

The Theatricality of Exhibition Spaces. Fluid Spectatorship into Hybrid Places

Abstract: Arts are permeable. The current museographical approach seems to go towards a form of interdisciplinarity which leverages the encounter between arts. From the MAXXI in Rome to the Louvre of Paris, to the National Gallery in London, this interaction between different art fields (dance, theater, music, etc.), gives rise to new forms of aesthetic proposals. Choreographed expositions and exhibited choreographies are the rendition of this kind of negotiation between visual art, museum spaces, and performing arts, which sets up the spectatorship dialectic between temporal and spatial dynamics. Within a migration process, from the black box to the white cube, the theatrical body becomes a work of art, through a process of objectivation.

Likewise, the spectatorship participation is choreographed, as well as the very act of observation. Moreover, the exhibition space loses its architectural and statutory hierarchies, becoming a hybrid place, a meta-theatre and simultaneously a meta- museum. The point of view changes; the frontal perspective of the theatrical or cinematographic architectures, and the Renaissance monocular gaze disappear. This is a contemporary dynamic of creolization for which, within an exhibition context, the spectatorship enjoyment dialogue with a form of theatrically, becoming a critical device of transcultural mediation.

Keywords: *aesthetic experience, creolization, contemporary exhibition, interdisciplinarity, performing arts, visual arts*

In a classic aquarium, each fish is enclosed in a little compartment with its name in Latin above it. While in more recent aquarium all the species mingle together, and it becomes impossible to decide, when a fish passes in front of you, exactly what name you should call it.
(John Cage, *For the Birds*)

In 2003, Bernardo Bertolucci referenced the famous race through the Louvre galleries of Jean-Luc Godard's film *Bande à part* (1964), by launching the three characters of his film *The Dreamers* on the same path into the Parisian museum. Running inside a museum or lying down on the floor beside a work of art (*Dancing Museum*, Louvre, 2016) is normally conceived as forbidden behaviors within a normal exhibition context. Nevertheless, the evocation of this kind of actions offers today the possibility to question the contemporary museum approach devoted to a contextual interdisciplinarity and to a form of artistic creolization,¹ where these behaviors become a real aesthetic device of creation.

In the contemporary art system, art is by now a history of exhibitions,² art is contextual. Thus, while artworks can no longer be considered outside of their modes of presentation, exhibitions "have become *the* medium through which most art becomes known".³ As part "spectacle, part socio-historical event, part

¹ "An encounter of cultural elements coming from absolutely different horizons and which really creolize themselves, really stratify and confuse with each other in order to create something that is absolutely unpredictable and absolutely new, the creole reality". Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 13.

² Jérôme Glicenstein, *L'art: une histoire d'expositions* (Paris: PUF, 2009).

³ Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne, *Thinking about Exhibition* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 2.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Laurent Fleury, "Le pouvoir des institutions culturelles: les deux révolutions du TNP et du Centre Pompidou", in Claude Fourteau, ed., *Les institutions culturelles au plus près du public* (Paris: Musée du Louvre/La documentation Française, 2002), 36.

⁶ See Nicolas Serota, *Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996).

⁷ To give a few examples of performance studies: Georgina Guy, *Theatre, Exhibition, and Curation: Displayed & Performed* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Jackson Shannon, "Performing Show and Tell: Disciplines of Visual Culture and Performance Studies", *Journal of Visual Culture*, 4.2 (2005), 163-77; Susan Bennett, *Theatre & Museums* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Erin Brannigan, "Dance and the Gallery: Curation as Revision", *Dance Research Journal*, 47.1 (2015), 5-25; Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012).

⁸ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1934); Richard Shusterman, *La fin de l'expérience esthétique* (Pau: Presses Universitaires Pau, 1999).

⁹ Marianne Massin, *Expérience esthétique et art contemporain* (Rennes: PUR, 2013), 28.

¹⁰ See Mathieu Copeland, *Choreographing Exhibitions* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2013).

¹¹ See the distinction between performance art, intended as an experimental corporal practice which is "exhibited in a direct, face to face relationship between the performer and the audience", and performing arts (or living arts): dance, music and theater. Between these two typologies of 'performances' resides a clear difference which affects the ontology of the theatrical act. While the performance art criticizes the methods of reproducibility typical of performing arts: "methods of narrativity, spectacularisation, and representation", on the contrary, performing arts underline the unrepeatable nature of performance, and its attachment to the spatiality and the temporality of the present. Barbara Formis, "Performance Here and Then", in Copeland, *Choreographing Exhibitions*, 56.

¹² "It is surely time to think about theatre and museums together since so many others do: cultural policy makers, urban and regional planners, arts and other marketing agencies, and of course, visitors". Bennett, *Theatre & Museums*, 77.

¹³ Julie Pellegrin, "This is not a Catalogue", in Copeland, *Choreographing Exhibitions*, 17.

¹⁴ Luca Basso Peressut et al., eds., *Mettere in scena, mettere in mostra* (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2015), 11.

structuring device",⁴ the exhibition seems to be a "potential place of action"⁵ in which the beholder meets his own limits and possibilities. In recent years, we have witnessed a turning point in the relationship between the notions of aesthetic experience and temporary exhibition,⁶ which can also be explained by the emergence of visual culture studies and performance studies which have highlighted the need for a re-reading of some key concepts, such as the theatricality of the exhibition, and display, the spectatorship performed, or even the exhibition space choreographed.⁷ Current museographical programs appear as attempts at interdisciplinary dialogue between different art fields, which propose to the public a new form of contemplation or aesthetic participation; in the specific context of contemporary art, the aim of the exhibition seems, in most cases, to want to create the preconditions for the staging of aesthetic experiences intended as a very work of art. Beyond the ontological issues,⁸ the aesthetic experience is no longer limited to artifacts, but it is a bodily encounter in a specific space and time, it is a: "sensitive relation that one maintains with the environmental context".⁹

From the MAXXI in Rome to the Louvre in Paris, to the National Gallery in London (just to name a few emblematic occasions), the reciprocal interaction between various forms of art – in particular, dance, theater and visual arts –, gives rise to new aesthetic experimentations: a kind of "choreographed exhibitions"¹⁰ or 'exhibited choreographies' which upset the spectatorship dialectic between temporal and spatial practices as well as the logic of exhibition display. These dynamics – forms of *metissage* and negotiation between modern and contemporary art, exhibition spaces and performing arts¹¹ – challenge the ontology of the theater;¹² better yet, by putting into relation the ideas of choreography and exhibition, they appropriate respective languages to create performing exhibitions in which the spectator navigates within a fluid environment and an ephemeral temporality. Furthermore, choreographing exhibitions within a museum context makes the artist's body (dancer or actor) the very subject of the proposal, that therefore deprives spectators of the traditional conditions of a theatrical gaze. Taking place in precise and temporary moments which overlap the museum daily routine, these interdisciplinary proposals lead the spectator to rethink his habits and his attitude towards the act of vision. "In the absence of scenery, of lighting or specific music.... The spectators [are] confronted not only with what [is] there to see, but also with the way in which they negotiate their own movements, themselves [catch] up in the train of the choreography."¹³

In this sense, an aesthetic of space arises; the aesthetic of the ephemeral, of the temporary, comes up creating a hybrid, fluid space where the spectatorship body moves by experiencing a new spatial and phenomenological dynamics. We might almost speak of an innovative spectatorship awareness that emphasizes the polysemy of the idea of space; by acquiring new identities and expanding its boundaries, the idea of space becomes "a temporary attribute bound not so much to the quality of architecture as to the uses which arise from it".¹⁴

Organized 'in' and thought 'for' places of art (museums, galleries, institutions, etc.), these types of choreographed propositions become the occasion to discuss some key concepts, such as the notion of objectification of the body, the crises of the art object, the documentary transmission or the archiving of the ephemeral, or even to discuss the current museographical politics that we could define as 'living'. In this regard, the concept of theatrical "museography"¹⁵ of Claire Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Jacques Ezrati allows forthwith analyzing these issues without forgetting the question of the spectator or the exhibition context. This exhibition approach is based on the concept of 'sensory exhibition', in which the public participates actively in the unveiling of the artistic event. This way highlights the dialectic between the political and economic museum necessity to seduce a *large audience*, and the use of a theatrical language to realize alternative exhibitions. In this sense, the idea of 'alternative' is used as an advertising factor to attract spectator curiosity towards new artistic contexts. In other words, the theatrical 'museography' allows awakening the interest of the spectator, by creating the conditions for the realization of 'spectacular' aesthetic experiences.

If this approach, on the one hand, put in communication two distinct aesthetic regimes – presentation and representation –, on the other hand, also echoes back to the famous Jean Davallon's 'viewpoint museology', from 1992, that is an engaging method of presentation centered not on exhibited artworks but on the spectator. "Objects and knowledge are present as before, but they are used as material for the construction of a hypermedia environment which encourages visitors to evolve, offering them one or more points of view on the subject of the exhibition".¹⁶ Based on this consideration, while the phenomenological and spatial experience of an artistic proposition seems to aspire implicitly to the spectatorship seduction, a work of art becomes a real scenographic apparatus for the exhibition.

These two reflections find in Claire Bishop's in-depth analysis of contemporary museology a critical rendition: "Rather than a highly individualized artistic epiphany, viewers to these galleries encountered the euphoria of space first, and art second".¹⁷ In other words, contemporary exhibition spaces seem to be places of "sociability" capable of "providing visitors with the enjoyment of specific experiences".¹⁸ In this regard, Dominique Poulot, François Mairesse, Daniel Jacobi, and many other theorists have suggested considering places of art and, in particular, museums, as administrative instances, as economically and subsequently cultural institutions whose main objective is to attract the public, by catering to its needs. However, as Bishop underlines, "the steering question for the museum is not *whether* people will visit the museum but *how* they will view the works".¹⁹ Alternative and interdisciplinary practices thus appear as propositions able to begin a rethinking of the museum's role and the value of its collection and spectatorship visits. In this sense, the display activities of museum institutions, which put into dialogue different systems of re-presentation – dance, theater, visual art, music,²⁰ etc. –, while offering new opportunities for an aesthetic and artistic creation, they

¹⁵ Claire Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Jacques Ezrati, *L'Exposition: Théorie et Pratique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004). The authors propose a critical comparison between exhibition issues and modalities of staging: *artistic* approach, *scientific* approach, and *theatrical* approach. While, the first approach, artistic, characterizes the exhibitions of objects, following the traditional view of the history of art, the scientific approach is related to the exhibition of knowledge and it meets the pedagogical and cognitive demands of an attentive public.

¹⁶ Jean Davallon, "Le musée est-il vraiment un média?", *Publics et Musées: Regards sur l'évolution des musées*, 2 (1992), 115; see also Jean Davallon, *L'exposition à l'œuvre: stratégies de communication et médiation symbolique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999). In his text, Davallon proposes three models of museology which correspond to as many types of exhibits and to as many exhibition spaces: object museology, idea museology and viewpoint museology.

¹⁷ Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology: or, What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (London: Koenig Books, 2013), 5. Bishop argues and analyzes the considerations of Rosalind Krauss's text "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalism Museum" (1990).

¹⁸ Dominique Poulot, *Musée et muséologie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009), 112.

¹⁹ Bishop, *Radical Museology*, 37.

²⁰ Not to mention the latest extra cultural experiences, such as yoga or gymnastics at the museum.

²¹ Jean-Jacques Boutaud, “Du sens, des sens. Sémiotique, marketing et communication en terrain sensible”, *Semen*, 23 (2007).

²² Daniel Jacobi, “Exposition temporaire et accélération: la fin d’un paradigme?”, *La lettre de l’OCIM*, 150 (November-December 2013); Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. by Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

²³ Claire Bishop, “The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate, MoMA and Whitney”, *Dance Research Journal*, 46.3 (December 2014), 66.

²⁴ Josette Feral, *Théories et pratiques du théâtre: au-delà des limites* (Montpellier: L’Entretemps, 2011), 102.

²⁵ Jacques Sato, “Littéralité et théâtralité”, in Louis Dieuzayde et al., eds., *Le Langage s’entend mais la pensée se voit* (Aix-en-Provence: PUR, 2007), 172.

also become the result of a very form of exploitation of performing arts. This condition could be considered as a new exhibition need which uses the communicative,²¹ economic and social²² power of specific programs including performing arts in the galleries or museum spaces, in order to create what Bishop defines as a “Tino Sehgal effect”.²³

In any case, whether for aesthetic or more pragmatically commercial purposes, contemporary attention to the ‘exotic’ occurs as regularly into the artistic programming of museums, or within contemporary artists’ creative approach, and that implies a general rethinking of the relationship between visual arts and performing arts, or better yet, a re-reading of the choreographic context and the exhibition vocabulary. The displacement from the traditional theater to an exhibition space involves a series of ontological adjustments that resize the idea of moving body, of the orchestra and scene, of social space, and spectator gaze. At the same time, this migration from black-box theaters to white cube institutions puts into question the very notion of theatricality which, appearing as “the result of a perceptive dynamic, that of the gaze which connects someone or something watched (subject or object) and a watcher”,²⁴ thus becomes a device, a medium capable of proposing: “a new configuration of artistic experience”.²⁵

Besides, it should be noted that most of the museums or contemporary exhibition contexts are equipped by auditoriums or stage spaces to accommodate ‘spectacular’ propositions. This tendency to present performing arts in specific places recalls the ancient architectural hierarchies of the theater, such as the traditional distinction between the orchestra and the stage. However, this attitude seems to have been overshadowed by a current way, for which performing arts conquer museum spaces, from the entrance to secondary corridors; these kinds of interventions, which do not respect the formal and functional distinctions, equalize and democratize the exhibition space, by eliminating architectural hierarchies between noble spaces and connecting spaces, rest areas, or passageways. Thus, the scene is everywhere and nowhere; space becomes a hybrid place, and the beholder emancipates himself by conquering the stage that he shares with the artworks/body in motion.

As a sort of compromise, while the museum seeks in the theater the narration of a corporeal temporality, the theater, for its part, solicits in the museum the documentary research. Therefore, it would seem that the current artistic programming has generated meta-museum places and meta-theatrical places; hybrid spaces in which different languages overlap mutually, giving rise to a sort of hybridization between different forms of re-presentation which confer on the museum its original value of the sanctuary of Muses.

“Can savant feasts, under the auspices of the Muses, be held in contemporary museums?”²⁶

²⁶ Marcin Fabianski, “Ce que le musée du Louvre n’était pas en 1793: De certains musées pourvus d’une rotonde à coupole, lieux de débats érudits”, in Edouard Pommier et al., eds., *Les musées en Europe à la veille de l’ouverture du Louvre* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1995), 128-155.

painting excels and is superior in rank to music, because it does not perish immediately after its creation, as happens unfortunately with music.

(Leonardo)²⁷

In 1728, Ephraïm Chambers defined the museum as: “Every place which houses things having an immediate relationship with the arts and the Muses”.²⁸ These latter, while they presided over the arts and sciences, also ruled “musicians and poets, presiding over banquets and sacred festivals”.²⁹ In other words, the “most august sanctuary of the Muses”³⁰ was originally an interdisciplinary meeting place; not by chance, the etymological definition of the term *musetion*³¹ refers to a place of reflection and philosophical debate.

The current artistic and cultural context is far from Michael Fried’s postulate, for which: “art degenerates as it approaches the condition of the theater”,³² as it is also far from Greenberg’s laconism and even from Lessing’s oldest debate against Horace’s *Ut Pictura Poesis*. Unlike the formalist and modernist ambition which aimed to valorize the differentiation of statutory boundaries of the arts, nowadays the “arts of time and the arts of space”³³ meet again, by generating a relationship where the ideas of temporal succession and spatial juxtaposition coexist. Although having had distinct evolution and specific fields of development, in some cases, visual arts and performing arts have crossed each other. We should think, for example, of the ideology of alternative spaces, developed both in the exhibition sphere (the 1970s in America, just to mention the most historicized case) and in the theatrical field (Eugenio Barba’s *Third Theater* or Trisha Brown’s spatial experimentations). In addition, over time, we can recognize some examples in which art met theater and vice versa, such as the Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes*, the Futurist *Serate*, or even in the 1950s, when the crisis of the representation has been, among other things, an opportunity to experience new performative forms, for Merce Cunningham, John Cage or the Black Mountain College.³⁴ Afterwards, the falsified reality of Luigi Ontani, Gilbert & Georges’s living sculptures, Cindy Sherman’s disguises, or the cases of theatricalization of Orlan and, in the cinematographic field, of Pier Paolo Pasolini, are other examples which witness the continuous and tight dialogue between these two representation systems. In present time, finally, some artists – such as Lili Reynaud Dewar, Ragnar Kjartansson, Dector & Dupuy, Cesare Pietroiusti, Nadia Vadori-Gauthier, Julien Prévieux, Boris Charmatz, Sasha Waltz, Jérôme Bel, etc. – have overlapped different representative and communicative levels, by appropriating the narrative and aesthetic potential of moving body.

In these latter dynamics, several concepts such as the moving artwork, or phenomenological experience, or even instantaneity, duration, active or passive participation, introduce the basis of a new spatial and temporal consciousness of spectators. In particular, the spectatorship participation is choreographed and theatricalized, as well as the very act of observation: the body of the beholder

²⁷ “Ma la pittura eccelle e signoreggia la musica perch’essa non more immediate dopo la sua creazione”, Martin Kemp, *Leonardo on Painting*, trans. by Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 35.

²⁸ Ephraïm Chambers, *Cyclopaedia* (London, 1728), 605; reprinted in *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences*, X (Neufchâtel, 1765), 893-894.

²⁹ François Antoine Pomey, *Pantheum mythicum seu fabulosa deorum historia* (Frankfurt, 1701), 151.

³⁰ Borelly, “Description de la Galerie de Médicis”, *Journal d’instruction publique*, 3 (1793), 179.

³¹ Marc-Olivier Gonseth, “Le dépôt, la vitrine et l’espace social”, in Pierre-Alain Mariaux et al., eds., *Les lieux de la muséologie* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2007), 6-7. See also François Mairesse, *Le musée temple spectaculaire: une histoire du projet muséal* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2002), 17.

³² Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 139.

³³ Gotthold E. Lessing, *Laocoon, ou Des frontières de la peinture et de la poésie* [1766] (Paris: Hermann, 1990), 120-121.

³⁴ Though the lack of real and conceptual aesthetic consciousness has made the performing arts simple exhibition devices or documentation items, until at least the 1960s.

becomes, very often, the object of an implicit transformation that, depending on contexts and museographic goals, transforms the visitor in a device, in an obstacle, or in the real subject of the artistic proposal. Likewise, dance, theater, or cinema are not to be considered as mere subjects of a historical or documentary exhibitions, but, on the contrary, as tautological devices of their own staging. In other words, choreographies or theatrical performances are not exhibited in the form of archival elements (historical footage, posters, etc.), but are temporarily staged in a museum context, becoming the real objects of worship, the real works of art which upset the traditional logic of the exhibition display.

³⁵ Walter Moser, “L’interartialité: pour une archéologie de l’intermédialité”, in Marion Froger and Jürgen E. Müller, eds., *Intermédialité et socialité* (Münster: Nodus, 2007), 69-92.

³⁶ John Cage, *Empty Words: Writings ’73–’78* (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan U. P., 1979), 179.

³⁷ Michel de Certeau, “L’opération historique”, in *Faire de l’histoire*, 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

We could speak of a form of *interartiality*,³⁵ that is an interaction between different arts which, while maintaining their own specificity, still dialogue through a conceptual compromise between proximity and distance. Within a sublimation process that seeks to overcome the statutory boundaries – “the fences [are coming] down and the labels are being removed. An up-to-date aquarium has all the fish swimming together in one huge tank”³⁶ –, a kind of closeness of attitudes and modes appears. We could define this condition as a neighbourhood of foreign productions stem from different social spaces and different methodologies and histories³⁷ seeking to improve each other.

This communion which enhances differences becomes even more understandable when we think of the evolution of the very idea of theatricality. While in the 1950s and 1960s, this notion was used to distinguish and to make the theater autonomous from other arts (especially dance and performance), today, on the contrary, this differentiation is attenuated and emphasizes the possible ways of interaction. This change of perspective has enabled, foremost, a re-evaluation of spectacular dynamics and theatrical languages which, by themselves, become aesthetic and conceptual devices to be exhibited. In this way, whilst maintaining the distinctiveness of each context, when these worlds and systems come into contact, their dialogue determines some contact zones, namely: “social spaces where cultures meet, collide and confront each other, often in contexts of relation power highly asymmetric”.³⁸ In these situations, “subjects construct themselves through their mutual relationships”,³⁹ by juxtaposing “in a single real place many spaces and locations which remain, for themselves, incompatible”.⁴⁰ This is, therefore, a set of different “situated” dialogues that have been readjusted in order to appropriate a new space able to create other forms of translation and interpretation.

³⁸ Mary Luise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone”, *Profession 1991* (New York: MLA, 1991), 575.

³⁹ Mary Luise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 8.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, “Les hétérotopies”, in Daniel Defert, eds., *Michel Foucault: Le Corps utopique, suivi de Les Hétérotopies* (Fécamp: Nouvelles Éditions Ligne, 2009).

Performing the Spectatorship Gaze

Le rôle du musée n’est pas seulement d’informer et d’instruire, il est même vraisemblable que cela ne soit pas son rôle du tout et qu’il ne le fasse qu’à la marge. En revanche, il est de provoquer des éveils, sensibles, émotionnels, intellectuels....

(Serge Chaumier, *La muséographie de l’art*)⁴¹

⁴¹ “The role of the museum is not only to inform and to instruct, it is even likely that it is not its role at all and that it does so only at the margin. However, it is to provoke sensitive, emotional, intellectual awakenings”. Serge Chaumier, “La muséographie de l’art ou la dialectique de l’œuvre et de sa réception”, *Culture et musées*, 16 (2010), 35.

Beyond the artistic proposals of artists, today we should probably investigate the stakes that a performing proposal, intended as an institutional event, can produce within a museum context. In this regard, if, on the one hand, it is necessary to wonder how the museum opens to the logic of the scene, on the other hand, we should insist on what it means to exhibit today, by putting into discussion the very role of the art institution. Many examples exemplify these issues from a contemporary point of view, such as the exhibition year of Tino Sehgal at the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam (2015), the solo show *Simon Forti: Thinking with the Body* at the Salzburg Museum (2014), the exhibition *Yvonne Rainer: Body Space Language* at the Ludwig Museum (2012), or *Move! Choreographing you* at the Hayward Gallery (2011). In these proposals, the encounter between performing arts and visual arts spatializes moving bodies as exhibition devices, by creating a moving scene. At the same time, several contemporary art manifestations show how the reinterpretation and critical rereading of theatrical and spectacular languages and their narrative potential can lead to new proposals and aesthetic events, such as the *Nouveau Festival* of the Centre Pompidou, or *Do Disturb* at the Palais de Tokyo.

That being said, first of all, an ontological distinction must be made, since, depending on the different places or institutions, the interdisciplinary nature of these exhibition dynamics varies for aims and realizations. Then, we can distinguish between contemporary art museums, which are more inclined to propose dynamics crossing stylistic and conceptual boundaries, and museums of modern or ancient art, or museums of other natures, scientific, historical, etc. For this latter kind of places, the process of hybridization seems to exploit the communicative power of theatrical languages, mostly choreographies, to propose new ways to live the museum and its collections, and other forms of vision and aesthetic enjoyment.

Speaking of that, the program set up by the Louvre in Paris, *Nocturnes du Vendredi*, proposes classical ballets held in normal exhibition spaces. During these occasions, the interaction between dance, artworks of the collection and the ornament of the rooms, questions the limits of spectatorship gaze. The absence of a real distinction between scene and orchestra makes the beholder free to meander into the room, changing his point of view in relation to dancing bodies and the exhibition outfitting of the specific moment. Within a choreographic partition, artworks, mostly sculptures, thus temporarily lose their nature of work of art to become, instead, almost scenographic devices, accessories or mere decoration, which activate the staging of actions; therefore, moving bodies are objectified, acquiring the status of artwork. The exhibition space, for its part, become a very scenographic architecture: exhibition halls lose their first nature of containers to become, through a conceptual overlapping, meta-theatrical spaces. A temporary new scenery thus comes to the public.

This brief example emphasizes several questions concerning both the nature of the museum artworks and their role in the exhibition process. Within these

choreographed dynamics, the action of putting on display merges with the creation process, making the theatrical gesture a heuristic device. In this sense, the question of temporality and duration of action goes hand in hand with the statutory definition of the performed gesture, as Mathieu Copeland underlines: “Time is fundamental in an exhibition made of, and in, movement. In this orchestrated time, these gestures only last as long as it takes for them to be realized and experienced. To choreograph an exhibition is to confront the ephemeral nature of movements”.⁴² Here, Copeland highlights the interdependent relationship between the idea of realization and the idea of exhibition process, revealing the ephemeral nature of both contemporary exhibition and aesthetic experience. “A choreographed exhibition will only exist for the time needed for its overall realization”.⁴³ In this way, the spectator finds himself living a nomadic visual experience, chasing the bodies in motion and repositioning himself at every displacement of the artworks.

⁴² Mathieu Copeland, “Choreographing Exhibitions: An Exhibition Happening Everywhere, at all Times, with and for Everyone”, in Copeland, *Choreographing Exhibitions*, 21.

⁴³ Ibid.

Dancing Museum is, for its part, another example which places onstage the spectator, seeking to investigate what it means to attend an exhibition, and to explore “traditional ideologies of conservation and curation wherein alternative arrangements of body and object can be imagined and repositioned”.⁴⁴ Stemmed from the collaboration of choreographers, dancers, and video artists, the project has proposed, for two years, choreographic exhibitions in European museums.⁴⁵ Beyond the will to experience space phenomenologically, the objective of this project was to take advantage of dancing bodies in order to propose to the public a new way of looking at the work of art, of contemplating the space and of experiencing a museum place. In April 2016, *Dancing Museum* invaded the Louvre's spaces, precisely the rooms of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, performing other methods of aesthetic reading and museum visit; as a kind of promenade, the event proposed an experience, halfway between a different apprehension of the museum and a different approach towards a contemporary idea of theatricality.

⁴⁴ Guy, *Theatre, Exhibition, and Curation*, 24.

⁴⁵ *Louvre* (Paris), *MAC VAL* and *La Briqueterie* (Vitry sur Seine), Sioban Davies Dance and the *National Gallery* (London), *Dansateliers* (Rotterdam), *D.IDS* *Dance Identity* (Pinkafeld), *Civic Museum* and *Palazzo Sturm* (Bassano del Grappa).

During the choreography, dancers have surrounded sculptures with their bodies, walked into the halls, danced in transitional corridors or lied down on the floor, just below a showcase and next to unaware visitors of choreography. By pushing the beholder to change perspective, these dancers have questioned the normal rules of museum behavior, offering to the public the chance to experience new points of view. Moreover, being dressed normally, without any sign of recognition, the dancers mingled with the spectators, preventing them to clearly distinguish between dancers and simple visitors. As in a system of overlapping, several statutory levels emerged, from the spatial and temporal superposition of different exhibitions to the encounter between distinct kinds of spectators - those who were in the halls to admire an artwork and those instead who were there looking for dancers. According to these experiences, the theatricality of ephemeral gestures would replace the presence of museum objects, through the staging of an experience in which the spectator becomes, depending on the occasion, an actor, a

scenic element, or a disturbance factor. In any case, the beholder's new role relativizes the choreography, by sublimating the uniqueness of the 'here and now'. An unusual proposition arises, which is neither visual art, nor performing arts nor performance art, but a hybrid event composed by the immediacy of the performative gesture, the uniqueness of the experience and the museum spatiality.

Beyond the concepts of objectivation of the body and of aesthetic experience, these two examples cross boundaries between the sacred space of art, the scenery, and the beholder's privileged place. Thus, within a fluid and hybrid place, halfway between a theatrical stage and a museum space, the spectator's point of view is upset. The typical frontal perspective of the theatrical architectures, as well as the Renaissance monocular gaze which blocks the viewer in a specific place, disappear to leave room to a multidirectional experience. In a sort of parallax, which multiplies the paths and points of view from which to experience the vision, the spectator is activated by a multipurpose perception and involved in the choreographed exhibition. While observing, the spectator also participates in the exhibition, therefore, his behavior becomes an exercise of aesthetic creation. By abandoning his condition of passiveness, about which Susan Sontag⁴⁶ realized a deep reflection (at least from a cinematographic or photographic point of view), the spectator conquers the scene in the illusion of having acquired an emancipated condition, almost becoming a work of art, a real exhibit.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977).

⁴⁷ Duncan Cameron, "Effective Exhibits. A Search for New Guidelines. The Evaluator's Viewpoint", *Museum News*, 46.5 (January 1968), 3-45.

What experiences and what audience should thus be considered? How should we think of the ways of use and enjoyment of these new narrative modes? Can we still speak of a visiting path or should we consider introducing a free experience and various modalities of spectatorship perception?

Performing the Idea of Exhibition

The new museums of the future will ... seek to promote different modes and levels of interpretation by subtle juxtapositions of experience. Some rooms and works will be fixed, the pole star around which other will turn. In this way we can expect to create a matrix of changing relationships to be explored by visitors according to their particular interests and sensibilities. In the new museum each of us, curators and viewers alike, will have to become more willing to chart our own path, redrawing the map of modern art, rather than following a single path laid down by a curator.
(Serota, *Experience or Interpretation*)

By taking modern and contemporary art museums as examples, these choreographed events have to be interpreted not as in the examples seen above – as a proposal realized in order to develop new forms of vision and perception of museum collections –, but as a real exhibition of contemporary art which questions mostly the process of exhibiting and the creative act.

The intervention of Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker⁴⁸ at the Centre Pompidou

⁴⁸ *Work / Travail / Arbeid*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 26 February-6 March 2016.

(2016) allows going further in this reflection. At this occasion, the choreographer conceived a nine-hour-a-day show, executed by the dancers of the Rosas group, and exhibited in the South Gallery of Beaubourg. During these hours, the dancers walked and danced to music by Gerard Grisey, following geometric and circular paths that they traced with chalk on the floor. Throughout these choreographies, the spectators were not only free to wander in the exhibition space but were even invited to invade the scene in a peremptory way, to become almost an obstacle to trajectories drawn and followed by dancers. The musicians, likewise, were on the scene, playing and sailing on the same trajectories. Thus, musicians, dancers, and spectators intersected each other, by sharing the same space which was also connected with the outside, through the large glass window of the gallery which overlooks the Tinguely's *Stravinsky Fontaine*.

Unlike the examples discussed above, this exhibition has not taken advantage of the narrative potential of the artworks of the collection to create possible interdisciplinary encounters. The choreographed exhibition or, in this case, the exhibited choreography of the Belgian choreographer interrogated the profound significance of the act of putting on display. Among other things, this is even more evident if we consider that the Rosas group dancers were the only 'objects' to contemplate in the gallery. Unlike the Louvre example, where dancers, as semantic devices, questioned the viewer on his visual and perceptual relationship with the museum objects, in the case of the Centre Pompidou, the dancers, together with the spectators and musicians, were the only items to look.

The Boris Charmatz's *Musée de la Danse*, exhibited at the Tate Gallery in London (2015) and at the MoMA in New York (2013), is another example in which the absence of traditional works of art in the exhibition space made the actors and the spectators' bodies the subjects of the spectatorship gaze. At the London exhibition,⁴⁹ for two full days (48h uninterrupted opening), 90 dancers invaded the Tate Gallery spaces through performances, dances, ballets, or even muscle heating to the public which finally participated by becoming the implicit subject of this proposal. In addition to the dance sessions scheduled at specific times and in different galleries of the London museum, also the Turbine Hall was invaded by Charmatz's dancers. The huge open space of the Turbine Hall, usually devoted to contemporary art installations, has thus become a dance hall for different types of dancers. Indeed, we can distinguish two different spectatorship conditions: a spectator who preferred to stay on the margins of space, sitting on the floor and contemplating the dancers, and a spectator who, on the contrary, chosen to get onstage and take part in the event. Once again, a moving artwork arises; like a wave, dancers' bodies wander inside a space to be discovered differently, putting into question the discontinuity of the various temporalities of the logic stage, and emphasizing a temporal and conceptual overlap.

The interventions of Sasha Waltz at the Museum of contemporary art and architecture (MAXXI) in Rome and at the Neues Museum in Berlin (2009) are

⁴⁹ BMW Tate Live: *if Tate Modern was Musée de la Danse?*, Tate Modern, London, 15-16 May 2015.

other emblematic examples. At these occasions, the Berlin choreographer created simultaneous dancing performances by offering to the public a first exploration of the museum space. Both for the MAXXI in Rome, built by Zaha Hadid, and for the Neues Museum, restructured by David Chipperfield, the choreographies of Sasha Waltz inaugurated the reopening of these places which, for the occasion, were exposed empty, without any traditional artworks installed.

In both cases, Waltz unveiled a particular way to understand the architecture of the place, intending it as a theatrical scenery. The curved shapes of the walls, the oblique lines, the horizontality and the verticality of these museums have been sublimated thanks to the movements of the dancers. By considering space as the result of the communion between its architecture and its uses, the choreographer proposed a form of architectural dialectic which connects dancers' bodies and spectators' bodies. With Waltz, the body thus becomes the vehicle for an architectural message. Conceiving this choreographed exhibition as an exhibition in motion where the viewer moved together with the artworks (bodies), Waltz organized it on a set of simultaneous stages which the public could discover individually. Through an architectural and phenomenological experience, the spectator was thus free to choose his personal vision perspective, to create a specific museum path, and finally, to write and read his own personal exhibition. In an exhibition space that was emptied of any object, and saturated by a gestural, aesthetic, and experiential presence, bodies have moved in different temporalities. Therefore, the viewer has had to confront not just about what he should have looked at, but also about the way he should have looked, negotiated and adapted his movements, within a space almost become a real stage.

One last example, Tino Sehgal's *Carte Blanche* at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris (2016) finally summarizes the dynamics of the interrelation between performing arts and visual arts, as well as the emergence of a new form of spectatorship. At this occasion, the whole structure hosting the Parisian art center has been emptied of any kind of scenery device or foreign elements to the architecture of the site.

The exhibition space has unveiled, showing its structural conformation and thus becoming a huge stage in which an indefinite series of actors and dancers alternated day after day, overlapping with the audience. According to the artistic practice of the artist, who tries to go beyond the preconceptions of the exhibition meaning, and to focus on interpersonal exchange and aesthetic experience that these series of performed situations produce, the ephemeral and random nature of relationships emerges with clarity.

Once again, we are faced with a series of bodies, spectators, and actors, whose artistic and aesthetic status cannot be totally distinguished. The non-enunciation of the fictional performance and the non-presentation of the artistic device reveal the idea of a singular, personal, and intimate body, which then overlaps the notions of artwork and object. In this way, it is no longer a matter of distinguishing or contemplating a body that walks, dances or plays, but of becoming aware of own

position and role in a social space. Therefore, the lack of statutory limits able to define the perimeters of what the fiction, the representation, and the real is, imposes a rereading of the concept of representative temporality. The use of theatrical languages within a museum context involves thus a reconsideration of traditional terms and conditions. The spectator's freedom to choose when to come into contact with the artistic event allows depriving the proposition of its nature of theatrical reproduction, giving it a random status of unique and unrepeatable experience.

The solo show of the Norwegian artist Ragnar Kjartansson, at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2016, concludes, then, this reflection. Among the various showed artworks, *Bonjour* (2015), was a performance which repeated, during the entire duration of the show, the fleeting encounter between a man and a woman in a life-size setting. In this case, the repetition of the scene – interpreted by the actors continuously, during the opening hours of the art center – allowed the spectator to experience not only different theatrical moments, but also the narrative potential of the casual encounter, thus combining the ideas of the museum visit and the theatrical vision. At the same time, the installation of the artwork, by appropriating the language of theatrical scenography, completely overturned the scene/orchestra relationship. Indeed, while, on the one hand, the gestural repetition within a museum context allowed the spectator to become aware of a new meta-theatrical temporality, on the other hand, the theatrical scenery and its installation in the exhibition space also interrogated the spectator on his place and point of view in an exhibition context.

Located on the second floor of the museum, the two-level installation was visible both from one of the balconies of the second staircase of the building and from the ground floor. This theatrical installation was exposed as an art object, almost sculptural, and this condition not only allowed the spectator to turn around the whole stage, thus experiencing the 'behind the scenes', but also showed the representation from a totally overturned point of view, emphasizing the communicational and aesthetic power of an interdisciplinary encounter.

Where does the stage begin?

In all the examples discussed, a new spectatorship body emerges, thus becoming the accident that triggers the unconscious. Chasing the dancers in an empty museum (MAXXI, Waltz, 2009), dancing with them (Tate, Charmatz, 2015), experiencing a different form of temporality and theatrical spatiality (Palais de Tokyo, Kjartansson, 2016), becoming an obstacle to ballet dancers (Center Pompidou 2016) or even the subject of another spectator's gaze (Palais de Tokyo, Sehgal, 2016): in each of these cases, the spectator was questioned, and his presence was interrogated both as a moving body and as a thinking body. The viewer shares the same stage space of the actors, thus becoming the Pasolini's

spectators of *Che cosa sono le nuvole* (1967), who burst onto the stage to intervene in the theatrical action. The viewer finds himself immersed in a new and democratic space, where there is no real statutory or hierarchical distinctions. It is thus a temporary hybrid space, which becomes a scene thanks to the body which delimits its ephemeral boundaries.

This condition could be considered as an ontological break which democratizes (normalizes) exhibition spaces, by favoring the loss of their functional and factual characterization. Thus, the exhibition, while freeing from the modernist rigidity, crosses the threshold, invades the atrium, and appropriates transitional passages, interstitial junction, corridors, and staircases. Otherwise, this condition goes to the encounter of a new exhibition policy where performing arts become devices not only of the exhibition but also of the aesthetic creation. Consequently, this condition requires rethinking and reconfiguring the contemporary exhibition space and exhibition conditions. Demarcation, circumscription, overlap, hybridization. Where does the stage begin?

From another point of view, it is also the performative movement of the dancers that allows recognizing the spectacular space. The apprehension of choreographed gestures gives the spectator the means to elaborate his position and to locate himself in a meta-space. In this sense, the individual, as a nomad, choreographs his position on the stage, by sharing and negotiating with the dancers' bodies a place where he has, at every moment, to position himself. However, when the viewer wanders in this meta-space, he choreographs not only his position in the scene but also the spectatorship gaze, thus questioning the modalities of vision, of experience and museographic reading. Finally, we should perhaps rethink and reformulate the notion of 'public' body, its relation to the artwork, and its aesthetic objectification. In a context which requires the restatement of the fundamental concepts, the exhibition seems thus to become a spectacular and instantaneous exercise of aesthetic encounters.