Chapter 2 – How Do Institutions Choreograph Us?

Chapter Introduction

Throughout 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 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 artworks, 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 – in between artist and a curator, and between an external researcher and a sector professional who has, for over 15 years, worked both inside and outside major art institutions.

In 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, this second chapter discusses 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 this chapter, I articulate my reflections on the organising process leading up to the event ‘How Do Institutions Choreograph Us?’ and connect my practice as a curator ‘in the expanded field’ in relation to the theoretical discourse on the ‘curatorial’. I then propose a reflection on my movement as a cultural agent working within major art institutions over the years. Following this analysis, I discuss the findings of the collaborative process and summarise their individual presentations in relation to my PhD research questions, as an extension of the dialogic process that underpins this practice.

In analysing my role in organising the symposium and, more broadly, my role within institutions over the years, I aim to emphasise the performativity of my practice and 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, acting simultaneously 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).

The elements of my PhD practice that I discuss in this chapter 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 more traditionally associated with curating are not seen in hierarchical opposition to acts of administrative logistics, and the curatorial elements of 'choreography' and 'orchestration' (Lind, 2012, p. 12) are emphasised. Lind, in fact, specifically mentions 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 moved fluidly through various institutional levels of responsibility, status, and seniority, 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.

As I will show specifically through the symposium's analysis, my practice is, 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 text quoted above, and in many other sources in curatorial studies (for example, Von Bismarck, 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 ‘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 this PhD.

At the ICA event, I sought to critique the medium of the academic symposium, proposing a commentary on its social and intellectual dynamics through a script or score that invites audience participation. As Paul O’Neill points out (O’Neill, in Rugg, Sedgwick, 2007, p.13), the turn towards the curatorial is characterised 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 organisation as ‘backstage’.

In my day-to-day work at the ICA, I regularly took part in weekly staff meetings. Here, too, conversations often revolved around an opposition between ‘front-of-house’ and ‘back-of-the-house’ institutional practices. I participated in these recurrent internal debates about the opposition between different spaces in the building, where a choreographic tension played out between two types of spaces: the ‘front’ and the ‘back’ of house; the ‘upstairs’ offices, and the ‘downstairs’ galleries[1]. In the meetings,

[1] With reference to De Certeau’s distinction between ‘place’ and ‘spaces’ presented in Chapter 1 (Chapter 1, pp.44-45), these are not only physical locations – or ‘places’ in De Certeau’s terms, but they were deeply

the change of power dynamics between these spaces was also recognized as key to institutional change.

This spatial opposition connotes not only the tension between staff and the public (visitors/audiences), but also an opposition between 'office staff' and 'floor staff', including 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. 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' 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 workspaces. But, most importantly, I aim to point out that this tension between

associated with particular types of 'spaces'.

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 and is communicated from the institution to the visitors, with these choreographies propelling and replicating onto the audience's experience of visiting and engaging with the displays.

Similarly, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (Goffman, 1956) notices how the 'backstage' areas are often designed with 'backstage' architectural characteristics and materials, and, often, 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 to denounce social inequality, the different social and racial implications of these spaces, where cleaners and people of colour were more often seen at the time Goffman was writing. However, this is still partly true as of today.

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 show how these practice activities were inspired by my theoretical

research on the discourse of the ‘curatorial’ and, conversely, how concepts from curatorial studies often directly fed into my choices in organising the symposium.

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

- the performative aspects of my PhD curatorial practice and, more specifically, my role during the symposium organising process in relation to my partners, 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, in relation to the discourse on the curatorial, I recognise forming, nurturing and consolidating relationships with both 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 gallery 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 the event's final realisation. On the basis of Foucault's and Derrida's

theorisations[2], Von Bismark (Von Bismark, 2023) 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, exhibitions often have a 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 'paradoxical 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 strongly emerged in the last stages of my symposium's organising process, when it became evident that the opportunity for hosting this event had been gifted to me in compensation for my institutional work over the months. Institutional tension occurred around my request to use the main ICA theatre as a venue, and I became aware of my 'guest' role in the organisation. I felt a strong sense of my relative, temporary and precarious power in

[2] 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)

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 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, 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’, whom 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.

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 recognising 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 were 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, notepads, 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 the midpoint 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 to expose the medium of the 'academic event' and 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 position itself is 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 to disrupt the atmosphere of seriousness and debunk the aura of authority of academic events. In this sense, I look up to pioneering artist 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 Broodthears’ *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).

The two historical examples were key sources of inspiration in developing my curatorial practice over the past few years and remained constant in my thinking throughout the lead-up to the symposium. However, I must stress how many more contemporary explorations of similar ideas and practices are pertinent to similar questioning and concepts. These two examples are particularly relevant to the present discussion because they engage with the museum and its codes, and because they are early, 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 drawn on methods from both my practice as an artist and as a curator. Throughout my career, I have conceived these two practices as separate; however, I recognise that my development in each often happened in tandem, and many ideas and strategies persisted and travelled between one and the other at different moments. I draw on Paul O'Neill, a key author in this area of study,

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[3] (Bishop, 2008). They both assert that, however intertwined and overlapping these practices may be, the artist and the curator are separate and interdependent 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 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 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)

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

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 before the event delivery in June 2023. A series of collaborative conversations began then with the invited contributors, some of which informed editorial changes to the text.

I offered two areas of investigation that 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’: institutions’

offices, especially, and their administrative and operational processes. I emphasised that these can be intended as physical, materialised choreographies, and virtual ones.

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

In the section below, I outline my connection with each contributor and summarise their contributions on the day. I identify the relationship with each invited speaker and artist 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 individual contribution 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 offer this perspective within the context of an artistic and choreography-led research event, providing 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 several open-ended questions and encouraged to discuss feelings of being 'welcome' and belonging in relation to different elements of the architecture and the gallery displays.

The study's findings showed that the building came across as 'cold', 'intimidating', and 'corporate' to the group; however, they gave more positive feedback on the object displays and interactives that were being built at the time. 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 would be much greater if this type of study were 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 invitation 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 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 neighbouring businesses, the local authorities including the local administration and the police, and charitable organisations active in the area. Richard presented alongside 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 during the pandemic.

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 *rhythmanalysis* 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 made of words or drawings.
- 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 colleague 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 decided together that her contribution to the symposium would 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, 1996), 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 'interpretation' has mostly been replaced for a friendlier and more 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, depersonalised 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 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 guerrilla 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[4]. 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 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. *A Bad Review* highlgihts that the highly performative language of these statements is 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

[4] *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.

their choice of language and tone of voice – mentioned here in reference to Sara Ruddock's contribution above.

CHAX5

The collaborative relationship with arts collective CHAX5 started from my connection with Paul Paschal as a fellow PhD student at Roehampton University. A performance and visual artist and writer, Paul has a longstanding collaborative relationship with artist Rohanne Udall. Paul and Rohanne form a collective that, as part of their vision, continually changes name. At the time their project Public Intimacies was presented as part of the ICA symposium, the collective was called CHAX5.

I reached out to Paul and asked to include his collaborative work with Rohanne *Public Intimacies*, a series of print posters that covered the entirety of the wall of the ICA Theatre as audiences walked in and remained in the space for the duration of the event. My conversations with Paul, which later developed to extend his involvement as symposium co-convener, were rich, as his research at the time also focused on institutional power dynamics.

The artwork resonated with my research because it brought a vivid, close-up vision of the body into the space and displayed it on the walls of the art institution, materialising the tension between public and private I discussed earlier in this thesis (See Chapter 1, 'Public and Private', pp.41-47). The printed words consist of body parts – 'hand', 'mouth', knee' – evoking a raw physicality and the prepositions – 'your', 'my' – suggesting an encounter between individuals, often of sexual nature,

albeit without clearly defining it or describing it. The work's medium – posters – epitomises the public sphere and mass communication. For these reasons, CHAX5's piece was essential to my curatorial rationale for the day, contributing by unapologetically suggesting an aspect of the body and of physical encounters that is left out of public spaces, and nonetheless often lives in them through imagination or 'forbidden' encounters.

Symposium Video Production

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

The Choreographic Frame

Paul Paschal was the co-host of 'How Do Institutions Choreograph Us?'. In this role, he did not simply to introduce the speakers and moderate 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, 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 Sara 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 are both 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 Foucault and her reflection on Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, Cvejić proposes that the 21st C is a 'society of performance', 'characterised by a conscious and self-monitored re-embodied doing and showing doing' (Cvejić, 2021, p. 71). Cvejić explains how, in contemporary society, subjectivity is defined and redefined through showing ourselves, establishing, negotiating and re-establishing a relationship with ourselves by doing something. As Cvejić points out, this is evident in day-to-day life 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 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.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented the practice research devised and performed in response to my second research question, 'How does the body of the art worker, as artist-curator moving inside and outside an institution, negotiate agency within its institutional choreography?' (Research Question 2, p.11). This practice also continues to engage with the first research question around agency and resistance (Research Question 1, p.11).

The chapter draws the movement of an art worker from, to and ‘in between’ the institution through examples of a daily practice of negotiating the conditions of production of the curatorial event ‘How do Institutions Choreograph Us?’. This movement is described as performative as it takes shape through its subtle negotiations of agency, which directly affect the outcome of the event’s delivery. The art worker navigates her role in a complex interplay of power with institutional bodies, including the hosting institution (ICA), the funders (TECHNE), and the home university (Roehampton).

The performative nature of the practice is further investigated by analysing the symposium’s ‘choreographic frame’, which invites audience members to respond to a ‘score’ or set of performance instructions. The collaborative process with each symposium contributor further reflects the performative nature of this curatorial practice, where building and nurturing each relationship constitutes an act of knowledge production.

The symposium contributors’ responses to the brief address all the research questions for this PhD project (Research Questions 1-3, p.11), including inviting audience members to experiment with score-making of their own movement.