

# Through the stage to the museum

PERFORMING ARTS IN MUSEUMS : PRACTICES, AUDIENCES, "CULTURAL  
MEDIATION"

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What do museums provide to the performing arts, in terms of place, practices and purposes? We shall consider dance, theatre, music, story-telling, puppetry and circus arts in the museum area from the perspective of reception theories and in regards to the cultural mediation offers, involving interpretation, promotion and education resources and programs. What are the aesthetics issues of the insertion of live performance practices — original creations, staging, revivals, transpositions, theatrical or choreographed guided tours — in the museum spaces, for the visitors / audience, for the curators and for the artists?

What is at stake here is the junction, or the collision, between the stage and the museum both as a theoretical and practical issue. What frictions, contagion, sharing and oppositions, perspective lines, or “lines of flight”, does this connection between performing arts and museum fields involve and produce? What are the missions, the values, and the philosophical, strategic and tactical principles that found and shape the practices of performing arts in museums? Which device, which repertoire and art forms are relevant? How do those museum and stage propositions – practices, discourses, texts, activities – deal with the position of visitors and spectators? Are “spectators”, “viewers” and “visitors” exchangeable terms in exhibitions, thus demonstrating an evolution and a growing connection between practices? Are those postures adjacent, or is it an alternative that could be settled by stage and museum display? How do the performing arts in the museum space induce, stipulate or affect the visitors’ response to both the exhibits and the performance itself? Is it possible to consider an “instrumentalization” or “exploitation” of performing arts in museum or an exploitation of the museum by performing arts, in a way that would not involve any distortion or subordination, but as a new opportunity for both?

Those issues must be analyzed in regard to the whole range of practices and medias involved in curatorial, educational and interpretative devices aimed to the audience : curatorial and scenic arrangement, events, activities, texts (from labels in the exhibition to promotion and presentation texts of the scenic events), programs and resources. The institutional perspective (promotional strategies, cooperation and exchanges between museums and performing arts institutions, expectations and purposes in terms of image and audience) is obviously essential. Qualitative and quantitative surveys, investigation and inquiries considering both the audience and professionals (from the museums and from the performing arts companies and institutions), would be particularly welcomed.

Four perspectives are to be considered : temporalities, spaces, bodies and objects, and voices.

## *Temporalities*

During the 1960s, museums opened their galleries to new temporalities which were set up in a long term fashion. The arrival of ephemeral practices, connected to sculpture, process art, or performance art, contributed to challenge the fixed temporality that partly characterizes the museum. The transition of the artwork, from the studio – or from its original environment –, to the exhibition space, is one from a place combining several temporalities to a place that is fundamentally timeless. The purpose of the conference will not be to browse the history of ephemeral practices in the museum, but to understand how, beyond performance art and visual arts, the performing arts also contributed to that temporal disruption. The presence of performing arts in museum galleries will be one of the main points of focus, or, in the case of programming in specific spaces (auditoriums, lounge areas, workshops, etc.), the connection that programming establishes with the collections. How did the museum's ways of exhibiting art works change in order to give room to new temporalities? To what extent can the time of performance, the time of the show and that of the gesture entail a new look at the museum?

The existence of several temporalities in museum galleries is not only a matter of perception of the art works; it also affects the perception of the place itself and of the evolving definition of the museum as it places greater and greater emphasis on the event. Therefore not only the issues dealing with the temporality of the art works, but also the processes of perception of the museum by a public renewed through a diversified programming could be examined. How can performing arts generate new rhythms for the visit of galleries – by increasing, condensing, lengthening or splitting up time – both in terms of the duration of the aesthetic experience and in terms of programming and opening schedules?

## *Spaces*

In what terms is it possible to describe the alteration of the museum spaces with the intrusion of the stage : juxtaposition, demarcation, fusion, overlapping, superposition? Where does the stage actually begin within the museum area and where does it end? Where does the spectacular event happen? Are those spaces marginal and devoted rooms or do they physically or symbolically invade the exhibition area? What are the places and functions still held by the exhibits in the scenographic, choreographic or dramatic device? Reciprocally, how does the scenic event – bodies, sounds and action – happen to reshape and reconfigure the museum space? What spatial relations between artists and visitors does it build? What itineraries and physical postures does it involve – standing, walking back and forth, making circles and swings – and how does it play with the actual display intended for the exhibition? Contributions are thus invited to focus on questions related to stage and exhibition scenography, as well as their various combinations.

When the performing arts fit into the museum, it is also possible to envisage the relationship between them in terms of territories, and to describe the meeting and collaboration between professionals of both parts as an experience of deterritorialization. What kind of exchanges and mutations (of practices, of concepts, of references, of the creation process) are they driven to, when conducting together those projects?

This conference shall also consider this gathering in terms of intermediality, and analyze how the transposition of the show into the museum context leads to shift or

mutations of both the performance itself and its perception and interpretation by the visitor/spectator, and provides the artists with new possibilities.

### *Bodies/objects*

Bringing dance, theatre, music and the visual arts together in the same exhibition space allows to reunite two aesthetic modes : presentation and representation. The concrete, physical presence of the dancers' and actors' bodies emphasizes an approach of creation through the senses, generating subtle echoes between two conditions of the aesthetic experience. The embodiment of movement in the exhibition galleries, the presence of voices and sounds, offer the possibility of enlarging the sensitive experience beyond the visual. The visiting experience is then radically transformed. What are the relations between different art works in the exhibition space converted into a theatrical space? What are the echoes between the art forms presented, between the presence of visitors and the ephemeral gestures?

Performing arts have also been integrated into the guided tours of museum galleries, turning gesture and theatre play into educational tools. For example, dance can be used in a sensory and cognitive approach of painting and sculpture. Seizing the development of a movement, choosing an instant, understanding the impulsions and the dynamics of the body : dance, painting and sculpture share a common knowledge and work process on anatomy, on the forces of the matter and of the muscles, on the representation of movement, its abstract forms, its connotations. How can the complementary nature of gesture in visual and performing arts be thought? To what extent the use of movement could be a vector for a sensitive knowledge of artistic forms and practices? Case studies could be analyzed, as well as the relation between gestures, movements, and visual art works, both in educational contexts and in a more theoretical perspective dealing with the corporeity of art works.

### *Voices*

Those temporalities, spaces, bodies and objects are, eventually, related to a whole stratification of voices, words, speeches, texts, during the performance itself, before and after, on or around the stage, in or around the exhibition areas... Voices can be heard about the performance, or about the collections, the exhibits and the exhibition itself; they can be of a scientific or a dramatic value, of an authentic or a fictional nature, related to the museum context, or not. The original complexity of the status of the texts and speeches in museums and exhibitions increases when confronted with the insertion of performing arts, and the amalgam of professional standards. What are the connections between voices on stage and voices in the museum? Between the museum texts, the labels, and the actor's words? Between the academic museum guide and lecturer and the storyteller? Between dramatised guided tours, and interactive itinerant shows in the museum space? What are the stakes of such texts and speeches, their significance and their functions, in regards to the performing arts practices and the missions of museums? To what extent does this stratification of voices actually participate in the legitimation, the renewal and the revival of the artistic and cultural heritage, and of the institutions where it is preserved and displayed? To what extent, and under which conditions, can

the juxtaposition of those distinctive, and often divergent monologues, result in an actual polyphony or a dialogue between the arts and the cultural practices?

Proposals coming from various fields such as museum studies, performance art studies, literature or arts history, economy and sociology are encouraged. Please send us a 3000-characters abstract proposal, together with your name, email, affiliation, and a 50 / 100-word bio-bibliography in a single Word document by May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015. Notification of acceptance will be sent by June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

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