Chapter 2 – How Do Institutions Choreograph Us?

Chapter Introduction

Throughout the course of my PhD journey, I had the opportunity to lead a consistent part of my PhD practice as part of my 10-month TECHNE-funded placement as 'Racial Justice Fellow' at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. While continuing to explore my investigation on visitor movement in art institutions and how this connects to their intellectual journey in encountering the exhibited art works, through the ICA placement, I came to question my own position in studying this encounter. The ICA experience pushed me to consider my role as a fluctuant, hybrid, and ambiguous one – in between artist and a curator, between an external researcher and a sector professional who has, for over 15 years, worked both inside and outside major art institutions.

In the Chapter 1, I framed the art museum as a site of continuous performance, and I described visitor movement within the performance studies discourse of everyday movement choreography. While acknowledging this conceptual framework as a fundamental premise of my PhD investigation, that will be further developed in the third chapter, in this second chapter, I discuss the ideas of 'practice of the everyday' and 'everyday movement choreography' in relation to the work carried out by the members of staff of an institution. In particular, I will reflect on my own practice as a cultural agent whose work has always moved from, to, and with art institutions and the performativity of my work in this sector.

In *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 90), Lefebvre frames working in an office as an everyday practice of reproducing power structures and power relations. While going to work every day at the ICA, I observed my own and others' daily routines of sitting at the desk, typing, speaking, meeting, participating in after-work events. In *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012) – a text I kept going back to during my ICA placement for its strong connection with the work I carried out there – Sarah Ahmed also speaks about 'institutional habits' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 26) as a means to perpetuate and solidify institutional racism.

In this chapter, I present a critical reflection on two fundamental aspects of my PhD practice research carried out during the placement at the ICA: the symposium 'How do Institutions Choreograph Us?' I organised at a culmination of this period, and the day-to-day work tasks I carried out in the area of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). In the first part of this chapter, I articulate my reflections on the organising process leading up to the event, and I contextualise my practice as a curator 'in the expanded field' in connection to the theoretical discourse on the 'curatorial'. Following this analysis, I discuss the findings of the collaboratives process and summarise their individual presentations in relation to my PhD research questions, as an extension of the dialogic process that underpins this my practice.

Reflecting on the brief to the symposium's contributors retrospectively, it is evident that the contributors engaged with one aspect of the brief much less significantly: the proposition to explore the symposium's concepts in relation to institutional racism. In the final part of this chapter, I will therefore continue with a critical review of the day-

to-day work I carried out at the ICA in the EDI area during my placement, where I will explore these aspects further.

In the analysis of my work as a symposium organizer, and Racial Justice Fellow at the ICA, I aim to emphasize, on the one hand, the performativity of my practice, and, on the other, the institutional choreographies that I observed and generated as a result. Both in organising the symposium, and as a placement student at the ICA, I was a hybrid figure, concomitantly acting as an external researcher and a staff member of a major London art institution, and closely tied to the requirements of a funding body (TECHNE) and an academic institution (Roehampton University). Being 'selected' as one of two students on the placement, when only myself and another one student applied to it, I took on an almost completely unscripted role, and I eventually wrote the job description for it. In the final part of the chapter, I will therefore present both the awkwardness and fruitfulness of my positionality throughout the placement and, in relation to Ahmed's text quoted above, how this relates to a broader uncomfortable-ness of anti-racism work in institutions.

The development of this chapter stems from realization that it is not possible to discuss the choreography of visitors and how institutions choreograph visitors without questioning the Whiteness of institutions and my positionality as a White researcher as a problematic angle to my research. Sarah Ahmed accurately describes inclusion as a 'technology of governance' (Ahmed, 2012, p.143), 'a way of bringing those who have been recognized as strangers into the nation, but also of making strangers, those who in being included are also willing to consent to the terms of inclusion. A national project can be also understood as a project of inclusion

– a way others as would-be citizens are asked to submit to and agree with the task of reproducing the nation' (Ahmed, 2012, p.143). As an EU migrant, I partly identify with the perspective of a 'stranger', who, for the past 18 years, has strived to live in the UK and to have a career in the museum and gallery sector in London.

Additionally, the elements of my PhD practice that I discuss in this chapter – the symposium and my EDI work at the ICA – emerged as a culmination of my professional journey in the past 15 years. Throughout this time, I moved away from pursuing a strictly curatorial career, and transitioned fluidly across various roles, often taking them on simultaneously: artist, curator, producer, marketing officer, visitor assistant and administrator, working both independently, and as a member of staff of museums and galleries. Although this move was partly driven by the practical and financial necessities of living in London, it also corresponded with a shift in my intellectual development. It emerged from deeply connecting with the discourse on the curatorial, and in some historical examples from the 60s and 70s of the development of the figure of artist as curator, which I review in this chapter.

In Maria Lind's key publication *Performing the Curatorial* (Lind, 2012), the role of curators is defined 'in the expanded field' and explored for its function of 'mediators' (Lind, 2012, p.11). In this figure, practices that are more traditionally associated with curating are not seen in a hierarchical opposition with acts of administrative logistics, and the curatorial's elements of 'choreography' and 'orchestration' (Lind, 2012, p. 12) are emphasized. Lind, in fact, specifically brings the example of symposium organising as a form of curatorial practice. In this line of thinking, I will demonstrate how my practice can be identified 'in between'. My work has always fluidly moved

through various institutional levels of responsibility, status, seniority, and requiring different types of expertise; between major art institutions and unfunded, self-directed projects; between more traditionally curatorial acts and administrative, and at times extremely labour-intensive, tasks.

Finally, as I will show specifically through the symposium, my practice was, first and foremost, relational. Having always had a conflicting relationship with my sense of authorship, I strongly connect with the debate on collective or multiple authorship, represented both in Lind's above quoted text and in many other sources in curatorial studies (for example, Von Bismarck, eds 2022, 2019, 2016).

The audience/visitors' perspective has also always been the core preoccupation of my practice and my thinking as a cultural agent. In the discourse on the curatorial, curators are often described as a 'cultural agents' who 'make art public' (Lind, 2012, p. 11). This emphasis on the relationship with the audience, and the relationship between the institution and the 'public' is also key in connecting two core aspects of my PhD.

In the ICA event I organized, I sought to present a critique of the medium of the academic symposium, proposing a commentary of its social and intellectual dynamics through a script or score performed by the two symposium conveners – myself and Paul Paschal – which we asked the audience members to participate in. As Paul O'Neill points out (O'Neill, in Rugg, Sedgwick, 2007, p.13), the turn towards the curatorial is characterized by a fading of the identification of the curator as the

‘critic’ in favour of a practice which centers on the critique of its own medium – in O’Neill’s text, this is the exhibition, as opposed to the art objects on display.

Drawing on the framing of the art museum as a site of continuous performance that I outlined in the first chapter, we may see visitor movement in all public-facing aspects of institutions as ‘onstage’, and the institutional choreographies from the perspective of the staff members and workers of an organization, as ‘backstage’.

In my day-today work at the ICA, I regularly took part in – and often led – the EDI staff working group weekly meetings. Here, too, conversations often revolved around an opposition between ‘front-of-house’ and ‘back-of-the-house’ institutional practices. I participated in these constant internal debates on the opposition between different spaces in the building, where a choreographic tension was identified and played out between two types of spaces: the ‘front’ and the ‘back’ of house; the ‘upstairs’ offices, and the ‘downstairs’ galleries. Thinking back, once again, at De Certeau (De Certeau, 1984), these are not only physical locations, ‘places’ in De Certeau’s terms, but they were deeply associated with particular types of ‘spaces’, and, the meetings, the change of power dynamics between these spaces was seen as key to institutional change.

Not only is the connotation of this spatial opposition the tension between members of staff and the public, the visitors/audiences, but it is also an opposition between ‘office staff’ and ‘floor staff’, which includes gallery attendants and information staff, cleaners, security guards and receptionists. The ICA debates were strikingly similar and constantly reiterated in other institutions I worked at in the past, including (and

especially), the V&A. Working for seven years as a Gallery Assistant at the South Kensington site, I was able to observe the choreography of movement through the 'Secretariat' wing of the building – the historical location of the staff offices, and where Directorate still sits today. This movement almost had a video-game quality: six levels, stacked one right above the other, where the lower ground, dimly lit with LED lights, with linoleum flooring, limited air flow often resulting into unpleasant smells, and rat traps scattered everywhere, was for the front-of-house and security staff changing rooms and leisure rooms. The middle floor, leading to the Directorate, had red carpets, works of art hung on the walls, air conditioning and always-filled paper towels' dispensers. Finally, up on the to the 6th floor, the V&A Membership team, for which I also worked with for 6 months, were crammed with too much paperwork and stuffed with too many biscuits and coffee to keep spirits alive through the million clients' – rather obsolete – database.

Through this brief reflection through the spatial aspect of my time at the V&A, I aim to place an emphasis on the physical and performative relationship I had with these work spaces. But, most importantly, I aim to point out that this tension between spaces at the ICA and at the V&A is key to understanding the power relations and inequality the institutions are based on. Further, perhaps this tension reflects back and is communicated from the institution to the visitors, with these choreographies propelling and replicating on to audience's experience of visiting and engaging with the displays.

Similarly, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman notices how the 'backstage' areas are often designed with 'backstage' architectural

characteristics and materials, and also, more often than not, have a socio-cultural connotation in terms of the people that inhabit or more frequently pass through those spaces. Designers will allocate ‘dark colours and open brickwork to the service parts of the buildings, and white plasters for the front regions’ (Goffman, 1959, p. 125), employers contribute to this by ‘placing persons who ‘make a good impression’ in the front regions’ and ‘reserves of unimpressive labour can be used for activity that must be concealed from the audience’ (idem, p.125). Goffman also connects, albeit without an evident political intent of denouncing social inequality, the different social and racial implications of these types of spaces, where cleaners and people of colour were more often to be seen at the time Goffman was writing. However, this is still partly true as of today.

In the ICA’s EDI weekly meetings debates, it was in fact often discussed how resolving the internal divide - both physical and metaphorical - between these spaces was a key starting point to resolve the inequality, abuse and social and racial injustice the institution conveyed in the public realm. Several solutions were proposed and implemented throughout the time of my placement to address this, as I will describe more in detail in the final part of this chapter. But the key aspect of these discussions was that addressing the injustice present among members of staff was recognized as the solution to relate to audiences in the same way.

The Symposium

In this section, I analyse the process leading up to the symposium and I discuss, more broadly, the curatorial component of my PhD practice submission.

Specifically, I demonstrate how these practice activities were inspired by my theoretical research on the discourse on the ‘curatorial’ and, conversely, how these concepts from the field of curatorial studies often directly fed into my choices of the symposium’s organising process.

I identify the findings of this part of my practice in:

- the performative aspects of my PhD curatorial practice and, more specifically, of my role during the symposium organising process in relation to my partners, and specifically the host institution - the ICA – and the choreographic nature of the final event delivery on the day.

- the symposium contributors’ individual responses to my PhD research questions, outlined in my written brief to them, and further developed through a series of conversations with each of them over eight months, and resulting in their individual presentations on the day.

- the symposium’s ‘audience score’ and discuss mine and Paul Paschal’s performance of it.

Practice submission elements – hyperlinks for section

Symposium Video

https://vimeo.com/1146504586/333e384947

Symposium Brief to Contributors

https://www.museumchoreography.com/symposiumbrief

Symposium 'Score'

https://www.museumchoreography.com/symposiumscore

Relational practice, hospitality and power dynamics

First of all, in relation to the discourse on the curatorial, I recognise forming, nurturing and consolidating relationships both with institutions and individuals as a key aspect of my process and practice. The symposium was made possible thanks to a partnership with TECHNE, who provided support in principle and cash funding, and with the ICA, who offered the venue free-of-charge, contributed to the event's success through its marketing and reputational status, and provided in-kind support and a small cash contribution. My relationship with each of the artists and with the museum and galleries professionals who presented at the symposium, not only developed closely following my invitation and over the course of the 8 months leading to the event, but it was also the result of my professional interactions with each of these individuals over several years. This enabled a deep mutual understanding over the themes and questions proposed by the event, and a level of trust and intellectual availability which would have not otherwise been possible.

While many authors in the field of curatorial studies identify curating as a relational practice, with specific reference to Beatrice Von Bismark (Von Bismark, 2023), I want to draw attention to the careful process of several, often minute negotiations of

‘conditions’ that I underwent with all involved parties, and how these were fundamental to my event’s final realisation. On the basis of Foucault’s and Derrida’s theorisations[1], Von Bismark (Von Bismark, outlines the power dynamics of curatorial situations in relation to the idea of hospitality, whereby the curator or institutions may be seen as the ‘host’, and the audience as ‘guests’. The author, however, hints at the complex relations between the role of ‘host’ and ‘guest’, stating that these roles’ statuses are only temporary, because they are limited to, or enabled by, the performative quality of exhibitions and curated events. Like performances, in fact, exhibitions have an often long lead-up or preparation time, a ‘show’ time of months or days, opening hours, and teams working contextually towards their realisation. As a result, the roles and professional statuses of the human agents involved have the possibility to change over time and in different contexts.

As part of this dynamic of hospitality, Von Bismark continues, is the ‘pardoxical logic of the gift’, which, ‘although being tied to reciprocity […] is also situated in such a relationship of compensability’ (Von Bismark, 2023, p. 144). At the ICA, I was situated as a ‘guest’ PhD student, where it was my PhD funders, TECHNE, and not the ICA, providing me with a stipend. So, I was, in some respect, in a position of ‘gifting’ my work hours to the ICA, without directly being paid by them. A sense of the ICA owing me something in exchange for my work, became quite apparent from the start, and strongly emerged in the last stages of my symposium’s organising process, when it was often emphasised that the opportunity for hosting this event had been gifted to me in compensation for my institutional work over the months.

[1] Derrida, J., Dufourmantelle, A. (2000) *On Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida To Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA, 2000) and Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, 1972-1977, New York; both text quoted in Von Bismark (2023)

Underlying tensions became explicit around my request to use the main ICA theatre as a venue, in a time where the technical team was short-staffed and financial pressures had been ongoing within the organisation since it had lost a large portion of their NPO funding in October 2022 (Artforum, 2022). Throughout the organising process and close to the event date, I was openly reminded of my ‘guest’ role in the organisation, and that the curators and organisers who were permanent members of staff had priority over the programming. I felt a strong sense of my relative, temporary and precarious power in the situation, and recognised the accredited status of the ‘host curators’ as one I could not request or claim.

From another angle, as an organiser and curator of the event, and from the perspective of the audience and the invited contributors, I was the host. It was often challenging for me to navigate the tension between my very limited and precarious power within the ICA, and my relative position of power in relation to the invited contributors. In various literature on the curatorial, the role of the curator as a ‘mediator’ is often highlighted and debated (Lind, 2012) especially with reference to ‘independent’ curators, or curators operating outside of regular employment within an institution. I certainly played a mediating function in the communications and logistics’ arrangement between the ICA and the contributors. Instead of being a mere administrative exercise, this was a process of often subtle negotiations in close dialogue with the ICA’s programming priorities, their technical and financial resources, and their marketing and audience targets. For example, my technical requests towards the installation of CHAX5’s collective work *Public Intimacies*, had greater positive response if I framed these within the narrative of the ‘artists’ requirements’, as opposed to ‘the organiser’s’ or ‘the event’s’ requirements. I also

gradually realised that framing my professional standing as an ‘artist’ or ‘a PhD student’, who the ICA was helping to produce a project, was more successful for the purposes of making requests, than conveying a sense of me being a ‘curator’ of the event. Similarly, tensions around the ICA providing cash support to the event, were finally resolved with the institution happily covering the ‘artists’ materials’ section of the budget, as well as the audience refreshments. Fighting an initial resistance from the ICA to cover any cash costs at all, it is understandable that the costs that were eventually supported aimed at keeping in line with key points of the organisation’s public mission - supporting artists, and welcoming audiences who were likely to come back to the ICA in the future – therefore protecting its reputational standards.

I must stress that this reflection on decision making and negotiation processes between myself - the ‘guest’ organiser/curator - and the ICA - the ‘host’ institution - are not in any way made to denigrate the process or the organisation itself. What I aim to emphasise here, is the complexity and articulation of curatorial practice, where these apparently small actions and communications are central to the event’s outcome. As it is evident, these actions often reflect deeper power dynamics, financial and managerial pressures, and overall strongly contribute to the formulation of meaning in the curatorial. In terms of my PhD’s methodology, I believe it is key to identify these apparently minor or everyday decisions as constitutive of a ‘practice’ which cannot be otherwise accurately defined.

Multiple and collective authorship

In recognizing the precarious and relative authority of my position of ‘guest’ curator, and the complexity of negotiations of conditions both with the institutional venue and

the event contributors, I also want to acknowledge my connection to the idea of collective authorship. This approach to curating has been widely identified in the discourse and practice of the curator ‘in the expanded field’, including in the above quoted Beatrice Von Bismark’s text, to Maria Lind (Lind, 2012), to Paul O’Neill (O’Neill in Rugg, Sedgwick, 2007), Clare Bishop (Bishop, 2008) among others. As Clare Bishop effectively summarises (Bishop, 2008), one of the main characteristics of pioneering figures of ‘independent curators’ in the late 60s and 70s is a new sense of curatorial authorship - a multiple one – where the conception and realization of a curated event is ‘more akin to that of a film, a theatrical production, or a concert’ (Bishop, 2008, p.121-122).

Bishop’s article presents an overview of a few historical moments between 1968 and 1972, when the figure of the ‘independent curator’ emerged in opposition the traditional museum or gallery curator, and in close connection with the rise of both installation art and institutional critique. In my intellectual and professional development over the past 15 years, and in the perspective of defining and discussing my practice in this thesis, I have always strongly connected to these historical examples, and often referred to them to critically assess or question the standards and quality of my curatorial activity.

The primary aim of the symposium ‘How do institutions choreograph us?’ at the ICA, was to invite artists in the performance area, and art professionals working in the museum and gallery sector to engage with some of my PhD research questions. A collaborative process was therefore key to the event’s realisation, and the contributors’ responses – in the form of visual-verbal presentations, print material,

practical demonstrations and workshops, group discussions and co-hosting – contributed to a multiple sense of authorship and collective meaning-making in this curatorial situation. My name and biography was listed as one of the contributors in the marketing and information material handed to the audience, and the institutional presence of the ICA in the organising process allowed my authorship to be, somehow, only quietly acknowledged.

Playing with the medium: event choreography

'How do institutions choreograph us?' was also a commentary on the performative nature of conferences. I was interested in the rituals and structure in 'acts' (the different lectures separated by coffee breaks); the hierarchies between 'protagonists' (keynote speakers), the 'presenters', and the 'extras'; the event's 'props' (name badges, note pads, printed programmes, audience surveys); the 'scenography' (the chairs, their orientation towards the front of the room), and so on. Since its very conception, I had a resistance to refer to this event a 'symposium' or a 'conference' as I wanted to move away from the traditional format of these academic events, or, at least, to put a spotlight on the performance quality of these types of events. I later leaned into calling it a symposium, to make things simpler for my interlocutors, but it is important for me to stress that my wish was to resist this word, and, in relation to my concomitant practice as a performance artist, to treat this event's planning as a preparation for a performance, like any other.

The choreographic nature of the day was made evident by the 'score' that my collaborator and co-host Paul Paschal and I put together and performed. This is

available, in its written form, as one of the elements of my practice submission on the PhD website: https://www.museumchoreography.com/symposiumscore

In an explicit homage to Bojana Cvejić's *Spatial Confessions* (Cvejić, 2014), the score provided a conceptual framing throughout the duration of the event, through a longer participatory section at the very beginning, and at a mid-point of the event. Through a set of verbal instructions, Paul and I asked the audience to participate in simple choreographic games - we asked them, for example, to change their position in space, or to perform simple gestures. While later in this chapter, I will engage in a more detailed analysis of the score through its context in performance practice of the 'performance-lecture' and the discourse on 'seriousness', in the brief discussion follows, I continue locating my practice within the curatorial discourse with reference to a few historical examples from the field of visual arts.

The score aimed at produced a meta-discourse through a set of spoken verbal instructions for physical movement, or, more simply, a performative commentary on the conventions of an academic event's format. Specifically, it aimed at exposing the medium of the 'academic event' in its social dynamics of power, where inequalities and hierarchies are often silently played out or openly expressed. This participatory game, also had the aim of creating a playful sub-text and, indeed, facilitate social connection among audience members, in the perspective of the group discussions happening later in the day.

This strive towards both a playful and critical approach towards the format of the curatorial situation I was proposing, also connects me to historical examples of

curatorial practice in the visual arts questioning and engaging critically with its very medium – which, in this context, is the exhibition. The curatorial positions itself as a critical approach reflecting on its own methods, conceptual premises and practical outcomes to produce new meanings. The historical references from the late 1960s and early 1970s are particularly striking for me, because they reflect a time 'when curators were starting to make visible the mediating component […] of an exhibition' (O'Neill, 2007, p.12), and this approach revealed an intention to demystify the 'hidden structures of the art world' (O'Neill, 2007, p.12).

The idea of demystification is important to my event because through the humour and playfulness of the symposium's score, I aimed at disrupting the atmosphere of seriousness and debunking the aura of authority of academic events. In this sense, I look up to pioneering artists collectives General Idea and Group Material, active from the late 1960s through to the mid-1990s, who not only appropriated curatorial mediums with humour and wit, but also achieved, through their practice, abolishing the divide between 'high' and 'low' forms of art and culture.

Other historical examples of re-appropriating traditional elements of curatorial practice that I considered include Marcel Broodhears' *Musee de L'Art Moderne* - a series of installations of a fictional museum set up in his home, where the artist used playfully traditional elements of museum displays (gallery text, labels and interpretive panels). As Clare Bishop points out, Broodthaers used 'open letters, letter heads, announcements, signs and texts' to 'invoke the operators of institutional authority as a set of performative gestures'[…], so that 'the trappings of the exhibition installation were themselves staged (Bishop, 2008, p.128).

I quoted historical examples in the field of art and curating as these were key sources of inspiration in developing my curatorial practice in the past few years and remained constant in my thinking throughout the lead-up to the symposium. However, I must stress how so many more contemporary explorations of similar ideas and practices are pertinent to similar questioning and concepts. The two above mentioned examples are particularly relevant to the present discussion because they engage with the museum and its codes, on the one hand, and because they are very early and pioneering examples of artists working in a curatorial capacity.

As to more recent examples, Hans Ulrich Obrist's overview of his 'Curating non-conferences' (Obrist, 2014), Obrist describes two examples from his practice – 'Mind revolution', organised with Christa Maar and hosted in a research centre near Cologne; and 'Bridge the Gap', devised with Miyake Akiko at the CCA Kytakyushu in Japan – when he produced a curatorial situation appropriating the format and schedule of the conference. While removing the 'official' content of them – the keynote lectures, the structured discussions, the seminars and workshops – he simply experimented with the idea of just 'putting people together in a specific time and place' (Obrist, 2014, p.153), and he continues, 'It is not just a mere conference: it is really about the production of reality, about connecting people who otherwise wouldn't have encountered this way within the framework of knowledge production' (Obrist, 2014, p. 155).

What it is relevant to my practice in these examples, are both the emphasis on the curator as a social agent facilitating and creating new relationships between people,

and the focus on the performative elements of the conference as producing meaning alone, or becoming open vehicles for any other meaning to be created among the event's participants. In organising my event, I agree with the idea expressed in Obrist's auto-biographical account, that the most interesting conversations at conferences do not happen during the formal presentations and speeches, but in the restaurant, the green room, or in the hotel accommodation. As Obrist points out, 'the role of the curator is to create space, not occupy existing space' (Obrist, 2014, p. 154).

In this PhD project, I have used methods from both my practice as an artist and as a curator. Throughout my career, I have always conceived them and pursued them as separate, however, I recognise how my development of each often happened in tandem, and many ideas and strategies persisted and travelled between one and in other, at different moments. I draw on Paul O'Neill, a key author in this area of studies, and Clare Bishop (Bishop, 2008), who both oppose the theory that artist and curator are identifiable and undistinguished roles, as it has sometimes been claimed[2] (Bishop, 2008). They both assert that, for however intertwined and overlapping these practices may be, the artist and the curator are both separate and inter-dependent roles.

In the perspective of my research methodology, it is also important to note that curatorial studies have played an important role in placing value in the role of other mediating cultural agents in the process of the curating. Both O'Neill (O'Neill in Rugg, Sedgwick, 2012) and Von Bismark (Von Bismark, 2023) speak against the

[2] Groys, B. 'Multiple Authorship' (2006) in Vanderlinden, Filipovic, E., *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Exhibitions and Biennals*, Cambridge (MA), p.93-99

traditional status of the curator as the only protagonist to the curatorial situation, and they underline the role of cultural workers in the process of meaning-making of the cultural profession. Bourdieu's words, as highlighted by Paul O'Neill, support and effectively summarise this vision:

> 'The subjects of the production of the artwork – of its value but also of its meaning – is not the producer who actually creates the object in its materiality, but rather the entire set of agents in the field. Amongst these are the producers of the works, classified as artists...critics of all persuasions...collectors, middlemen, curators, etc.; in short, all those that have ties with art, who live for art, and, to varying degrees, for it and who confront each other in struggles where the imposition of a world view but also a vision of the art world is at stake, and who, through these struggles, participate in the production of the value of the artist and of art' (Bourdieu 1993: 261)

Similarly, artist collective Group Material have been an inspiration for me also for the revolutionary take on their own positionality, which I strongly identify with. As Alison Green points out, 'in rejecting the role of the artist-as-maker they became something else - producers, organisers, interpreters of art and other artefacts, 'cultural workers', even. They mobilised the exhibition as an active site where all things were under scrutiny: institutional power, aesthetics, cultural value and political discourse' (Green, 2011).

The contributors' responses to the brief

In this section, I reflect on the collaborative process with the symposium contributors, and summarise their responses to my curatorial invitation. For this analysis, I refer to the brief to contributors (http://museumchoreography.com/symposiumbrief) and the symposium video submitted as elements of practice for this PhD: https://vimeo.com/1146504586/333e384947

The brief

I elaborated the contributors' invite or 'brief' in October 2022, eight months prior to the event delivery in June 2023. A series of collaborative conversations started at that time with the invited contributors, some of which informed slight editorial changes in the text. The brief represents the snapshot of my thinking connected to my placement at the ICA - it positions my PhD research questions in relation to my EDI work at the ICA, on the one hand, and Visitor Studies methodologies. This is also reflected in the choice of the projects presented in their contributions. I had made clear to the invited contributors that they were welcome to engage with only some aspects of the brief – any that felt the most relevant to their work and the projects presented in the final contributions were chosen in dialogue.

I offered two areas of investigation which reflect the structure of my PhD project: the movement of visitors in museums and art galleries, and the institutional choreographies produced and reproduced at the 'back of the house': in these institutions' offices, especially, and in the administrative and operational processes. I

note that these can be intended as physical, materialized choreographies, and virtual ones.

The choice of the invited contributors was based on the relevance of their work to address the questions I outlined in the brief, but also in view of a considerable level of trust and a professional relationship with each of them, built over years. The contributors' varied expertise reflects the interdisciplinary approach of this PhD Similarly, the brief offered various entry points connected to the themes of my research through spatial practice literature, including Lefebvre and De Certeau, performance practice and theory, Visitor Studies, and the curatorial discourse.

In the section below, I outline my connection with each of the contributors and summarise each of their contributions on the day. I identify the relationship with each of the invited speakers and artists as the key expression of my PhD practice of artist-as curator, and their individual responses to my brief, as a collective production of knowledge through multiple authorship. I also explain below how the variety of approaches and the different nature of the contributions, connected through the theatrical frame of an audience participatory 'score', evidences an artistic approach to my curatorial practice. Each of the individual contributions represents a creative and collaborative response to my PhD research questions.

Marie Hobson

I chose to work with Marie Hobson, Senior Audience Research and Insights Manager at the V&A, to show how the research questions may be approached from the

perspective of Visitor Studies. Marie also has a strong academic background in the field, with a PhD in Visitor Research at the Department of Education and Professional Studies, King's College London. It was important for me to give this perspective within the context of an artistic and choreography-led research event, to offer an introductory overview of a methodology that uses the physical interaction of bodies in spaces and measures it through qualitative and quantitative data collection.

Marie presented a visitor research project which investigated feelings of belonging and feeling 'welcome' in the museum in connection to visitors' physical journey. Focusing on the new V&A site, opening to the public in Stratford in London in May 2025, Marie and her team took a group of 16–25-year-olds on a virtual journey through the designs for the new museum from the outside of the building and into the galleries and areas of 'open storage' of objects, which are a key feature of the new museum. At each stage of their journey, the group were asked a number of open-ended questions and were encouraged to start discussions on feelings of being 'welcome' and belonging in relation to different elements of the architecture and of the gallery displays.

The study's findings showed that building came across as 'cold' or 'intimidating' and 'corporate' to the group, however, more positive feedback was given to the object displays and interactives that were being built. Marie concludes in her presentation with 'We can't change the architecture, but we can change our signage, content interpretation and our experiences to help encourage our visitors to enter and be through our spaces'. From my own professional experience as a freelancer in Visitor Research at the V&A (2013-2020), and from the conversations I have had with

herself and the team, a very common difficulty in the professional area is that qualitative research and evaluation are often seen as retrospective to the planning and delivery of projects, of a smaller or, in this case, greater scale – the design and planning of a new museum. However, the benefits of evaluation work be much greater if this type of study was to be carried out prior to designing a new building.

With the symposium being framed and informed by institutional critique, one of my key aims was to provide audience members with an opportunity for direct communication with representatives of major art institutions in London. At the end of Marie's verbal-visual presentation, audience questions were many and, at times, openly challenging and confronting her. Marie had to play a challenging role: she was the face of the institution – one of the biggest, most funded, and most popular museums in London – and audience members related to her as such. Although, as mentioned, I was partly reluctant to reinstate the traditional hierarchy of an academic event structure, with the most popular and powerful institution in keynote, the audience reactions and fervid interactions during her presentation showed that another important goal of the event was achieved. Audiences saw the event as an opportunity for critically address institutions and actively engage in this debate.

Richard Martin and Luke Gregory-Jones

My invite to Richard Martin and Luke Gregory-Jones from Whitechapel gallery, was founded on a long-standing professional relationship with Richard, former Public Programmes Curator at Tate, and, currently Director of Education and Public Programmes at Whitechapel. Richard has also lectured at King's College and had mentored me during the application process to my PhD.

Richard's strong background in museology and institutional critique, dedication to public engagement, ethical integrity in his profession, and openness to students and early career researchers like myself, allowed me to nurture a dialogue with him over the years. In the months preceding the symposium, after a few email exchanges and a meeting, Richard and I arrived at selecting the Angel Alley project as the most suitable for discussion in the context of 'How do Institutions choreograph us?'.

An 'in-between' space over the years, Angel Alley, adjacent to the Whitechapel gallery, in East London, became a socially dangerous place especially during the Covid pandemic, and called into question the role of the gallery in approaching a socially and politically charged situation, and its rapport with the neighboring businesses, the local authorities including the local administration and the police, and charitable organisations active in the area. Richard presented jointly with Luke Gregory-Jones, Head of Visitor Services and Civic Engagement at the Whitechapel Gallery at the time, who played a key role in the Angel Alley project, especially in pandemic times.

I was interested in the project as it confronted the interaction of an art institution – the Whitechapel gallery – with its surrounding area and its passers-by and the broader civil context of stakeholders involved in the administration of the streets nearby. This would allow to bring to our discussion on the day the choreography of the urban space, and the socio-political implications of an art institution within the space of the city. Richard and I also discussed *rhythmanalisis* and Lefebvre's idea of 'social space', key to my research, in relation to Angel Alley.

The Whitechapel gallery's presentation constituted another important building block representing my thinking and practice for this PhD project – the complexity of negotiation processes and participation of different professional figures of an institution, and between these various voices and external stakeholders.

Alisa Oleva

My dialogue with Alisa started in 2020, based on our shared interest in the psychogeography and artistic practices of walking, which Alisa's work is centred on. The collaboration was imbued by a deep understanding of each other's research, and specifically around choreography of everyday movement of visitors and tourist groups. Alisa's research work *A Visit to an Art Gallery Without Looking* (2020), is a video where the artist visits a gallery and gives herself the task of visiting without looking at any of the artwork. The camera shot, reflecting the artist's gaze, is fixed on the choreography of visitors: feet, hands and arms gestures, and pace. Similarly, in her older piece *A Silent Guided Tour* (2014), the artist, armed with a closed umbrella, walks around the city with a group of tourists, conducting a guided tour with no words.

Alisa's focus on scores, as well as everyday movement, reflected in her contribution to 'How Do Institutions Choreograph Us?'. Here, her contribution – a guided walk for the symposium participants around the perimeter of the ICA – started with handing out an envelope to each of the participants with coloured sheets, each with a one-to-two-lines score. These were an invitation for the audience to perform those scores

outside of the event frame. They are published as appendix at https://www.museumchoreography.com/appendices

Alisa designed the walk around three tasks she invited the audience members to perform:

- Drawing a map of how they arrived at the ICA that day, then have a moment to share it with someone. The maps could be in words or drawings, in whatever shaper.
- An exercise she calls the ‘human camera’: opportunity to meet someone in the group, share how we see the environment around us and frame what we see and what we want to share it with another person.
- Short 15-mins walk: Tracing the textures of the walk with their hands, or a stick or the back of the pencil (if they didn’t feel comfortable putting their hands on the building’s surfaces) of the perimeter of the area directly surrounding the ICA.

Alisa told me her interest in approaching the brief was engaging with the skin of the institutions, the inside and outside of it. I see her work as adjacent to my practice research in her engagement with the spatial dimension of institutions both at a physical and affective level. Her walking scores gently address themes of intimacy both within a solitude of the self and within the superficial collective entity of a group of tourists or visitors during a visit. Alisa’s interest in the minimal actions or gestures of the choreography of visiting and the relational waves echoed by the same are rooted in a similar interest of the museum scores I describe later in Chapter 3.

Alisa's walk during the symposium – which we had asked audience members to sign up for in advance – demonstrated its success: the walk was over-subscribed, and Alisa said that she had never had such a large group of participants. Most participants committed fully to the tasks proposed in the walk fully, and at times engaged with challenging the security-controlled space in the London prestigious and wealthy area of Westminister.

Sara Ruddock

The collaboration with Sara Ruddock grew through a series of written exchanges, one in-person meeting and one movement session, where me and her explored the possible avenues for her symposium contribution. A Roehampton and TECHNE PhD collegue at Roehampton and Techne, Sara is a dancer, choreographer, and teacher. Her PhD is focused on the connection between movement and sound and, specifically, a practice research project on resonance and vibration. Sara and I jointly decided her contribution to the symposium was to be a movement workshop. This was the only movement-focused workshop offered on the day, and it was important for me that it offered participants not only the possibility to explore the symposium's concepts through a physical practice, but I also wanted it to be an opportunity for the audience to restore and come back to their body during an intense day of sitting down and listening.

In our exchanges prior to the symposium, I discussed with Sara the symposium brief, and especially the idea of verbal and textual choreographic 'instructions' present in the museum space. I also made a specific proposition to Sara was to connect with

the idea, often debated in museological literature, of the museum's 'voice'. This comes across through various types of verbal communication, such as gallery texts (panels, labels), known in the museological sector as 'interpretation' or 'interpretive texts'; signs inside and outside the museum building, including those prescribing 'rules' (for example, the 'do not touch' sign) and other operational messages (ex. 'queue this way'); digital and print marketing texts and visual communication.

The debate and references around 'museum voice' is long-established in museological discourse, I discussed with Sara *Exhibit Labels* by Beverly Serrell (Serrell, XXX), which presents a useful overview of key points in the discussion, with a few examples of various writing styles and tones of voice that museums have used. As the author explains, the formal register and academic language for gallery 'intepretation' has mostly been replaced for a more friendly and accessible vocabulary and grammatical structures, with a journalistic style building following a 'pyramid' structure (from the most important or striking information to more and more detail). However, Serrell also shows the variety of possibility in addressing interpretative text writing and, consequently, the 'tone of voice' the museum can express, and my proposition to Sara was to explore some of these in a movement workshop setting and see what interactions they might produce as potential scores for movement.

In my meetings with Sara, I also brought Andrea Fraser's video work *Little Frank and His Carp*, where we see Fraser being gradually sexually seduced by the voice of Bilbao's Guggenheim audio guide. The audio-guide presents Fraser with a series of vocal 'instructions', evoking images and suggesting different ways of interacting with

the space, which Fraser interprets by gradually undressing and rubbing her semi-naked body against the museum walls. In the context of Fraser's broader academic and artistic work on institutional critique, the video is not only funny, but it also clearly encapsulates the idea of a male, dominant, depersonalized and unilateral 'museum voice', emitted from the 'visitor-friendly', accessible device of the audio-guide, and a female visitor overpowered by its vocal instructions.

Sara integrated my input into her practice-based research on resonance and resistance, and how these two ideas are experience physically in the institutional space of the ICA. In the 45-min movement session during the symposium, Sara led a series of body-centred explorations, focusing on listening and scoring. She guided participants to listen not only to sounds, but to their own physical sensations, their interactions with the other participants, and the objects in the space – the ICA theatre as set up for the symposium, where the chairs had been stacked similar way as the opening scoring exercise. She asked participants to articulate these sensations into movement or voice, and in connection to the idea of resonating with, or resisting to the hierarchies living in the history of the participants' own body and their presence in the wider space of the ICA. Following that, participants drew or wrote scores of their physical experience during the session, and some exchanged and discussed their scores with others at the end of the session.

Tara Fatehi

Building on a 10-year professional relationship, my dialogue with Tara was fluid and imbued with deep mutual understanding. I first curated Tara's work as part of a 2-day festival Spontaneous Combustion in 2014, and later became the Producer for her

project Mishandled Archive, funded by the Arts Council England and supported by key UK art organisations, including LADA and Arts Admin.

Her contribution was one of the few to engage with the idea of colonialism and social inequality presented in the brief. As part of a 3-month artist residency at the UN headquarters in Geneva in 2021, Tara conducted a historical research, looking at the archival documents on Palestine, particularly the period of the British mandate in Palestine and the years leading up from the First World War to the Nakba in 1948 and the establishment of the State of Israel. The residency culminated in video work that was streamed live on the artist's Instagram account on the 29 November, the International Day in Solidarity for the Palestinian People, when the UN had no celebration of the occurrence happening.

Tara strongly connected to my experience of a physical relationship with the institutional spaces, which, as described in this chapter, deeply informs my practice. During her verbal and visual presentation at the symposium, Tara showed two videos, snippets of which are embedded in my PhD submission's video. While wearing for the Covid regulations at the time, the videos show the artist performing minimal dances 'in disguise' – minimal movements that are so small that can 'pass' for everyday movements, or not recognized as dance in the CCTV cameras or by the very few people passing through the office. These movements act as her own – and her social media followers'– secret, silent and riotous celebration of the National Day for the Palestinian people.

Harun Morrison

Harun Morrison presented a work-in-progress video with a short accompanying text provisionally entitled ‘Reflections on Reflections’. As the culmination of a one-year period of residency at the Horniman Museum in South London, funded by the Delfina Foundation, Harun produced the exhibition *Dolphin Head Mountain* (Morrison, 2022). As part of the residency, Harun produced a new choreographic work entitled *Defences of Animals*, which we see in a film Harun made in collaboration with James Allan featuring in the symposium’s submitted video.

The work takes its name from a section of the Horniman Museum’s display, *Defences of Animals*, which presents a range of strategies animals use to defend themselves. The corresponding wall display in the museum lists a series of actions which present the basis for the movement score (ex. warning calls; intimidation by sight; flocking; camouflage; etc.). During the exhibition run, these movements were interpreted by different performers, including Monica Tolia who features in the film.

The film direction investigates the multiple layers of seeing intrinsic to the experience of going around a museum – where we see reflections through the glass cases, and especially our own and others’ reflection superimposed with the objects on display. The camera intentionally never features direct shots of the performance, but only its reflection in the glass cases.

In his symposium presentation, Harun contextualised this film as a how the museum choreographs us, and not only in our bodies but also in our attention through the curatorial elements of display. Through the film work, he emphasised how this

process of curating attention is similar to what a camera frame does in film – for example, with moments that might be equivalent of a close-up or a long shot.

He also explained that superimposition or layering of images of the self with the display objects and, in the case of the Horniman Museum, the conjuring or encounter between the human body and non-human body, is not only a visual effect but it is also a portal to an emotional affect, that the traditional experience does not always foster.

Jemima Yong and Anahi Saravia Herrera

In an in-person meeting in July 2022, Jemima and I discussed various options for her collaboration with me, prior to the symposium brief being written. We had several points of contact in our professional experience, including working in Communications in major art galleries in London, and I spoke to her about my several years of working at the V&A as an Evaluator – interviewing visitors in the galleries to collect answers to the museum's visitor surveys. Jemima spoke about her long-standing collaborative relationship with artist Anahi Saravia Herrera, and proposed to work with her for 'How Do Institutions Choreograph Us?', for their work on guerilla publishing.

Jemima and Anahi's contribution to the symposium was a print work following the format of an audience survey, entitled *A Bad Review*, and available on the PhD website at https://www.museumchoreography.com/appendices. The artists handed out to the symposium attendees the print survey halfway through the event, just like

a regular audience survey would be. They dressed in matching outfits - perhaps to evoke the uniforms of corporate survey auditors – and decided to give no introduction or verbal presentation accompanying the distribution of the survey.

The survey is strongly marked by the language of humour and rage, which Jemima and I discussed as being a fundamental premise to her collaborative work with Anahi. Their work often appropriates the existing format and styles of print and publishing. In this case, too, they looked at the space of the ICA and the setting of an art conference, and initially considered different options of creating a print 'in disguise'. For example, they considered adding bookmarks to the ICA books on sale at the bookshop, producing a menu for the ICA café, printing receipts or putting up posters on the walls in the spaces nearby the theatre, where the symposium was taking place.

As it is directly mentioned in the text of *Bad Review* itself, the aim of the survey was to use the idea of 'cloaking', which the project *Barbican Stories* (Barbican Stories, 2021) is an established example for. *Barbican Stories* wrapped in its critique in institutional language, or institutional design[3]. Similarly, Jemima and Anahi identified 'cloaking' as one of the fundamental strategies that institutions to deploy to mask their racist, ableist, patriarchal and colonial policies and to dissipate accountability, and they decided to appropriate the very same tactic as a tool for their institutional

[3] *Barbican Stories* was a project initiated in 2020 by current and former members of staff of the Barbican Centre, to mark their dissent towards the organisation and expose the inadequacy and hypocrisy of their policies and practices around racism and discrimination. *Barbican Stories* contributors anonymously fed into a print publication and an online writings that exposed their own or their colleagues' experience of institutional racism at Barbican. The project started as their contributors' accounts of discrimination had been silenced internally within the organisation, and have to this day been censored online. However, Barbican Stories had an incredible reach in the public opinion, especially following an article by Lanre Bakare in *The Guardian*, and Barbican Stories acted as a catalyst for many other art organisations.

critique. In *Bad Review*, the artists stay very close to the parameters of the survey as a form – with 'sliding scale' questions, 'happiness ratings' through smiley icons, and 'agree or disagree' options – and fire up this structure with the language of humour and rage. As a result, their commentary on the gallery sector is strongly expressed, but 'in disguise'.

I retrospectively discussed with Jemima how the uncompromising, direct, simple and cutting tone in *Bad Review* and the performative dimension of its language - with its marked connotation of a manifesto - links back to and positions itself in a striking contrast to the declared 'complexity' and vague, unspecific and nuanced language of many mission statements published by major institutions. As I will discuss further later in this chapter, the high performative language of these statements, are often used to cover for an inefficiency or unwillingness to take a clear position on socio-political issues, specifically around racial, social and gender inequality. Furthermore, *Bad Review*'s tone of voice also seems to contrast with the cautious balancing of words represented by the new 'friendly' and inclusive direction that museums have taken in their choice of language and tone of voice –mentioned here in reference to Sara Ruddock's contribution above.

Symposium video realisation

The symposium video, filmed by documentary filmmaker Elanor Mortimer on the day and featuring additional footage by Anika Tomic-Vajagic, was realised through a process of close collaboration with video editor and sound designer Rob Hart.

The choreographic frame

My collaborative relationship with Paul Paschal of CHAX5 extended to inviting him to co-convene the symposium alongside me. This role was not simply to introducing the speakers and moderating Q&As and group discussions, as it is common practice in most academic events. Through our co-hosting, I aimed to produce a more complex performative frame to the event. In the discussion that follows, I will refer to the practice submission element of the symposium video, where some of the moments can be seen performed in. I will contextualise the work through the collaborative relationship with Paul, and frame it within the context of the format of the 'lecture-performance' and the discourse in performance studies on 'seriousness'.

A fellow PhD TECHNE-funded student at Roehampton University at the time, Paul's research investigated institutional power, with a particular focus on the ambiguity of gestures and social antics of hospitality. As part of this collaborative relationship, Paul and I scripted a score where the two of us, as the event 'co-hosts', invited the attendees to participate in simple choreographic tasks. As a first step in the process, we discussed our own experiences of being a host and a guest, both in our personal lives and in professional settings of working in and with art institutions. Similarly to the relational dynamics of gifting mentioned earlier in this chapter, where reciprocity is tied to compensability (Von Bismark, 2023, p.144), hosting also instigates a relationship of power whereby the guest subscribes to unspoken terms of compensability towards the host. Many of us might have been in the situation where we are invited for dinner at someone's house and have felt the discomfort when being served a food we do not like to eat. At an institutional level, Paul and I

discussed, for example, the politics of working as part of an institution as a placement student, or being invited as an 'artist-in-residence', where we were often lured in with the promise of creative agency and later expected to comply to the terms of the institutions. We often came back to Sarah Ahmed's words in *On Being Included*, 'To be welcomed is to be positioned as the one who is not at home' (Ahmed, 2012, p.42), which I also decided to refer to the in the symposium's marketing materials and in the communications with the contributors.

The complete score shared between myself and Paul extended to every single moment of the event, and we rehearsed it as we would have done for a performance. Paul and I both have both are performance makers with experience of performing live and we discussed our performace styles. The submitted written element (https://www.museumchoreography.com/symposiumscore) presents only two key sections of the complete score, where we more explicitly asked the audience to participate in choreographic games. The first section, 'Welcome' sees us welcoming the audience as they enter the room at the beginning of the event, and the second section, happening at mid-point of the event, is entitled 'Choreographic Survey'.

The score is an explicit homage to Bojana Cvejić's *Spatial Confessions* performed at Tate Modern in 2014 (Cvejić, 2014), and I deliberately announced this reference to the audience as part of the score during the event. In a similar way to *Spatial Confessions,* the score plays with the idea of 'positionality' – how physical presence, movement and social interactions in a shared space connect to taking position in the sense of expressing opinion and their social identity. Both Cvejić and her collaborator

Christine De Smedt refer to the work as a ‘choreographic survey’ where (Cvejić, 2014) where they ask visitors passing through the Tate’s Turbine Hall to change their position in space or perform simple gesture in response to questions voiced by a performer through a microphone.

Cvejić’s explicit identification of her work with a ‘choreographic survey’ and its performative qualities of asking the audience members to perform their answers, provided a perfect structure for me to use for an academic research event where the museum practice of evaluation and visitor monitoring, including surveys, was to be explored through the lens of performance practice and theory. Adopting Cvejić’s format meant that I could ask the symposium’s attendees on the day not only to reflect on the theme of the event, but to *perform it*.

Not only this performative format was to reference the symposium’s overall theme, but it also alluded to more specific ideas explored by the presentations, workshops, and group discussion on the day. In the score, the attendees were asked to respond to ‘instructions’, and this mirrored the ideas discussed in the symposium of ‘instructions’, both tangible and implied, we encounter as visitors to an art gallery or museum. In the score, Paul and I pointed to the social dynamics of exclusion and power dynamics of both physical and metaphorical spaces in the arts – from academic events, such as the symposium we all were part of in that very moment, to the offices of the institutions some of us work at, or that were situated above us in the building that day.

In this sense, the score connects strongly to the context of the 'lecture-performances', and specifically their resurgence in contemporary performance practices in the 1990s. Although never systematically theorized as a genre, the format of the lecture has been adopted as a performative frame by several artists working across performance and the visual arts, including Andrea Fraser, Tim Etchells/Forced Entertainment, Bojana Cvejić, Jerome Bel, Xavier Le Roy, Paul B. Preciado, Martin O'Brian, Hito Steyerl, among many others. Although the lecture-performance has never been systematically reviewed as a genre of its own, Bojana Cvejić, in the context of proposing performance as a key denominator for the negotiation of the self in contemporary everyday life, also effectively summarise the essence of this type of performance as 'showing doing' (Cvejić, 2021, p.70).

In *Public Sphere by Performance* (Cvejić, 2015) and, more succinctly in *Notes for a Society of Performance* (Cvejić, 2021), Bojana Cvejić presents an historical overview of ideas around the definition and negotiation of the self between private and public realms since the definition of 'technologies of the self' in Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1986). Combining her reading of Founcault and her reflection on Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, Cvejić proposes the idea of the 21st C being a 'society of performance', 'characterised by a conscious and self-monitored re-embodied doing and showing doing' (Cvejić, 2021, p. 71). In other words, for Cvejić, in contemporary society, subjectivity is defined and re-defined through showing ourselves establishing, negotiating and re-establishing a relationship with ourselves by doing something. As Cvejić points out, in day-to-day life, this is, for example, evident in the numerous expressions and iterations of self and self-referentiality

through selfie photography, or in videos of oneself performing more or less challenging tasks shared on social media platforms.

Going back to artistic performance, a a well-known and very clear example of this idea is Xavier Le Roy's lecture-performance *Product of Circumstances* (Le Roy, 2009). Here, we initially see the artist, wearing everyday clothes, speaking in a lecture-mode – with a lectern, a microphone, a video projection. Differently from what would happen in a theatre performance, where there are pre-rehearsed lighting and sound cues, the artist asks, in the moment, the AV technician to change the slides and the lighting. Intermitted with the verbal lecture presentation, Le Roy starts to perform dance movements which increase in intensity, frequency and complexity as the performance progresses and the narrative builds. Simply through the alternate lecture-type speeches and dance movements, Le Roy tells his intellectual and personal story slowly moving away from his career in biomedical research to embrace dance professionally. What we see here is the artist's negotiation and development of ideas through an intellectual and physical journey of him-self, through movements and actions – lecturing and dancing – that embody it.

'How Do Institutions Choreograph Us?' is anchored to the legacy of lecture-performances outlined above because of the choreographic frame or score draws attention to the situation that we (co-hosts, symposium contributors, attendees), are all participating in. In other words, the score or frame is 'showing doing' the event. Further, I quoted Le Roy's *Product of Circumstances* as an example of a seminal lecture-performance, but also for its approach in the delivery of the performance, which Paul and I were striving to achieve. In Le Roy's piece, we see the artist at

once ‘being’ himself on stage and performing, he is ‘showing doing’. Even when performing dance movements, Le Roy’s performance quality is to just show us himself doing something. Similarly, through our score, Paul and I did not aim to set up a performance where we would act ‘as if’ we were in a ‘real lecture’. We were the co-hosts of the event, where the score drew attention to the performativity of the ‘real’ situation we were all participating in.

Adding on to these considerations, it was my key aim that the score was imbued with humour and playfulness throughout. This was achieved partly through the collaborative writing of the score by myself and Paul, and through our performance. Identifying Paul as a collaborator was vital to achieve this goal – his energetic and vibrant physical presence, his significant previous experience in live performance, strong skills in verbal delivery and a constant vein of humour and scepticism in his personality, made him the perfect candidate for this role. As I had not given precise direction on what to wear for the event, he arrived in a black-and-white stripes’ t-shirt with an anchor designed on it, and said to me ‘I hope you don’t mind I dressed up as a sailor’.

By creating a playful and welcoming atmosphere for the day, I aimed to encourage attendees to actively participate in the event with questions, expressing their opinion in the group discussions to be held later in the afternoon, and maintain a connection to their own body and their physical presence. For a similar reason, I scheduled the two practical presentations of the day – the guided walk devised by artist Alisa Oleva and a movement workshop led by dancer and choreographer Sara Ruddock – in the middle of the day, between two sets of verbal-visual presentations. This would create

a moment of physical diversion in the pattern of sitting down on chairs.

But, more importantly, the non-serious frame was a conceptual choice connected to the theoretical grounding of this practice research. In *On Seriousness*, Gavin Butt and Irit Rogoff (Butt, Rogoff, 2013), propose that seriousness as an intellectual and ethical stance and assert that this concept needs to be systematically theorised, critiqued and reviewed. Butt points out the connection between institutional power and the language of seriousness, which has traditionally adopted as a value to justify cultural, social and political hierarchies. On the other hand, Rogoff warns us against a new fear of seriousness connected to the commodification and branding of culture, which dangerously promotes political disengagement. The concept of seriousness in performance has also been widely explored in performance practice and especially through the 3-year project *Performance Matters* (2010-2013) and especially its edition *Trashing Performance* (2010-11).

In insight, my original intention to subvert the performative conventions of an academic event, was also only very partly achieved, and I still question my own resistance to pursuing this more radical approach. I was initially adamant to combine and equally promote practice demonstrations and verbal-visual presentations; artistic practice and academic or museum-based research; and contributors working in an institutional context with ‘independent’ artists and professionals. However, I eventually complied to the traditional hierarchy of presentations, where institutional professionals from the V&A and Whitechapel gallery presented at the beginning of the afternoon – therefore, following the tradition of ‘key notes’ – while artists presentations happened later in the day. This was due to a preoccupation on my part

to be able to hold the audience's attention, and a wish to have an opening for the event where the majority of the audience would confidently identify the speakers – associated with prestigious institutions in London – and gain their trust for the succeeding presentations. I do acknowledge, however, that this decision contributes to re-assert traditional hierarchies of power, knowledge and reputation, and kept the event in line with the traditional conference format.

Racial Justice Fellow at the ICA

In this section, I will continue reflecting on the performativity of my practice as a cultural agent in the context of my role as a Racial Justice Fellow at the ICA, with a particular focus on my day-today work in the area of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). Throughout the discussion that follows, I will often reference to Sarah Ahmed's book *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012), which, clearly stated by the author in the book, is based on the author's own experience of leading on EDI work alongside her teaching and lecturing roles in higher education. While her critique of this type of work refers to academic institutions, I found several connections to the work I carried out at the ICA. I often came back to the book throughout the ICA placement, and my selected quotes from it often became a starting point for discussions with colleagues in the weekly EDI staff meeting I led between Aug 2022 and Jan 2023.

I applied to the role as part of the PhD placement funded by TECHNE in November 2021. The placement's start was delayed, because only myself, among the several TECHNE-funded students the role was open to, had applied by January 2022. By

the early spring, one other student had applied and we were both ‘selected’ to start later that year. I had conversations with the convener of the placement opportunity – a member of staff from one of the university in the TECHNE umbrella – about the absence of applications. We discussed at length the reasons for this, why students may be discouraged to apply.

The position was certainly a challenging one for a PhD student – the role description suggested that the candidate would function as a Racial Justice champion for one of the major arts and cultural organisations in London. These included TECHNE partner institutions Kew Gardens, The National Archives, the ICA, the BFI, the London Metropolitan Archives. As Sarah Ahmed points out (Ahmed, 2004, p. 87), Equity and Diversity work is too often assigned to those who are lower in the hierarchy of the institution, and considered as a separate area of work from the core institutional work.

The prospect of this type of work felt exciting yet challenging, and my application stated clearly my uncomfortable-ness in applying for this role. As White European without an expertise in the area, I doubted my ability to carry out the role responsibilities, given my lack of specific knowledge and experience in the area. I also questioned whether it was fair that I would take space in a London institution which should be given to those who have been and are discriminated too long by racism in them. In one of our conversations, the placement convener pointed out, however, that one of the reasons people of colour and people who are discriminated in London institutions by reasons of faith and religion, may have seen, in the role, an unfair request in taking on the emotional labour of addressing the inequity and abuse

that is present in these institutions, as well as navigating the injustice they are subjected to in their daily lives and work.

The non-specificity of the duties and responsibilities of the role description also meant that, as selected candidates, me and the other student on the placement were unsure of what was exactly requested of us. Again, in Sarah Ahmed's analysis (Ahmed, 2012, pp. 78-81), the lack of definition of the terms of equity work in institutions, and its inability to name and point to specificity, are part of the reason for its ineffectiveness. She observes, for example, that, in the practice of EDI, the word 'racism' is often omitted, and substituted for 'diversity', where diversity becomes 'a variety of anything and everything' (Ahmed, 2012, pp. 79), an 'empty container' (Ahmed, 2012, pp. 80) where institutions are able to 'throw all sorts of things under that heading' (Ahmed, 2012, pp. 80).

Nonetheless, I fully embraced the un-scriptedness and uncomfortable-ness of this role as an opportunity and as being in line with my hybrid and fluctuant practice in London institutions over the years, and with being, once again, a 'guest'. The lack of clarity in the placement's role description meant that I was able to shape the placement in response to the specific context of the organization, and the collaborative relationship with ICA colleagues. Towards the end of the placement, I that to write my role description retrospectively. The collaborative dialogue with my line manager was rich and this meant that I was often leading the weekly EDI working group meeting and some of the All Staff training sessions on EDI topics.

With my line manager's position in the organization was Head of HR, many of my projects fell in that area, however, I was explicitly not assigned to any specific team and I was encouraged to work across departments. Since the start of the placement, however, I was informed since that the curatorial team did not have the capacity to take on any collaboration or supervision of my work. With the history, reputation and institutional investment of the ICA capitalizing heavily on the curatorial activity, I questioned whether this lack of capacity was to do, as referred to above, with keeping EDI work separate from the core institutional work and attributed to someone lower in the hierarchy. With that said, the majority of the curatorial team did regularly and actively engage with the weekly EDI working group and staff training led by myself and others, and showed a real concern across the board on these topics. They also spoke to me very openly about their experience of working in the organization and in relation to racism.

My position outside and yet with an insight in all teams once again characterized my role as a hybrid one, where I needed to adapt and mould to different contexts. This position allowed me to acquire an overview of the issues of racism and discrimination in the organization, as they developed across different teams and at different hierarchical levels. A couple of months into the placement, and by speaking to some of the colleagues who had been working in the organisation for a few years, I learnt about institutional trauma and episodes of racism which, in the EDI policies and documents I was given at the start of the placement, did not appear as clearly as they were named in my colleagues' words.

In 2020, the ICA has commissioned the Monitoring Group to investigate and produce a report focusing on the recent episodes of racism in the organisation, with recommendations for future progress which would fit into the overall vision and mission for an organisation that prides itself for radical and progressive views, reflected in the curatorial programme and audiences it aims to attract. In a subsequent internal document that used the Monitoring Group's recommendations as a foundation, addressing the injustice that had been present among members of staff was recognized as the key aim in the addressing the institutional traumas of the past, and the people affected by them, and to be able to then turn outwards to formulating an audience strategy that reflected the same good practice of racial dynamics.

According to this document, just before the start of my placement, the organisation set up a Monthly Anti-Racism Task Force meeting, led by a senior member of staff, with the plan of devising an actionable plan, with specific targets to achieve in relation to the main document's aims. Learning about the history of racial trauma, and coming to the realization of the sensitive moment I had come to join the organisation, added a weight to my role that I had not envisaged.

The internal document recognized that the issue with EDI work is, as it can be effectively summarized by Sarah Ahmed as 'document fatigue' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 89) – in brief, the institutional over-exertion on producing statements and declaring good intents, which do not follow through in effective and visible change on a day-to-day basis. The Anti-Racism Task Force plan was therefore made to be intentionally

malleable and its progress measurable at each of the monthly meetings, to be able to be specific and achieve the goals stated.

The contrast between rhetoric and practice on anti-racism in art organisations was also the topic of one of the staff sessions I planned and led for the ICA members of staff. I set up the workshop in a moment when the organisation was looking into writing a new mission statement on EDI. In the workshop, I proposed the participants to look at a selection of mission statements from different organisations in UK and North America, and discuss, in groups, the wording and its implications. The draft for the ICA's EDI statement was collectively produced in the context of another staff workshop, led by the Head of HR and the Head of Communications. Subsequently, it was decided that it was key that the EDI vision would be conveyed as fully integral to the organisation's overall vision, and the ideas discussed in these workshops fed into the ICA's new mission statement written by the Director and published in December 2022 on the ICA website.