienna. As if gestures and movements had spread in the manner of social media – 'gone viral' – and yet were embodied in real time and space.

The interpretation in Timisoara made me re-think possibilities for organizing and imagining future forms in the evolution of *Permanent Collection* and its presentation.

The aggregate of these performances at three geographic locations made me think of a kind of monumentality in reverse, one that does not dominate through large dimensions

but rather spreads horizontally, potentially taking in any and every location. A horizontal monumentality

This idea led me to contemplate forms of political and social organization, whereby bodies stand together in spite of their difference and diversity. A network of embodied solidarity or unexpected alliance that would insist on being seen. I was reminded of Judith Butler's essay on the theory and performativity of assembly.⁴⁹

"In one sense, the event is emphatically local, since it is precisely the people there whose bodies are at risk. But if those bodies on the line are not registered elsewhere, there is no global response, and also no global form of ethical recognition and connection, and so something of the reality of the event is lost. It is not just that one discrete population views another through certain media moments but that such a response makes evident a form of global connectedness, however provisional, with those whose lives and actions are registered in this way. In short, to be unprepared for the media image that overwhelms can lead not to paralysis but to a situation of (a) being moved, and so acting precisely by virtue of being acted upon, and (b) being at once there and here, and, in different ways, accepting and negotiating the multilocality and cross temporality of ethical connections we might rightly call global."⁵⁰

The question of how to scale up instances of resistance has preoccupied me for some time. The potential for employing choreographic tools to potentially scale up socio/political movements; this possibility was originally inspired by choreographer *Erdem Gündüz* and his 'Standing Man' action in Istanbul: A man enters Taksim Square (Istanbul, 2013) with nothing but a backpack. He chooses a spot and stands still for

⁴⁹ Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Mary Flexner Lectures of Bryn Mar College, 2015.

⁵⁰ Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Mary Flexner Lectures of Bryn Mar College, 2015. Page 104-105

hours, hands in his pockets, gazing towards the Atatürk Cultural Centre. He returns to the same spot every day and for several hours each day holds the same position, claiming the space with his body at a time when public assemblies in Istanbul are forbidden.

As the standing man (both body and action) became known, spreading across time and (virtual) space via gossip, social media, from body to body, people started to gather and join the action. One by one, taking the same position, all looking in the same direction. One body becoming many. Many becoming one. His solitary gaze now a collective gaze. Repeating, replacing, supporting one another, a living network of solidarity. Re-imagining the public sphere. Mobilizing an ongoing dialogue between their presence, passers-by and social space.

Envisaging a protocol of moving together, enacting a defined set of references, *Permanent Collection* wished to echo and re-mediate such instances of bodies coming together at a distance by means of both the explicit content of the material and the formal aspects of a protocol of gestures and movement. The ongoing action in Timisoara reflected the local context but at the same time indicated relationships with other contexts, histories and struggles.

These three iterations of *Permanent Collection* were at once different and similar. They produced difference through repetition. This was an idea that had been at the core of my initial research proposal. How might a collection be definitive but undergo continuous transformation and renewal? How could I propose a less static form of display? How can movement and the living body participate in re-imagining notions of ownership and preservation?

These three productions of *Permanent Collection*, developed almost back-to-back one after the other, allowed me to test the initial premises of my research proposal: embodying togetherness; passing a vocabulary of movement in a feedback loop, orchestrated as a kind of assemblage spanning bodies, spaces, time, distance and specific contexts. They were a try-out for a yet-to-come more synchronized presentation of the research work, which would mean a more detailed construction of a protocol of simultaneity for performing together and bridging distances.

Assembling Permanent Collection

I am often asked about my interest or purpose in employing pre-existing material. The quick answer might be that I am interested in history and how new narratives can be constructed using already existing histories and material, repurposing pre-existing narratives towards very different ends.

But I think that a more detailed and political answer is due here. This relates to *how* we produce, how we can revisit or ‘recycle’ material that already exists, which instead of disappearing into obscurity, can be re-imagined and go on to reclaim and remobilize potential meaning. The imperative of ‘new,’ to produce new things, objects, works etc., lies at the core of the modernist, capitalist project. And this lies too at the core of the art world, which is often wasteful, if not profligate. In the case of live works, most of the art institutions we work with are driven by the logic of the events economy. ‘The latest’ and ‘original’ are the watchwords here. Very rarely do we see much investment in revisiting or presenting ‘older’ productions or working with material coming from the past.

In response to this situation, I am interested in revisiting existing material and references and in ‘actualizing’ past material and re-mediating it as a part of a collective memory and history. This is also a gesture triggered by the desire to re-think how we produce from an ecological (and artistic) perspective.

As I have already said, when I began my research in Oslo at the Academy of Fine Art, I started by looking closely at the local context. I quickly engaged with the history of the MUNCH Museum and issues of labour and solidarity, which I understood as being an important part of that context.

At the beginning of this reflection, I wrote that I wanted to develop *Permanent Collection* collectively. What I meant by that was not exactly by implementing a participatory practice (for several reasons that I will explain later), but by probing the subjective memory of others for material that might be brought into my research.

When the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic arrived (at the outset of this research project), I understood that I would not be able to conduct research trips or meet people face to face. So, I resorted to sending e-mails and making phone calls to a wide variety of practitioners to ask them to deliberate on subjective references related to my research. For example, particular works of art, events, cultural artefacts, and other recollections that met certain criteria as instances of solidarity, togetherness, labour movements and/or their representation in culture.

I made it clear that I would make use of their suggestions, investigating these references in further research. I would never use their name as having had some responsibility for including a particular reference in the actual work. My aim was to absorb a kind of collective memory that would guide my research along different paths of inquiry, in directions other than those I would usually follow as an individual artist. This was very fruitful and I obtained a mass of information that led to new lines of research, some of which resulted in the material enacted and embodied in *Permanent Collection*.

I will list the names of all those who contributed to this collective input, but I will not reveal which reference or research direction they suggested. This is an ethical decision, as I feel it would be inappropriate to class this process as a participatory practice. I believe that a participatory practice demands long-term exchange with the individuals involved and it would be untrue to claim that this was the case.

The selection of references finally included in *Permanent Collection* has been entirely my responsibility, even though I must acknowledge and credit the collective input of the following contributors: Elizabeth Ward, Ingunn Rimestad, Magda Radu, Pierre Bal-Blanc, Tominga O'Donnel, Ralph Lemmon, Benjamin Boar, Stacey de Voe, Hilde Herming, Ebba Moi, Gard Olav Frigstad, Ute Kuhlemann Falck, Anne Beate Hovind, Jorun Sanstal, Mihai Mihalcea, Jimmy Robert, Mike Sperlinger, Anton Skaaning Thomsen, Marte Aas.

They impelled me to look into diverse histories and references that I would not have done otherwise. This provided a more pluralistic, broad-based and collective approach to *Permanent Collection*. Sometimes I used input proposed by the consultees explicitly. On other occasions, I used their suggestions as starting points for further investigation, which led me to histories and genealogies I would not have thought of on my own. In this way, I was able to incorporate the subjective recall of the people I consulted, expanding the scope of my research and its outcomes.

References

I will now give several examples of these references and how we set about embodying them. We used a range of methods for interpreting this diverse material: re-enactment; the tradition of the tableaux vivant (deriving from my past as a ballet dancer); choreographic interpretation; intervention; citation, historical movement techniques; speculative choreography and methods related to the individual performers' backgrounds (spoken language, body poses originating from the ballet tradition or other techniques coming from modern and contemporary dance).

Firstly, I would like to explain how I use the term “references.” I use it both to point at a particular event, artwork, instance etc, and in a broader sense as referencing back to a feeling, memory or state of being in a more general sense. For example, if one encounters a solidarity song or a representation of togetherness, this might point one back to a personal moment they remember in relation to it. Even if they do not recognize the exact instance or image I am referencing, I hope to induce a sense of relating to the reference through “pointing them back” to a personal experience or memory related to the reference we are enacting.

In the course of research, I amassed more than one hundred references for possible inclusion in *Permanent Collection*. As it turned out, only a third of them were selected for development with the performers. This was for several reasons, sometimes ethical ones. I felt I could not appropriate or represent references that came from geographical spaces that were beyond the scope of my personal experience. In the light of recent debates about colonialism and the appropriation of other(s') histories, I chose to let go of such references, even though I found them very interesting. I decided that even

though there was a risk of *Permanent Collection* being read as Eurocentric, it would be more sensitive at this moment in history to work with references that were closer to contexts that I am familiar with and understand. I am aware that this decision raises many possible questions about the work, but I am willing to justify and take responsibility for my decision.

The first reference I used, related to the workers who constructed the new MUNCH museum, as described above.

Another, particularly relevant reference is one that I call a ‘dance memory.’ This refers to a live performance at the old MUNCH museum in Tøyen dating back to 1974; no images or audiovisual footage of the dance have survived and perhaps never existed. So, I was interested in this in terms of the workings of memory, remembering, collective memory and embodiment. It is a prime example of this kind of production process and lies at the core of the method we developed for developing *Permanent Collection*.

Triangle 1974 – a dance memory

When I started my research into the background and context of the MUNCH museum, I found out that the former MUNCH museum building at Tøyen used to have a live program in the 1970s consisting of live music, dance and poetry recitals. I read about some of these live events and hoped to find audiovisual recordings of the dance pieces, to use as found material for *Permanent Collection*. But I soon learned that none was available. I had to start thinking of how I might use this material anyway, despite the absence of images or evidence.

One of the performers I invited to take part in *Permanent Collection*, Ingunn Rimestad, a dancer and teacher, in her last year at the dance department at KHIO was seventy years old at the time. I arranged to meet Ingunn to discuss some routine to do with availability and schedules. At some point, I started telling her about my research and my frustration at not finding any documentation of the dances presented at the MUNCH museum during the 1970s.

Ingunn smiled and said, “I danced there in 1974 in a piece called *Triangle*.” The conversation immediately switched from scheduling rehearsals to asking Ingunn if she remembered anything from that performance. She smiled again and replied, “Well it’s almost forty-seven years ago. I’m afraid I don’t remember much.” But I pressed on with my enquiry and asked if she could imagine trying to remember something through body memory and if we could try and work on *Triangle* together. She was very reluctant to do this but said she would try and remember.

Time went by and we got stuck in a long, second lock down. Ingunn was in Oslo; I was stuck in Bucharest. It was unclear when the lockdown would end and we would have the opportunity to meet again.

In the spring of 2021, I received an invitation from the MUNCH museum to contribute to a publication and a festival which was meant to act as a preview to the forthcoming live program and introduce the artists commissioned for the opening of the new building. All the invited artists were to respond to an unpublished poem by Edvard Munch, each through their own particular practice. The title of the event was *Uferdig* (Unfinished). I was reluctant to accept the invitation at first but in the end, I gave in and said yes.

The museum wanted me to make a dance in response to the poem and publish images of the dance in the book. But I did not want to choreograph a poem by Edvard Munch and instead went back to the idea of *Triangle*. My proposal was rather simple but had several layers to it: Ingunn would return to the old museum building at Tøyen, to the same room, the *Festsalen* (events hall), where she remembered performing *Triangle* in 1974. There, she would cast her mind back and try to recall the dance moves and perform them for one last time before the building closed for good. After that, she would come to the new building and perform what she had remembered of *Triangle* one more time in the future museum building. Constructing a literal link between past and future through memory and corporeality.

I imagined that we would literally transport this dance from a historical place to a contemporary context. A sort of “technology for remembering which is not object based.” (Mobile Academy Berlin)

To my surprise and satisfaction, Ingunn thought this was a good idea. And that going back to the old museum’s *Festsalen* would help jog her memory to retrieve some of the elements of the dance she had performed there forty-seven years earlier. I told the curators about my proposal, and even though they received the idea very well, they said that it would be difficult for us to gain access to the old *Festsalen* because the work of packing Munch’s paintings had already begun and it was not possible for us to perform there.

I made an excuse and said that our intention was only for Ingunn to see the space again to stimulate her memory. Finally, the museum accepted our request.

Now we began the work of finding ways to recall the forgotten dance. We decided to focus on sensations and affects. I asked Ingunn whether she remembered any element

propelling her to move during *Triangle* other than the actual choreography. She answered that she remembered the music ‘pushing’ her off balance, and her efforts to regain control. I proposed that we start there, from her remembering being pushed off balance by the music and her body reacting to that. It turned out that in doing so, Ingunn started to remember fragments of the choreography. If not a clear succession of steps, at any rate a relation was forming to the original mood and intent of the lost choreography. We pursued this and Ingunn started to recall a sense of the dance and how it might be re-performed again. She started to translate these memories of the dance and to produce a set of movements in time and space.

The day of the shoot at the old museum’s *Festsalen* arrived and Ingunn entered the space. She had planned to play a trick on the curators. To their surprise, instead of simply looking at the space, she threw herself into the dance. She went on dancing for quite some time and could not be stopped since she was already dancing. Her dance posed absolutely no threat to the safety of Munch’s art works. Ingunn’s trick proved to be an important strategy, as after the performance Ingunn told me that it had really helped her remember the dance. Or at least she felt as if she had connected with the space and her recall of the dance.

After that, she went on to the new museum building at Bjørvika and performed the dance twice, once inside and once outside the building. Translating and inscribing the dance into the MUNCH Museum’s new premises.

Edvard Munch’s works were being brought into the new building at exactly the same time and we had a sense of something of its ‘immaterial’ memory being transported simultaneously through Ingunn’s presence, body and movements. A sort of archive of the living in dialogue with the material objects in the Munch collection. This produced a

space and context for an embodied history, something that redefined our understanding of what constitutes heritage and ownership.

I had made one more proposal, aimed at turning remembering into action. This was very close to what I imagined *Permanent Collection* could become: an expression of embodied and shared heritage as an alternative to a history propounded by an individual or one single institution or nation.

I proposed to Ingunn that we would transmit the dance “telepathically” to another performer in *Permanent Collection*, Elizabeth Ward in Vienna.

My idea was that we would send Elizabeth information about *Triangle* drawn from memory, the main element being that of moving against the music to re-establish balance. We would let her interpret these memories in her own way.

What I meant by telepathy was no claim to telepathic abilities or special powers, but to rearrange the accepted hierarchy of the senses in order to produce a distinct type of knowledge. The art world prioritizes looking and seeing. As a result, visual art is a direct expression of the notion that the visual is the sense we can most trust in. I wanted to propose a different hierarchy to produce other knowledge, one that embraced the unseen, the tactile, the imaginary.

Ingunn and Elizabeth would perform *Triangle* simultaneously, on the same day at the same time, Ingunn in Oslo, Elizabeth in Vienna. The simultaneous actions would be captured by a photographer at each location and would provide the final outcome of the commission received from the museum.

The movements could then be transmitted between different generations of dancers and different locations in an ongoing practice of memorizing and multiplying.

The lockdown prevented us from meeting Elisabeth in person, but we transmitted Ingunn's recollections about the original dance via emails and telephone conversations. At the designated time, both performers enacted *Triangle*. It resulted in strikingly similar movements documented in photography, which were then published in the book *Uferdig*.⁵¹

Moving together simultaneously through the same historical material was a very early formulation for what I imagined *Permanent Collection* would become, with subsequent research informing the final enactment.

Subsequently, *Triangle*, was performed at the opening of the new MUNCH museum by Ingunn herself for ten days in a row, as part of *Permanent Collection*, in the Munch Museum's Monumental Hall. I imagined this as a tribute to Ingunn, a woman dancer, and as the actualization of a collective memory through embodiment.

Can a rumour or sensation become art history? Can 'back-translation' of a gesture in time derive from subjective and embodied experience? Can less canonical and western based methodologies, such as oral history, telepathy, somatic practice, attain equal status under the existing protocols for preserving and valuing collective histories?

Permanent Collection performer Elizabeth Ward referred me to this text by André Lepecki: "Ralph Lemon and Walter Carter teach us how a dancer can be an avatar of memory, collapsing past, present and future moments by stumbling upon and into new formations of temporality (...) In this account, dancers become interfering agents – beings fully embracing the viscosity of memory, the viscosity of futurity, within the precariousness of the present. The dancer as historical agent works at the threshold of another kind of choreographic formation, in which precariousness and ephemerality are

⁵¹ Uferdig publication, MUNCH publishing, 2021, page 32-35.

experienced and lived less as a kind of sorrow about the passing of time, and more fully in terms of the condition of physical matter itself.”⁵²

Gertrud Bodenwieser, *Demon Machine*, dance excerpt, 1931; Mary Wigman, *Hexentanz* (The Witch Dance), dance excerpt, 1926

Gertrud Bodenwieser was a dancer, choreographer and dance teacher in Vienna in the first half of the 20th century. She and many of her dancers were Jewish and were forced to flee Nazi Austria. She moved to Australia where she continued to make performances. She was never invited to perform in Austria again. She died in 1959.

Her husband, Friederich Rosenthal, playwright and the director of the Burgtheater, was murdered at Auschwitz concentration camp in 1942.

Elizabeth and I researched some of Gertrud’s dances and decided to adapt and enact an excerpt of her *Demon Machine* choreography in *Permanent Collection*.

The enactment of *Demon Machine* is installed immediately before *Triangle 1974* by Ingunn Rimestad, linking these two women dancers from very different periods in history and also linking Vienna and Oslo, both cities being *Permanent Collection* venues.

Another dance excerpt we enacted was *Hexentanz* (*The Witch Dance*) by Mary Wigman, also a pioneer of modern dance, who changed perceptions of dance and the body. We performed this at a very slow pace, much slower than the original version. The

⁵² André Lepecki, *Singularities. Dance in the Age of Performance*. Published by Routledge, 2016, page 162.

decelerated tempo was chosen in order to suggest a relationship with other histories, for example the history of Romania (where I come from) or other non-western histories.

The dominant narrative still affirms that contemporaneity is defined by the West, while other parts of the world should make efforts to keep pace with the West.

Hexentanz, 1926, is now considered one of the most radical dances in modernity. By drastically slowing down the tempo, we wanted to suggest a slowing down of history, providing time for others to catch up. This was intended ironically to make a critique of the western master narrative.

Act Up protest in New York City, 1987

This is a reference suggested to me by a queer artist and friend, Every Ocean Hughes. While looking into references during the various lockdowns, Every Ocean told me that the current Covid-19 pandemic situation reminded them of the early AIDS crisis and the Act Up movement, the international, grassroots political movement working to end the AIDS pandemic. For me, as a queer person, this historical reference had both a political and personal resonance. Even though I belong to a later generation, the AIDS pandemic remains present in so many stories of the queer community. I grew up knowing and fearing AIDS. I heard many personal accounts of people lost to the pandemic. So, it was important to me to include some reference to this history in *Permanent Collection*.

I researched the history and the numerous images of Act Up protests. One of the group's main protest strategies was to obstruct public spaces, streets, squares, public buildings, post offices, churches etc. laying their bodies in different constellations. This reminded

me of Judith Butler's "Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly,"⁵³ which has been a key reference throughout my research. Marginalized bodies assembling in public, reclaiming public space with their bodies, refusing to be ignored. In this context, I could see how movement could encompass both the grammar of dance and choreography and the metaphorical representation of social movements and protests.

After researching several *Act Up* protests in depth, I selected one in which many bodies held up their hands and entangled their legs and feet in a sort of 'lock,' making it harder for the police to remove them. This body 'lock' was a collective resistance initiative, in which the many became one in a concerted effort to form an unbreachable road block. I worked with the performers in the three cities, Oslo, Vienna and Timisoara, on different embodiments and situations for enacting this reference.

In Timisoara, the single performer constructed a slow, rather abstract movement with his hands lifted upwards, which took a long time to perform. He imagined the presence of others spread over different locations in different cities.

In Vienna, we decided to perform this outside the Kunsthalle Wien, in public space, just in front of the entrance to the performance and exhibition areas, blurring the boundaries between real street life and performance. Passers-by stopped and wondered whether this was in fact a spontaneous protest taking place in the courtyard of the MuseumsQuartier.

In Oslo, at the new MUNCH museum, we decided to perform the *Act Up* reference just outside the Monumental Hall, temporarily blocking the entrance to the gallery. Visitors were stuck behind and in front of the enactment for a short time, registering the massed bodies of the performers, holding hands in tight formation.

⁵³ Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Mary Flexner Lectures of Bryn Mar College, 2015.

My aim was to re-mediate and disseminate the history of what was an important struggle for the queer community at a time of danger, fear and uncertainty. The visitors took photos and posted them on social media straight away and I hoped that this would prompt a renewed awareness of the long-standing struggle against homophobia and AIDS prejudice, a struggle that remains as necessary today as in the era of Act-Up.

Extinction Rebellion's protest action at the Rockefeller Center, New York City, 2019

Following this series of embodied protests, I searched for a reference more closely connected to the museum as institution and the art world.

Extinction Rebellion's action in NYC in 2019 aimed to draw public attention to the ecological crisis facing the planet, to make politicians tell the truth about it and act to halt the destruction.

Extinction Rebellion is another international grassroots direct action movement, who have mounted protests all over the world.

In the reference, the members of Extinction Rebellion (XR) lay down on the ground to form a circle, their bodies occupying the space of the institution. Inside the circle, there is a sort of X formation, perhaps a depiction of the group logo.

With the five dancers we chose to focus on the circle in our enactment. At the suggestion of Elizabeth Ward, we introduced one movement, which also resonates historically with experimental dance in the 1960s and '70s in New York. We lay on our side in the C-curve taken from choreographer Simone Forti's practice, taught by

choreographer Steve Paxton in “Material for the Spine.”⁵⁴ Both were important members of Judson Church Theater, one of the most innovative and experimental dance movements in the history of dance. “Looking into the center of the circle, one person begins the roll, and the others try to be in sync. Slowly everyone rolls in an outward direction from the side to your back across the front of your body and onto the original beginning side. The group determines what rolling strategy works best. A simple rollover or maintaining the C-curve as taught by Steve Paxton and Simone Forti.”

By doing this roll, the circle expands endlessly into the space. This formed a link between *Extinction's Rebellion* action and a very specific historical moment for movement and choreography in New York, which was also politically minded.

The slowly expanding circle ends up occupying the whole exhibition space, creating a succession of configurations and patterns; the public have to position themselves in relation to the enactment as it expands and approaches, get closer or step back.

Anna Daucikova – *My Feet – Crossword II*, 1993-1994/2017

I met Anna Daucikova in her studio in Prague in 2019 during a research trip together with curator Pierre Bal-Blanc. I was fascinated by her practice and life story as one of the few explicitly trans artists belonging to an older generation in Eastern Europe. She also helped establish the first feminist magazine in Eastern Europe.

During the studio visit I noticed an artwork consisting of several photos showing her feet in different positions. The work felt very performative, every image suggesting

⁵⁴ Viewed 12 July 2022, <https://www.materialforthespine.com/>

movement. In between each photo there were blank spaces and I asked Anna whether we could enact this work, filling in the gaps or ‘missing images.’

So, we decided to focus on the feet. We took our shoes and socks off as the first part of the enactment making the feet the focus of the viewers’ attention. The performers start from the original positions of Daucikova’s feet in the photos and then moved them in a slow-paced choreography.

The performers were allowed a lot of freedom to interpret the images, which produced a choreographic work that focused on the feet, always maintaining a clear reference to the original work.

This also resulted in the individual performers producing subjective interpretations of the same historical material. They performed the piece several times during *Permanent Collection* and each time a different performer enacted this reference alone. I wanted to expand on the original work, taking it from an expression by a singular artist into a plurality of interpretations.

Naked feet inside the museum produce a strange encounter for the audience. Bare feet in public space are usually associated with poverty. The performers sit on the floor and move their feet very slowly. At the beginning, the visitors are somewhat confused by people sitting barefoot on the floor. As the enactment unfolds, they might come to understand that this is a performance but nevertheless the ambiguity of the piece remains.

Anna Daucikova told me that she had a very strict catholic upbringing. In this work she was playing – from her perspective as a trans person – with the iconography of Jesus’s naked feet.

Ralph Lemon – *Soul Train* (Chorus number 4), quotation

I found a twenty second video recording of Ralph Lemon's Chorus randomly on a Facebook page. Ralph Lemmon created a line dance for the entrance hall of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. The line dance was sourced from a vocabulary of movements drawn from the *Soul Train* line dances on YouTube. Soul Train was an iconic American music-dance television programme. I am an admirer of Ralph Lemmon's work, so I decided to quote this line dance in *Permanent Collection*.

Since we only had about twenty seconds of the original dance, I asked the performers in each location, to learn the steps from the video and then research YouTube for more *Soul Train* movement sequences. Each performer would add more steps to the dance resulting in a three-minute new dance constructed collectively as another episode in *Permanent Collection*.

Anna Jermolaewa – *Research for Sleeping Positions*, 2006

I first encountered Anna Jermolaewa's work during a research trip to Vienna for the ongoing project "Collective Exhibition for A Single Body – The Private Score Vienna" (in collaboration with curator Pierre Bal-Blanc). She showed us her video work *Research for Sleeping Positions*,⁵⁵ in which she re-constructs her arrival as a refugee from Russia at the Westbahnhof in Vienna in 1990. She was forced to sleep in the train

⁵⁵ Anna Jermolaewa, *Research for Sleeping Positions*, Video, 18 min., 2006.

station for a time and in this video work she revisits and recounts that experience, showing how she tried to sleep on a wooden bench in the station.

The instructions to the performers enacting this reference were to try and fall asleep at various spots around the gallery rooms, museum corridors, and other areas outside the exhibition space. They were to alternate a number of sleeping positions over a long period.

Lena Constante – *Mad Heads*

Lena Constante was a Romanian artist and essayist working with tapestry and folklore. She is not very well known outside Romania. She was arrested in 1954 and after a political mock trial she became a political prisoner, sentenced to twelve years in jail, much of which she spent in solitary confinement.

The series of drawings *Mad Heads* was an attempt to reflect and depict her experience as a prisoner. Even though she is not well known as an artist, I wanted to include her and make her work better known through *Permanent Collection*, placing her alongside other much better known artists and giving her equal status in the collection.

The drawing I selected from the series depicts a pile of bodies and heads displayed on top of one another. For this enactment we employed the tradition of *tableaux vivant*. Early on in my career, I trained as a classical dancer, and I suppose the tradition of the *tableau vivant* is a part of my heritage as an artist.

Each performer embodies one of the figures depicted in the drawing and together they form a live image of the original artwork.

Eszter Salamon – *M/OTHERS*, dance quotation

Eszter Salamon's *M/others* is an intimate duet between Eszter and her mother. In an interview I found online during my research, Eszter says that "these movements don't belong to us. They are there to be taken and interpreted by others."⁵⁶ I thought this statement echoed the core thinking behind *Permanent Collection*, meaning that it reflected critically on notions of ownership and heritage.

I selected a small excerpt from Eszter's choreography and, at the suggestion of Elizabeth Ward, we decided on a group version of the material.

Starting off from the two performers' original positions, lying on their backs on the floor, feet touching, we developed a collective movement, rather like a living molecular organism. We moved very slow, producing a wave-like movement with this collective, inter-connected body. It constituted a non-hierarchic and democratic structure (everyone gives and everyone receives a sequence of impulses), that constitutes both a homage to the original work and a new piece.

Edvard Munch – *paintings left out in nature*

This is the only direct reference to the work of Edvard Munch. Legend has it that the painter used to leave unfinished paintings outside in nature for very long periods. I thought this gesture was an interesting early break with the nature/culture binary.

⁵⁶ <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/multimedia/monument-07-mothers>

The performers and I developed different ways of embodying this legend. After many attempts, we chose a very simple ‘equivalent’: we decided to deactivate the bodies and lie down on the floor in the exhibition room, as if we were a living landscape. The idea was to return protagonism to the objects and other elements in the room, minimizing the presence of bodies and actions, now curtailed to just breathing. We spent a very long time on the floor making no discernible movements.

Telepathic Rehearsals

As the first and then the second lockdowns went on, it became clear that it would be a long wait before it would be possible to meet up with performers and research/rehearse materials for *Permanent Collection*. I began to panic, knowing that my research period was limited by a deadline; no one knew how long the restrictions would last. Forced by circumstance, I almost gave in and was about to call the performers and arrange for online rehearsals. But something felt wrong about rehearsing that way. I felt that I was in too much of a rush to make compromises, despite the urgency of the circumstances. I remembered the ‘telepathic’ exercise I described earlier, carried out with students at the Fine Art Academy in Oslo.

I asked the performers, spread between Vienna and Oslo, while I was stuck in Bucharest, to hold ‘telepathic’ rehearsals at a distance. I proposed sending material and references via e-mail each day, and that we would decide a time when we would work together, each at their own location, rehearsing at a distance. No Zoom or online images, just us working ‘together’ at the same time with the same references. We would do this for several weeks. Everyone agreed and we decided that when eventually we could meet and rehearse face-to-face, these ‘telepathic’ rehearsals would form the basis for further research and development. I thought it would be interesting for us to explore different capacities for producing knowledge and that we would produce very different ways of relating to the proposed material.

We decided to report in writing via e-mail after each telepathic rehearsal, documenting the session. Please note that not all the references mentioned here were used for the final presentation of the work.

I have transcribed the unedited emails generated by some of those “telepathic” rehearsals. I have not revealed who produced what, but simply presented the results of this research experiment. See some extracts of this exchange bellow.

We arranged to start rehearsing at the same time. Elizabeth in Vienna and me in Bucharest. I mixed up the time zones and I was late. Luckily, I was visiting a museum with lots of empty space. I decided to stay there and do the rehearsal. Before starting, we sent each other an image of the space we were in.

As a coincidence, the room I was in had an exhibition of drawings by Valie Export entitled “Waves.” I started by singing with a loud voice the first reference in our *Permanent Collection*, the song Bella Ciao. I imagined a shared soft togetherness. Summoning the workers that built the Munch Museum. It was powerful to imagine that we were singing together at the same time. One in Vienna the other in Bucharest. Inventing some ways of being together during restrictive times. Embodied through time and space. Connecting contexts and historical contexts.

For the second reference, Felix-Gonzales Torres’s, *Portrait of Ross in L.A.*, I went down on the floor in the corner of the room. Embodying the candies. The sensation I wanted to transmit, and feel is that we were breathing in unison. I imagined several bodies next to mine and then starting to sing the song “Sweet Harmony”

For the third reference, “Act-Up protest in NY”, I thought about blocking the access door to the exhibition space with our bodies while enacting the image. The thought I transmitted was “remembering.”

For the fourth reference, Maja Refsum’s memorial detail, I thought of becoming a minor but important detail. Don’t overlook anything!

And for the fifth, Louise Bourgeois, “Seven in Bed”, I thought of the position together being and feeling like we are waves. The waves of Valie Export in the room but also the waves of the sea close to the Munch Museum. Lying down for a long time, transforming into this multiple organisms or just matter that shifts and does not care for being anything in particular.

Telepathic graffiti/Bella Ciao - Trying to remember rhythm and tapping out in a mark.

Felix-Gonzales Torres - Soundtrack - the beloved

Leaning into the wall
sun shines in the corner, noticing the
dust under the floorboards
thinking of candy, sweetness of

enjoying moment, dust is opposite
but something that stays, that sticks

resting into

thought of Audre Lorde's "The Uses of the Erotic".

moment of missing others.

Betsy Kjelsberg - What struck me here was the feet.

Orientation of feet of one person always facing the same direction but as a group their feet were either to the right or to the left.

Keeping on the 80's theme - a bit "Walk like an Egyptian" (The Bangles)

Monument is also a static image of an action in motion so tried to be mostly static but move through the group with foot orientation...

Louise Bourgeois - this was the hardest to imagine without others

Alone in the studio I have blankets

so, I used them to intertwine.

also, the Sun. Found a stop in the sun as another to be with.

Day 2 – Telepathic Rehearsal

It was a beautiful day. Very warm and sunny. I decided to do the rehearsal in a small park.

Outside. I thought about how this sensation of the outside can be introduced inside in the exhibition space which normally is quite rigid and disciplined. One needs to be silent, not touch objects, behave.

I thought about lightness, playfulness, exuberance. The park had on one hand, kids playing, and on the other, single adults resting alone on benches. Everyone seemed to take a break from the pandemic. Masks were lowered, eyes were closed, and the sun was shining on their faces. For a moment I thought everyone was breathing together in unison. I thought about resilience as lightness. Instead of being tensed one could breathe out in order to become resilient.

I read an article before our session about the etymology of the word *conspiracy*. It derives from Latin, and it means to breath together.

I never thought of it. It always had such negative connotation. Then I began thinking of each of the references we were working on and what to transmit to you. But the main thought was: conspiracy.

Ralph Lemon – conspiracy. exuberance. being very loud. Let's do the dance very energetically and break the silence of the gallery room. Connect with the historical meaning of the "Soul Train" by filling the space with unfiltered and unauthorized noise and joy.

Kathe Kollwitz – center of the space. Bodies as shields. Still breathing together in unison. Eye contact with the viewer.

Eszter Salamon – many mothers with children in the park. Care in slow-motion. Slow down the space immensely. Micro perceptions. Become wind like the soft wind blowing my hair in the park. Move between object and subject.

Valie Export – since I was in a park, I imagined it should be a kid enacting Valie Export. I asked someone I knew in the park, and Zoe, an 8yo girl, did one position. I took a picture which I am attaching. It felt nice to enact this historical material with children. It gave a sense of playfulness. I went to the same spot and performed the enactment myself. Just to also play the game. I imagined all the kids in the park enacting Valie Export's "Body Configurations". Maybe I should do it one day. Got the idea to ask a few of my friend's children to pick up a position from the "Body Configurations" series and enact it inside their school. Valie Export confronted and inscribed her own body within male dominated institutions and relations of power. In the case of the kids, I thought the equivalent would be their school. An important place perhaps but also a disciplinary institution. I also thought about the fact that I don't have children and probably never will.

The thought I transmitted to you: playground and the children's republic.

Fabrikjentene – I just imagined how the Fabrikjentene start walking down the river Akerselva from their current position in front of the Arbeiders Museet in Oslo. They walk all the way down to the new Munch Museum, enter the monumental room and strike a pose.

To you I sent: strike a pose!

My phone continues to act up so no attached photos for now.

Ralp Lemmon- chorus line

1. bounce knees in and out 8 counts while the left arm lowers down

2. pick up right knee to step, alternating with opposite arms

6 times r, l, r, l, r, l

3. right foot comes into touch, tap step

4 times r, l, r, l

4. 4x lean over, swipe floor with fingers & back leg up to step, step repeat

5. jump in parallel shifting facings

6 times, r, l, r, l, r, l

6. step forward windmilling arms while step, step forward and step back

- I am pretty terrible at learning movement from video- have to go back and watch and pause and watch and pause to catch which foot where. Felt important to try to write it down even if it was a lot of stopping and pausing.

This was fun and while pretty simple I felt step 4 more challenging than it looks and I find myself so heavy in step 5!

The effects of corona lockdown...

Käthe Kolwitz - trying to embrace the sun that was shining so beautifully in the studio. The presence of the sun helps me feel not so alone but it was also pretty difficult to embrace. Still very fun to try

Eszter Salamon - I re-watched the video and what stood out was the touch.

Had image of many people laying on ground in the foot touching foot section of Eszter's dance. Many couple space through the room. Foot to Foot.

Valie Export- I found myself moving around the periphery of the studio. The sun was gorgeous, and I just wanted to luxuriate in the light while in these stillnesses

Ellen Jacobsen - What struck me was the attitude.

1 foot out, a bit of a pout.

This time I rehearsed at my mother's apartment in my old room. Therefore, there was a recurrent feeling of remembering and memory. I even started looking through some old photos of my dad and one image proved very useful for one of the references. Looking at our material for the day I noticed we had lots of protest movements. I thought about the notion of moving together through other people's gestures. Summoning them through embodiment. It was also a lot about retracing, actualizing past gestures and touching.

I also realized that I was focusing too much on sending you sensations. I wanted this time to send more practical information.

Extinction Rebellion – Lying on the floor in the middle of the room sideways. Aiming for my body to be part of a large circle. It reminds me of “Black Circle” by Malevich. Only that now the circle is a protest circle and an occupation of the space.

Crying for Ana Mendieta – On my knees holding my face in my palms. Really summoning Ana Mendieta. In her “Silueta” series, Mendieta played a lot with traces, absence and presence. How to leave a trace in the physical space?

Benson Tsang – I cut the space with my body on a diagonal. Thinking about the ethics of embodying scavengers. But I carry on.

The Hand That Will Rule the World – Here my father’s childhood picture provided inspiration. It depicts a group of kids at the seaside in 1945. They are constructing a human sort of pedestal and my dad stands on top of these bodies with his fist up. He was 12. I again thought about a monument by kids. There is a certain demonumentalisation at play.

School Girls Facing Riot Police in Hong Kong – A very simple position but depicting unity. I stood very close to the entrance door of the flat imagining if there were visitors coming, they would be confronted by our gaze and body posture.

So, touching the photo of your dad as a child!

Sense you tomorrow 13 Bucharest time :)

Extinction Rebellion-

This image reminds me of Steve Paxton's material for the spine and the Crescent roll which he credits to Simone Forti.

<https://www.materialforthespine.com/en/welcome/forms.crescent-roll.crescent-led-by-feet-and-hands>

Had image of us as a circle "c" curving towards each other and then make one roll out at the same time to grow the circle. This could go on and on. - Circle could grow or condense...

After practicing crescent rolls for a while, I also did the spiral. For this movement you need space. It felt good to travel through the room.

Crying for Ana Mendieta

I read Acting tips for crying.

One of the most practical was to be sure to drink water- for water to come out of your face you must have water in your body.

There were many different tips -think of something horribly tragic, etc.

The advice that stood out was the need for real vulnerability. The article said that tears without vulnerability mean nothing, but if an actor can allow a true vulnerability to be perceived then a scene can be strong without tears...

I didn't cry, couldn't cry and yet I know how easily I can cry over a sentimental film on the airplane.

Sat with that. Also sat with fact that I know much more about Ana Mendieta's death than her work and how sad that is...

Benson Tsang

I focused on the name See/Can't See and ended up sitting under a blanket. While under the blanket my breath became louder, more noticeable and I focused my breath in relationship to your breath. Felt important to hold this thought, my breath, your breath in Bucharest, what it means to breath together from a distance and how in a way this is all we have. Definitely influenced by our conspiracy talk :)

The Hand that Will Rule the World

This is a bit of a mystery. How to do it when alone. I thought again about Simone Forti's "News Animations" and approached this work half in my style of her practice and half "Authentic Movement"

It was cold so in the mystery I walked over to the radiator and had my legs against the heat. Felt the heat and then began humming. It is not what this will become but in the getting lost I had a moment.

School girls face the Riot Police

For this I thought about facing. The photo from the gallery looking out the window verse facing the police. I stood by a different window and looked out the window imaging I am with others before turning and coming further into the room to face another view.

This time again at home. In between tutorials with students. Therefore, the feeling of distance and fomo is very present. We speak about their work, possible plans for installation but all is uncertain and feels very distant. I am here they are there with no certainty in sight.

So, I turn to our telepathy session with the word “connection” in my mind. Fun fact: in the evening I took a yoga class via Zoom. The teacher gave a speech about the meaning of yoga saying it’s not about the gymnastics but ultimately about connection. Made sense for the day.

Doris Salcedo – I still have a very strong recollection of seeing this work live. It was impressive how it solved the huge challenge of the space in the Turbine Hall at Tate.

That’s a very tough space to command and this choice of cracking the floor and becoming monumental by going under rather than over, produced both a dramatical and strong effect.

I have enacted this work once before. But revisiting makes sense. The cracks are still everywhere and the Museum needs to still do a lot of work and address many “dark” issues of its past and present.

I lay down on the floor and imagine others joining me creating a line, a crack but also a connection, I imagine it in a very big room taking lots of space. Body to body, stretching, pausing, resting like a small organism.

Anna Jermolaewa – This is a reference we both know. It’s one of the very few references depicting or representing a single individual. Somehow the body positions in Anna’s work connect with what I had in mind to do for Doris. Anna was a refugee sleeping on a bench in the train station in Vienna. Doris’s work is about those left out on the margins of society. There is a connection ☺

I try different sleeping positions. At home it becomes strange because it is actually comfortable. In exhibition spaces it won’t be, because they are devices made for high visibility. One can’t rest if one is looked at all the time. I imagine the art works in the museum being exhausted by all the attention from the viewers. I read once a speculative text wondering about what the artworks are doing at night. When the exhibition is closed.

I thought about asking the Munch Museum to let us perform one time at night, during closing hours, so that we can be together with the other artworks without visitors. Or maybe we should just sleep in the monumental gallery.

Lara Almarcegui – It seems interesting to enact this reference which is made out of dismantling and destroying the walls of the building, in a newly built and recently finished museum building. I also thought about moving the debris of walls from another institution and exhibit it in a different one. The new one holding the old one to keep and show.

I have also worked with this reference before. It is about revealing different strata of the material, so I am thinking of piling up bodies. The way I am positioned now on the floor also makes me think about a barricade. A very soft Barricade.

Pauline Oliveros - I read the score for the *Sonic Meditation* we chose for the Telepathic Improvisation. I had no idea about it before, but it actually is exactly what we are trying to do. So, I tried sending you a sound. And then I tried sending you a movement. And then a mood. I imagined this could be something to do with the group and maybe the audience.

Natalia Goncharova – A lot of circles and lines in today's selection. I was thinking again about the art movement Goncharova was part of. It was called "Everythingism". I took one position from the image and held it in the middle of the room. I sent you that everything goes.

And I have no images or photos for this time.

This day I was quite late. For Christmas a friend gave me a gift certificate for a craniosacral gift certificate.

I've been having headaches later. Probably all the zooming so decided to go for a lesson.

After the lesson the practitioner commented wow- that was a really long session!

It had been more than 2 hours!

I was a block away from the studio but 25 min late to our start time.

Felt like I was walking through water to get to the studio.

As it was very hard to connect with “rehearsing” after this long craniosacral session, I decided to go straight into Anna Jermolaewa as a way to both connect to something familiar and give my body a chance to adjust.

I didn’t sleep but found several comfy places in the room to try to rest.

Thought a lot about transitions. Transitioning from public place (train station) to private act (sleep)

in relationship to my attempt to transition from deeply internal to rehearsing.

Pauline Oliveros- When I had checked the scores the day before the print had been a bit blurry.

In this moment my head also felt blurry and so I settled on idea of Deep Listening.

Years ago performed in Pauline’s studio/gallery in Kingston, NY and the name of the space was Deep Listening.

Calming breathing with question could I listen so deeply I could connect to you doing the same in Bucharest.

Doris Salcedo-

I was a bit lost at first. Walking along cracks in floor, looking for marks, eyes scanning the floor and then I went down to the ground and began rolling in a diagonal across the room.

It is 90m2 and I rolled across the long diagonal. Thinking back to Steve/Simone and imagined us in a mass rolling and creating a gulf in the room.

Lara Almarcegui -

This quote I had read some days earlier came to mind.

We are part mineral beings too. Our teeth are reefs, our bones are stones- and there is a geology of the body as well as the land. It is a mineralization- the ability to convert calcium into bone- that allows us to walk upright, to be vertebrate, to fashion the skulls that shield our brains.

I took off my socks to expose my toenails and bared my teeth. Something about exposing these more obvious mineral parts of us.

Natalia Goncharova

Circle dance - I made up one. 2 steps traveling in a circle.

arms open to side while stepping into second and then bending elbows so that hands come to head while crossing right leg over left to step

and then left steps into second and the arms go to second also.

Basic rhythm of open, set cross, open, step cross legs and open, diamond (hands towards head while elbows stay shoulder height), open, diamond with arms.

I wanted to find the simple circle dance even if I was alone. The rhythm helped me imagine others and also I felt a bit Nijinsky -Rite of Spring...

I decided to situate myself for today's rehearsal in an imaginary space. If we can't travel at least our minds can. So, I imagined a place which is a combination of Oslo, Vienna and Bucharest. Some sort of hybrid place to inhabit and move together alongside these contexts.

Edvard Munch – This reference became quite intriguing and especially how to do it. I was thinking of what an equivalent to art works left outside to transform in nature could be. I lied down on the floor next to the paintings and deactivated myself. The performer does not arrest or asks for attention in the space. It lets other, non-human- elements, become more important. I was thinking of "Horizontal Man" by Julius Koller. I also thought of performing for the other elements in the room and not for the audience. A dance made for the paintings. I was a bit afraid that it does not become too convoluted or hermetic though.

Gabriele Stotzer – I liked the sort of agitated, storm like feeling of the film. I copied some of the movements and jumps in the film rather than making my own. I guess the original dance had to be spontaneous, so I thought of slightly playing around with that by repeating what they did in the film. Like a rehearsed improvisation ☺

Lena Constante – this is an instance of a very sad story with some horror details in it. But the image has something beautiful. It made me think of willow trees. Come together as willow trees and enact this image.

Tonje Ramstad – An abstraction. Summoning this artist, I really know nothing about felt really abstract but not uninteresting. I like the combination of materials I see in the work. I went against the wall upside down trying to enact those forms in a very direct way as if my body was simply another material like any other.

Ana Daucikova – this is familiar material, but I liked doing it again. Bare feet in a museum produce a certain sensation in the viewer. Many museums still have a very “elegant” or even elitist feel to them. It’s all looking very proper, therefore walking bare foot inside feels like a little transgression to rules of how one should or should not behave in such places.

Munch Paintings in the Forest - What does it mean to be acted upon? Thinking of canvas weathering in the forest and how can I enter into a similar process without the elements like weather and longer periods of time aka seasons.

Laying on floor Pauline’s “Deep Listening” comes to mind. Let myself breath and feel weight sink in floor while listening. Listen and listen until I hear bird song and then find myself curving over to the side in relationship to the bird’s song. As if the sound of the birds is acting upon my body. This creates sound of my jeans on the floor and then I let this sound act upon me. Have to think of the aging body while in this.

Deep Listening and image of long periods of time spent in a forest become an overarching score for the day.

Gabriele Stotzer- Because my mood is a bit low (it has been cold and grey for days) I decide to go for shaking. Find myself once again coming down to the ground and then do the exercise recommended by my PT that I never do. Heel Rocks. This exercise was very popular in the 90’s post-modern dance NYC. I never liked doing it. Never found the feel or point of doing it. Today as well I’m starting and stopping, starting and stopping. Eventually I do this enough time that when I stop the rocking feeling passing like a wave through my body. It reminds me of childhood days spent on a boat and then still feeling the lull of the boat when in bed for the night. It’s not the demonstrative ecstatic but similar to altered states where something passes through the body to another state.

Lena Constante - now that I get a little background (would like to know more) Lena and Gabriele are linked. Time spent in prison. find myself turning, tilting my head as if i could be many faces. I do not change my place but in my mind the tilting heads are like a totem pole, one above each other. think what it means that I feel something that others will not see. or in my imagination it looks like something that is not actually reproducing. some head tilts I feel more friendly, some more serious, but with each one fragmented feeling of "I'm here," "I'm here."

Tonje Ramstad - A bit lost in this one. Look up the word Sama-connected to-er - togetherness

Again, the aloneness feels present, so I lean into Pauline's deep listening and Manuel's presence in Bucharest.

Doing this brings me to see the many lines in the space.

I go to sit infant of the window above the radiator. My body a line just next to the window seam, my legs lines echoing the lines of the radiator.

Notice I am across from the ballet barre and actually my lines are also from a distance echoing lines in the studio.

I get cold and slip down to the floor where it feels very natural to transition into.

Anna Daucikova - Looking at feet, imaging the feel of Anna this is where I realize I am somehow still in Munch Paints in the Forest and Pauline's Deep Listening

How we inhabit time and how we listen to that time passing.

It is simple but warm and more interesting that I can put into words.

I went again outside. This time by a park which has a small lake. I noticed that we don't feel the urge to take pictures and send it to each other. It's a good sign we got rid of the visual ☺ For the first telepathic rehearsals I felt like I had to show and document via images but now I am confident that our presence and notes are just fine. It seems like this session's materials are very much about definitions and statements. Since this is our last telepathic rehearsal for the moment, maybe I was prompted to give some more direct framework or clear direction to the politics of the work. We shall see.

Hannah Ryggen – “Fishing in the Sea of Debt” is still where we are to this day. Debt is everywhere and it still divides us in a few rich and many in debt. The pandemic made it very obvious. Like in David Graber's book *Debt: the first 5000 years*.

I took quite literal the swimming title. So, I laid on the ground channelling swimming. I did not actually pretend swimming as it felt too pantomime like. But wondered what would suggest swimming. I imagine the entire image spread on the floor as it would be the canvas. In some sort of motion. Swimming in a sea of debt must be horrific but it also points out a very real struggle. I wonder what we can make out of it.

Dagny Juel – I ordered her book during rehearsal. I wanted to go and visit the Women's Museum in a city called Kongsgvinger which was also her birth town. I imagined something very straight forward: reciting one of her poems or texts loudly in the monumental room.

New definition of Museum – A definition. What is in a definition. Again, I thought about delivering the definition very straight forward by heart. I also imagined asking the workers in the museum uttering it to the public. As this is the opening of the new Museum, I think it's good to be ambitious ☺

Jesus Carillo – This is statement situates us very clearly and critically at the intersection of art, politics, ownership, decolonial, heritage, preservation etc.

I also imagined it straight forward. I found myself reading it loudly by the lake. I felt like the outdoors were not very impressed, hehe. Who cares for art and museums right there? I felt like I was disturbing the peace of the place. But maybe that's what it should do. Disturb the peace of a regular and unproblematic museum visit. At least for a brief moment.

Ingegjerd Dillan – I really liked the position of the bodies and the formation. I was trying to map it out and move very slowly. I was thinking of slowly dragging the central figure around the space. I also tried a rhythm. Like building a simple but constant rhythm. Maybe we could find together a rhythm and think about the collection and exhibition as a set of rhythms.

This day was much more atmospheric for me. I was in a bad mood. There were shootings that took place not so far from where I went to school my last year of high school.

White Christian Terror. I was in a horrible mood in reaction to the way the police department made humanizing remarks about the shooter's actions. I was mad at the way the fundamentalist church the shooter was a member of had no self-reflection on how their ideology could twist someone's brain and instead used the typical of language of damnation to condemn and distance themselves.

Hannah Ryggen- I found myself on my stomach and opening and closing arms. not really like swimming but slightly. more trying to engulf something. arms. as if I could hold/collect a great amount.

Dagny Juel- had to think what happened to Dagny is part and the same - feel a theme of patriarchy and misogyny and femicide that stretches through time. Would like to read some of her text or the biography I found about her in English. Can imagine linking Dagny to the crying for Ana

Dagny: Dagny Juel Przybyszewska, the Woman and the Myth, by Mary Kay Norseng.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvcwn360>

Postposed new definitions of museum - reading both current and proposed definitions out loud thinking then about museum the new one as ideal rather than place. And old one much more about institution as walls of building and what is inside rather than thinking beyond of what this means

Jesús Carillo- got lost a bit with idea of heirs, legacy, thinking how this attack to patriarchal thought

“Sister Break the Chain, Join the unity”- After looking at this image I found myself doing the moonwalk Lol! Kinda random but was 80’s link to walk like an Egyptian-bangles hit times where the moonwalk was a cool dance and also a way to travel while emphasizing heels up. This was a detail that I noted. Although naked nearly all the feet were in a forced arch. Moonwalk was my way through.

After the heaviness I felt from outside the studio combined with feeling depressed about Dagny’s murder it was great fun to end moonwalking! <3

Felt privileged to enter the building. The press and the media have been waiting and longing for a long time to get into the museum, and we were one of “the first” to see it, as he portrayed it. Quite empty building, empty rooms, big windows, escalators, material of steal, escalators, 13 floors, huge windows and more escalators. The feeling of being in an empty airport.

We made it to 12th floor, with access to the amazing roof top. Enjoying the huge space that will constantly be filled by bodies later this fall. We used a bit time in the beginning to just land in the room, get to know each other, reading your documents about the project and sharing thoughts.

- Then we attacked the first task: Portrait of Ross in LA. The image, the work and the music video, the lyrics set many thoughts and discussions between us. Leading us talking about suffer, sacrificing, satisfying, collapsing, shame, ecologically thinking and somehow leading the conversation to sharing about own culture, background and heritage. We felt it was huge topic and captured our interest. I was also imagining us singing the song in a lump of body.
- Then we only managed to read and discover task 2, Seven in Bed, before we had to leave the house. But I was also imagining the song continuing, while we were trying to get in the position of lying in the same position as the image.
- **Doris Salcedo – Shibboleth** - This installation is amazing. I could imagine our bodies recreating the lines, as our body parts is constantly or minimal shifting and recreating new cracks.
- **The train dance:** We actually finished day 3(Thursday) with this dance. Learning it and dancing together. Sharing moves and memories that connects or assimilate to Soul Train. I have a video of us doing the combination that I can share with you, Manuel.
- **Ezster Salamon.** I really enjoyed this video. Soft love, caring and supporting. I look forward to visiting the material and research. We didn't get time to try this with each other, but exciting.

Looking forward to the press conference today, and finally it's HAPPENING!!!

Dear all,

Here is my report. During the telepathic rehearsal I was visiting a Transportation Museum in a city called Timisoara. I was being briefed by a guide about the history of the place, workers condition, what this work meant for the city like 100 years ago etc.

I felt it was very related to our Permanent Collection in terms of topic.

1. **Portrait of Ross in L.A.** – I imagined again the pile of candies embodied in a corner. Like a living organism, breathing and sounding together. This image persists. The space was huge so I imagined that a song could eventually command and fill the space. Sweet Harmony.
2. **Louise Bourgeois** – Seven in Bed – Another pile of bodies close together. I still imagine it in the very center of the room. Like a horizontal sculpture. I was busy trying to figure out how to come into that position. Perhaps one by one, taking time. Producing slow time.
3. **Doris Salcedo** - This space was so huge that creating the crack with our bodies on the floor would take really long. But nevertheless, become interesting. How can only six bodies redefine the space or reconfigure it as public space. This piece functions in many contexts.
4. **Train Dance** – For this one I was really trying to imagine you in Oslo at the new Munch. I remembered the short dance and pictured all of you doing it and learning the steps. Then I was really curious which movements you would both add to the chorus line and if we could hum the beat and the music from the recording.

5. **Eszter Salamon – Mothers** – For Esther I tried a very slow part on the floor. Where the two women seem to slowly protect and caress each other. For this enactment it would also be great if each one of you would select a short excerpt you like. Learn a bit of the choreography and then try it together. Or like small details from the piece scattered around the room.

6. **Munch Paintings in the Forest** – This one was a bit tricky to imagine. But I could really see it taking a long time. I was trying different positions on the floor. Peripheral not in the center. And I was trying to imagine what you were imagining. Feel a connection across time and space.

- 7.

I am curious to hear about your experiences.

Dear Manuel,

I am so ashamed to send you this report so late, but it has been a full-on chaos over here. All projects that have been on hold, have started again, all at the same time.

Anyhow, here is my report of some of the pieces we were talking about during rehearsals we had at Munch:

1. Portrait of Ross in L.A (interpretation)

Learning the song - simple melody and simple text, yet very meaningful message.

The text sounds very banal and cliché but when reading them and actually thinking of what the words mean, it is very powerful. We have heard these words so much, to the point where they kind of lost their power of making a real impact. We hear them but have somehow lost the ability to listen to them.

The lyrics could be about racism, homophobia, war, capitalism.... they are the same words being used over and over again and are somehow losing its power.

Having them put in the context of "Portrait of Ross in LA", it gave me the feeling of time stopping. The melody is the same throughout the whole song, there is a lot of repetition. Just like it must be towards the end of a process fighting a terminal disease (AIDS in this context).

- Time passing slowly
- Shame
- Pain
- Physical body in slow yet continuously change (like the pile of candy)
- Bitter sweet

In the context of Permanent Collections

I see ourselves singing or humming the song "sweet harmony". Allowing it to last long and giving it enough time to create a certain vibration and let it be spread out in the room.

I also thought of a pile of clothes on us. Instead of candy, a small piece of clothing would gradually be removed from our bodies, one at the time. Maybe only clothing that have historical or emotional meaning to us or to others that we might know.

Louise Bourgeois - Seven in Bed (interpretation)

Intimacy, trust and embracing. The bodies are intertwined. This has become kind of a surrealistic thing to do in public nowadays, because of the Covid -19. On my own experience, during the past months, just watching people hugging on tv movies somehow created a small reaction within myself, as if they were doing something wrong. However, when I see people touching or hugging each other now, I have a warm feeling taking over myself and I look at it as some kind of luxury. People are hugging again but still, we are only hugging those we know from before or trust. Having someone to hug has now become some kind of privilege. I like the idea of taking time, coming slowly together, hugging and staying on it. This gesture, when given time and attention to, can awaken or create feelings on those watching. Hugging tight, closely and long before, contra after 2020 has totally different meanings and value. Perhaps a slow transformation, where at some point the audience can see all 6 bodies but only 5 or less heads, from time to time. Making these transformations happen over a long time, can be super interesting to try out.

3. Doris Salcedo (interpretation)

The picture with the woman and a girl walking side by side with the crack in between them is for me quite strong or representative, when thinking of the crack as a scar or the aftermath of a colonization.

A scar in form of vandalized infrastructure that takes several generations before it is fixed. Some generations will live and die and all they will know is a life with a "crack". A crack also symbolizes separation and distance created by privilege. This goes all the way from borders, airports, educational and health system, cultural heritage, I could go on forever... A crack, a scar, a permanent collection of scars built up over time and changing places and people. For some, a "crack" can be a strong and personal memory, while for others, it is an historical monument.

4. Train Dance

This was really fun to watch, to learn and to practice together! This is definitely not the kind of music or dance that I would expect to see in a museum, especially at Munch. I loved to feel how it totally changed the dynamic and energy in the room. We went from having these very deep conversations about social inequity, historical oppression, challenges related to gender and race, working class's exploitation, to a 5-6-7- and go! :)))

It was fascinating for me to see how we all just changed not just the topic but the body disposition and mood in absolutely no time. This can also be something to play around with on rehearsals - shifting modes. (Jens has a film of it and maybe he can share it with you:)).

5. Crying protest

This was very strong to read, at the same time I find it a bit funny to imagine the protesters discreetly sneaking themselves inside the museum in pairs, with a very specific agenda.

There is much power and some form of empathic vibration in grieving. The protesters were grieving a woman who had a brutal death. In the context of *Permanent Collection*, I would see us grieving women who are victims of domestic violence, women being oppressed by strict society and cultural rules and outdated religions.

Hi everyone.

Sorry for late update. Many projects going on parallel, because of the more opening of Oslo - restrictions.

Here is my **short** notes:

I arrived after lunch. We were more efficient about going through the new «tasks» / works.

Discussing and also getting to know each other more. It's the first time we are working together in this constellation and sharing experiences and thoughts.

1. **Hannah Ryggen**. I was now imaging a booklet of images, (when I revisited the work.) that gradually changes from page to page, because of the different situations that happens in the work. A surface of images, like the body. We didn't physically tried to embody the picture.

2. **Tonje Ramstad**. Layers, lines and texture. How every installation gets their space and placement in the room, is also very interesting constellation. Yes, it's very abstract, and by embodying the lines and layers, I can imagine a closer/ a more concrete relation to the work.

3. **Natalia Goncharova**. We were discussing the culture and image around round-dance and set in different settings/cultures. I can resonate to the 'The everything'ism'

4. **Extinction Rebellion**. Ingunn and Ornilia, please help to remember this. hehe.

5. **Fabrikjentene**. we discussed the work, and that era.

Made me also think about the sculpture in the garden of the Castle (slottsparken). A statue of Camilla Collett, a writer, but also a women-activist. And I remember it also says: «bereist af kvinder», Raisen by women (even though it was a man who made the statue). By I will strike a pose for the women.

6. **Wolfgang Tilmans?** Don't think we reached to do/discuss this.

Towards the final stages of *Permanent Collection*

I dedicated most of 2022, (spring, summer and autumn) to revisiting and re-writing the score and material for *Permanent Collection*. In the typical production mode habitual on the art circuit, ‘returning to’ or ‘re-working’ a piece is difficult for many reasons, including economy and budget. Project funding and commissions are oriented towards the continuous production of new work. Older works may be presented but simply as ready-mades, repeated as repertoire pieces. This is not always true, but after twenty years of art production, I would say there are few exceptions to the rule.

I decided that – if there is a specificity to artistic research that is distinct from other modes of production – I could for once follow my own work rhythm and escape the rhythm set by the market for a moment. I set aside a proportion of my research budget for re-visiting the works produced, taking my time to analyse their logic and content, and find new ways of presenting the material.

My objective was to imagine and construct a different constellation comprising the material leading to the final presentation of *Permanent Collection*. A group of performers and I set out to explore possible strategies that would allow us to better integrate the movement material across the simultaneous performances, strategies that would facilitate the embodiment of connections and mutual exchanges across the complex time-space we were to inhabit. This meant imagining different performative actions with which to make visible the protocol of moving together through time and space. How we might construct a means of perception of the other from space to space, separated by distance, through embodiment and bodily presence.

As a first step, Elizabeth Ward and I met in Vienna in Spring 2022. We developed a score – a sort of instruction manual – which could be followed by any performer however distant, in order to assimilate and perform the material in *Permanent Collection*. We called this score “Cookbook.”

According to Wikipedia, a cookbook is “a kitchen reference containing recipes.”⁵⁷ So, the score contained the ingredients for *Permanent Collection's* re-interpretation.

The score includes a range of information, from the details of concrete movements to different spatial configurations, the relationships between performers and space, indications of tempo, general attitudes, timing, relations, relations with the original references, mood, choreographic devices, etc. It is imagined as porous, to be adapted by the performers in response to the specific conditions and situation of the performance space they find themselves in.

The references and content of the score is informative but also changeable. For the final presentation of the research project, some of the references might or might not be performed according to the circumstances and decisions taken at that moment. The Cookbook is also meant to offer insight into the working methods adopted throughout this research project.

In the next step, in the summer-autumn 2022, I met three performers in Vienna for a series of rehearsals in which we re-visited the work produced so far: Elizabeth Ward, Benjamin Boar and Mihai Mihalcea. These performers had taken part in all the three previous iterations of the work in Oslo, Vienna and Timisoara. I was interested primarily in the bodily transmission of the material. A kind of collective exchange based on remembering embodied material – remembering through doing. After this, I

⁵⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cookbook>

wanted to modify the existing score and imagine additional strategies by which we could boost the visibility of this protocol for moving together simultaneously at a distance. We imagined future venues where *Permanent Collection* might be performed and introduced elements designed to help audiences to better visualize/imagine the presence and reality of the other spaces and performers, even though they would not be able to see them.

These strategies ranged from invoking the presence of the others by enunciating and enacting the exact movements or texts the others were realizing in real-time. Or by providing precise descriptions of the other distant spaces, their situation and circumstances during each iteration of *Permanent Collection*.

This may sound rather abstract, so I will offer concrete examples in the final chapter to explain these strategies with more clarity. I will also explain the premises for selecting venues and selecting the material included in the final work.

With these ‘revisitations,’ my aim was to work collectively to develop the material produced so far. To induce cross-contaminations and fresh interpretations of the work through a collective reading of its future potential, based on the performers' experiences and feedback. The task was to expand on the knowledge accumulated to date and move it towards a more open-ended and collective result.

I wanted the performers to exercise increased agency over the material as individual subjects and interpret it in such a way as to bring the, by now, familiar references to different performative conclusions. Following the inner logic of my initial proposal, I wanted to challenge the notion of ownership a little further. Letting go of any control I might have and placing trust in the performers to make decisions based on the experience of three years working together.

So, in Permanent Collection, revisitations constitute an important part of research. This is research that depends on full acknowledgement of the input and collective memory of all collaborators. As one of the performers told me: “we performed it so many times that the material sits in our bodies. It will be easy to enact it again.”

Permanent Collection – simultaneous ongoing action

I will now move on to the final presentation of *Permanent Collection*. By ‘final’ I mean the work I am submitting to the appraisal committee, who will evaluate my doctoral work in artistic research.

Contrary to the – sometimes pervasive – mode of making works bigger and bigger, I chose to develop a simpler and more concentrated *Permanent Collection*. This differed from the previous three productions, which involved larger scales and numbers of performers. But it is still in line with my initial proposal to build incrementally every year on each production leading to a ‘final’ presentation of *Permanent Collection*. This decision had several reasons. On the one hand, I do not want to simply reproduce what has already been done in previous presentations of *Permanent Collection* (these are documented and will be made available for evaluation). I wanted to take a few risks and challenge both myself and my project. I have chosen three very different spaces for the presentation of what I call “**simultaneous ongoing action.**” The differences in relation to the previous performances lie in its format, social function and politics.

The three spaces combine a white cube space with two non-traditional art spaces, one of which is not designated as an art space at all. I also chose to focus on a smaller number of enactments and give more space for interpretation of the material to the performers. One reason for this choice was to contradict the notion of growth, of always upscaling the dimensions of a work. I imagined a ‘monumentality’ that accumulates horizontally by multiplying, rather than through large dimensions and large numbers of performers concentrated in one space. I also imagined a suggestion of movement (in the many senses of the term) expanding across time and space rather than expanding in volume at

a single location. I thought of movements as physical presences spreading and multiplying, as if in virtual space but in real time.

The three venues I selected are very different from one another and may be seen as contradictory in relation to each other. My aim was to try and connect them, in spite of their different histories and social functions, and in spite of inherent contrasts and contradictions. This was also an additional exercise in terms of my practice.

One important additional focus for the final presentation is an attention to the notion of “gesture” in the sense proposed by José Esteban Munoz in his seminal book on radical queer politics, *Cruising Utopia*.⁵⁸ In *Cruising Utopia*, Esteban Munoz often employs the notion of gesture as important *ephemeralia*. Not in the commonly used sense of a gesture which disappears, but as a potentiality for a future becoming. As a promise for transmitting and remembering histories into the future: “Concentrating on gestures atomizes movement. These atomized and particular movements tell tales of historical becoming. Gestures transmit ephemeral knowledge of lost queer histories and possibilities within a phobic majoritarian public culture.”⁵⁹ In the direction suggested by Esteban Munoz’s, we worked on the details and history of the gestures we were performing. Alternating between moments of “sculptural immobility,”⁶⁰ flow and slowness.

We also decided to take a closer look at the personal history of the performers’ gestures and to develop a lexicon of movements complementary to the core references in *Permanent Collection*.

⁵⁸ Jose Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, NYU Press, 2019.

⁵⁹ Jose Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, NYU Press, 2019, page 67.

⁶⁰ Paul B. Preciado, *The Losers Conspiracy*, Artforum magazine, March 2020.

“What characterizes gesture is that in it nothing is being produced and acted, but something is being endured and supported. The gesture interrupts the normative flow of time and movement. The politics of queer utopia are similarly not based on prescriptive end but, instead, on the significance of a critical function that resonates like the temporal interruption of the gesture.”⁶¹

Supporting one another by means of commonly shared gestures and imagining different space-time relations outside linear or normative time became another focus for preparing the final presentation of the work. We explored ideas related to distance and proximity or distant proximities.

The three venues I have selected for the *simultaneous ongoing action* are: the Monumental Hall of the MUNCH Museum, the London Pub in central Oslo and Sala Omnia in Bucharest, Romania.

I will now try and explain the reasons for the choice of venues.

⁶¹ Jose Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, NYU Press, 2019, page 91.

Monumental Hall of MUNCH Museum

I chose to stick with the MUNCH museum because it was a space (due to the circumstances described above) dating from the very beginning of my research project. It was the place that hosted my first thoughts about the nature of the project to be. It was also a site that partly determined the direction of *Permanent Collection* and some of its content. This time, I wanted to build a relationship between the MUNCH museum and the initial material and two other very different spaces and histories; neither were white cubes (or black boxes) and less established as prestige arts venues.

Another reason for selecting the MUNCH Museum again is more political. I believe that in today's fragmented and polarised public sphere, favoured by the architecture of the digital, it is important that an artwork meet a 'general' public. By this I mean that we very often experience showing our work almost exclusively to our peers. This is not meant to diminish the importance of making work for small or independent spaces. But as a means of escape from a certain kind of 'isolation' I sometimes feel when working in the art world. Choosing both types of venue seemed relevant at this point in history, rather than opting for one type or the other. A strategic choice perhaps. I am aware of inherent contradictions and risks, but I believe that contradictions are sometimes a generative part of art making. Staying with the trouble.

London Pub Oslo

London Pub in Oslo is the oldest gay/queer bar in town. From the start, I had been interested in using it as a performance venue. This is for personal, historical, and political reasons. I thought; “What if, in addition to representing queer issues and representations, we inhabited and situated our actions in a real queer space? I am a queer person and yet I have never done this before, even though I have been involved on occasions with queer programs and projects.

From today’s point of view, I noticed how the new generation of younger queers occupy other platforms and spaces, very often online. The ‘traditional’ gay bar is no longer a predominant space for action and expression for newer generations. I understand this reality and I accept it. However, I think it is a shame to abandon and lose these spaces that belong to us and constitute a significant part of our queer heritage.

Hence, my interest in working with an ‘older, ‘un-hip’ queer space.

I should mention that I first proposed using the *London Pub* as a venue for *Permanent Collection* in early Autumn 2020. But the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic arrived, making it impossible to imagine working in a bar due to the restrictions. I returned to the idea of using the *London Pub*, in early June 2022, when pandemic-related restrictions seemed to have been lifted. But soon after, a terrorist, homophobic attack took place in Oslo with the *London Pub* as a main target. Twenty-one people were injured and two people were shot dead.

The shock of these tragic events was devastating. I had to think very carefully whether I could present *Permanent Collection* at *London Pub* and what this would mean. Time went by and I visited the *London Pub* several times. I noticed that the bar was gradually

recovering from the shock and recuperating its usual life. Events were held again, much like before. After talking with the owner of the pub and asking for his permission, I decided to resume my initial plan of presenting *Permanent Collection* at the *London Pub*. The owner told me they were very happy to host collaborations, which he felt were acts of solidarity.

I have explained this background in order to make it clear that I already intended to use the London Pub before the terrorist attack in June 2022. I never intended to instrumentalize this tragic event or take advantage of it. I am also fully aware of the ethical implications of choosing to work at a site that has suffered such an act of violence.

However, after long deliberation, I decided that it was important to work at the *London Pub* and that this decision was relevant to both the project and to myself as an artist and queer person.

Sala Omnia, Bucharest, Romania

During Nicolae Ceausescu's dictatorship, *Sala Omnia* served as an annex and conference hall for the inner circle of the Romanian Central Committee of the Communist Party. It was the place where Nicolae Ceausescu delivered his speeches on cultural matters (among other things). So, *Sala Omnia* has a highly charged history.

Following the Romanian revolution in December 1989, *Sala Omnia* became the house of the Romanian Senate, the most important political chamber of the Romanian Parliament, the seat of the highest authority

Until recently, Romania's penal code criminalized homosexuality and same-sex relations. It was not until June 2001 that the Romanian Senate repealed the infamous article 200 of the penal code. The final vote was held on the premises of *Sala Omnia*.

Later, in 2016, *Sala Omnia* was designated by the government as the official venue of the National Centre for Dance in Bucharest. This was the first institution in the history of Romania dedicated to contemporary dance. In 2004, together with a small group of independent choreographers, I took part in establishing the National Dance Centre. Through political activism and a series of public protests, we managed to persuade the Minister of Culture to establish a centre dedicated to contemporary dance. It was a small victory for us, and for me personally, a very important event in my life. At this point in time *Sala Omnia* is in a state of ruin, awaiting renovation.

So, there were many reasons for using *Sala Omnia* for *Permanent Collection*. But at the same time, there were connections between the legalization of same-sex relations and the history of the *London Pub* in Oslo, that drove me to choose these venues for the final presentation of my project.



Sala Omnia (The National Center for Dance Bucharest).

CODA

As we are asked to deliver our reflection to the evaluation committee on the same day as the final presentation, I do not know at the moment of writing this reflection exactly how things will play out. But I can try and map out some of the principles and objectives behind my decision to present the final stage of *Permanent Collection* in this configuration.

The primary intention is to challenge my practice and to connect, through the newly developed *simultaneous ongoing action*, places which have at first sight very little in common. An unusual alliance between former west and former east, between distant geographies linked through personal lived experiences. I began calling this “distant proximities” or “intimate distance.” Between established and ‘respected’ art venues and less established and legitimized (by the art world) spaces of encounter and social interaction. In this way, I am interested in exploring and contrasting different formats for presenting a work. Formats that might change the meaning of a work through the multiple histories, politics and social demographics they represent. I could have chosen only ‘white cubes’ in gallery spaces or only so-called ‘alternative spaces.’ But I felt that a mix would better represent the nature and intentions of my initial proposal. I am aware there is a risk in this decision and many potential critical pitfalls. But I think that contradictions, providing they are potentially productive, should be welcomed as premises for an artistic research project that sets out to question existing boundaries and normative categories within art practice, as well as from a social and political standpoint. I felt a need to move beyond demarcated (and so protected) art spaces by connecting them to other realities and sites for intervention.

My intention is to use the process of artistic research provided by this fellowship, to generate further investigation and presentations of *Permanent Collection*. In this sense, my wish is to evaluate the outcomes of these three years' work and draw conclusions for further iterations of the project. Not only in the sense of art practice but also in the sense of the politics and the challenges that unfold.

Inconclusions (Research for Nothing)

If I look back at the years of research that have passed, I can draw on a few points and reflections, I am able to point to now. At the moment of writing these last lines, art education and research funding is experiencing huge pressure and economical stress, through budget cuts, conservative rhetoric and a general feeling that we are more vulnerable than we were before in our field.

Keeping this reality in mind and considering my many shortcomings during this process, I think I was able to gain new insights into my practice, research, and modes of working. Thanks to the time afforded by this artistic fellowship, I was able to “buy” time out from the logic of the art market and take a more in depth look at aspects/questions around my artistic practice which had a potential to be developed, or, on the other hand proved problematic. I was able to understand some of the things I do not want to continue doing or reproduce within my practice. Both from an artistic and political point of view. And which questions I should emphasize and work more on for the future of my practice.

Thanks to this research period I was able to have continuity and allow time for ideas and questions to take shape and develop. Time and continuity can be scarce in our field, and definitely belong to a political category.

Longer periods for working with material and people. Time to try out and research new ways of displaying the work, and more focused research.

During my last year I made a conscious decision to withdraw from constantly traveling and picking up new commissions, in favour of engaging with the local artistic community and my institution. By teaching, being present for conversations with the

students, presenting work, and generally investing my time for the local artistic eco system in a more situated sense.

In terms of research, together with a BA dance student from KHIO, Anton Skaaning Thomsen, I engaged in a period of research addressing my project but with no end goals in mind. A sort of “parallel slalom” research along or within the main research project but very open ended. Removed from some of the (sometimes) dominant logic of the institution for constantly producing “results”, quantifiable data and the so called “learning outcomes”.

We entitled this research *Research for Nothing*, paraphrasing a piece by fellow artist Eszter Salamon, *Dance for Nothing* (2010). We met regularly for about six months with the aim of keeping the research flowing, exchanging, and not limiting its possibilities for experimentation and imagination. I am mentioning *Research for Nothing* at the end of this reflection as an example of unplanned activity that proved important for learning further about research and artistic practice. Elements for thinking around artistic practice that appeared at times during *Research for Nothing*, influenced my approach toward the final presentation of *Permanent Collection*: how to keep a work open and indeed “alive”, how to allow for more agency for the performers involved by practicing a flatter hierarchy and offer more autonomy to them, how to keep the research open for all possible questions and doubts, and how to fully trust and practice trust on an embodied level with others. So that the main topics I wished to address at the level of content and practice, would also, eventually, become a part of how we practice artistic research.

Permanent Collection

Performers:

Beniamin Boar

Ezra Fieremans

Jack Hauser

Sabina Holzer

Mihai Mihalcea

Mzamo Nondiwana

Ingunn Rimestad

Anton Skaaning Thomsen

Jens Trinidad

Ornilia Ubisse

Elizabeth Ward

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