



The Body and Space: real and imaginary – Musings on site-specific

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ABSTRACT – The Body and Space: real and imaginary – Musings on site-specific – This article discusses a personal history of performances in which the focus is the body and its various relationships to space. Emphasis is given to the experiences of *Cia. Domínio Público*, a contemporary experimental research group, studies in site-specific and mural culture in Philadelphia. The discussion will traverse themes dealing with public art, site-specific performance, and intervention in public urban spaces. As the article explores new strategies for potentializing performative work in non-traditional venues, space is considered a partner in the creative process.

Keywords: **Site-Specific. Mural Culture. Performance. Body. Open-Air.**

RÉSUMÉ – Le Corps et l'Espace : réel et imaginaire – Réflexions sur des sites spécifiques – Cet article traite d'une histoire personnelle de performances où le corps et ses divers rapports à l'espace sont mis en avant. L'accent est mis sur les expériences de *Cia. Domínio Público*, un groupe de recherche expérimentale contemporaine, qui étudie la culture in situ et murale à Philadelphie. La discussion traversera des thèmes traitant de l'art public, de la performance in situ et de l'intervention dans les espaces publics urbains. Alors que l'article explore de nouvelles stratégies pour potentialiser le travail performatif dans des lieux non traditionnels, et l'espace est considéré comme un partenaire dans le processus de création.

Mots-clés: **In Situ. Culture Murale. Performance. Corps. Le Grand Air.**

RESUMO – O Corpo e o Espaço: real e imaginário – Reflexões sobre *site-specific* – Este artigo discute uma história pessoal de performances em que o foco é o corpo e suas diversas relações com o espaço. Destaque para as experiências da *Cia. Domínio Público*, um grupo de pesquisa experimental contemporânea, estudos em *site-specific* e a cultura dos murais na Filadélfia. A discussão percorrerá temas que tratam da arte pública, performance *site-specific* e intervenção em espaços públicos urbanos. Na medida em que o artigo explora novas estratégias de potencialização do trabalho performativo em espaços não tradicionais, o espaço é considerado um parceiro no processo criativo.

Palavras-chave: **Site-Specific. Cultura dos Murais. Performance. Corpo. Ar Livre.**

Introduction

In the latter half of the XX century dance began to experiment with how spatial settings became an intrinsic part of discovering how unconventional performing venues and consequently different forms of spectatorship motivated the body of a performer.

Motivated by their need to break away from the traditional framework of producing dance, dance artists like Anna Halprin, Trisha Brown, Merce Cunningham, and Yvonne Rainer along with other Judson Dance Theatre artists, to name a few during the late 1950s and 1960s, challenged the models of dance through their experimentation with space, without theatricality or emotional involvement.

In Yvonne Rainer's "Trio A: The Mind is a Muscle" the performers do not look at the audience. By shifting her focus from dance gestures, or what she had learned studying dance, Rainer included the bodies, principally her own, as "[...] contrasting the frames of art and culture with actual bodily experience. Dancers' bodies were real but also opaque" (Robertson, 2016, p. 135-136).

The sixties brought their dances closer to pedestrian images, ordinary perspectives, and a myriad of ways of seeing the body in movement by using various strategies to encounter movement without the polish of concert dance. The era welcomed experimental performances capturing issues that ranged from Anna Halprin's interest in social activism and community, site events that explored the perception and cooperation of performers and locales, including the people present, to Cage's and Cunningham's work which included "the desire for interdisciplinary collaborations, the use of utilitarian objects, and the spirit of collectivity." The meeting place for such ideas was Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where the influence of Bauhaus, specifically Walter Gropius, encouraged cross-cultivating relationships between different areas (Bennahum; Perron; Robertson, 2016).

These ways of opening the performance space allow the objects and people in the space different roles from stage performances and audiences sitting in the dark contains of a theater.

Anna Halprin embraced the "materiality of the body in natural, open space" which she acquired through her visits to Black Mountain. This pre-

pared the scenario for artists to eventually step into larger open-space projects, dissolving the separation between the spectator and the performer. Once the door is opened, the shape of what is to come depends not on the fact that the boundaries are blurred or even cracked, but on how and what to do next.

When theatres in Campinas closed in 2010 due to the need for urgent renovation, *Cia. Dominio Publico* took to the streets. The group's discovery of how the space acted upon the performance and the performers motivated an investigation that uncovered the life of a place and the people who regularly frequented it, bringing the body of the performer and the watcher into a place of artistic discourse.

Street performing is all about deciding what to do the moment it happens. Even if the place is familiar, what happens within it is not predictable. Ferdman states in her book, *Off Sites* that “Site specificity has become so common, so banal that we no longer necessarily label it as such. And yet approaches to site-specific performance abound with endless possibilities for reinvigorating theatre and performance and pushing at disciplinary boundaries” (Ferdman, 2018, p. 5) This comes down to how the viewer will process a performance since the spectator takes in the whole scenario, including the smells, the light, and the movement of the passerby.

The mural culture¹ fascinated me through not only the images it projected, full of a community's history or the energy that emanates from a place but curiously, by contrast, nobody seemed to pay it much attention. People would walk by and rarely take notice of the mural. This bothered me because as striking as the images were the only way people seemed to see them was through the neighborhood tours the mural organization offered.

The Muralart.org tour guide would talk about the content in the mural, bring it into context, and discuss the artist's involvement with the community. Phil Smith in his book *Making Site-Specific Theatre and Performance*, says that a site “is far more than, say ‘a space’ or ‘a place’. It suggests that a human choice has already defined its boundaries, meaning, and identity. A site is always the site of something... a kind of container for what is important” (Smith, 2019, p. 3)

How does memory act on spectatorship? Is the performer the agent of the culture he/she is fundamentally connected to? By discussing cross refer-

ences to improvisation, site-specific, performance, and public art, the author's experience proposes to offer a more candid discourse to happen between the artist, the location, and the spectator.

Interfacing with the Past

Philip Corner, a former member of the performing group Fluxus, and a resident composer and musician for the Judson Dance Theater, my intuitive and extraordinarily inventive high school music teacher during the 1970s would say to his students, "go outside and listen to the grass grow." Funny as it seemed then, we all listened, and I believe each of us heard the grass grow. At least we wanted to. Corner was teaching us to think abstractly, to leave behind the absolute proof of things in life, and that everything was not explainable and justifiable. It was his way of telling us to look beyond the ordinary and see the extraordinary.

I suspected that I always knew that unconventional spaces were my elixirs for performance and creation. My early experience of being in tune with the erratic nature of cities and public spaces was the awareness of inadvertent spectators breathing new life into whatever and wherever I was dancing. The less traditional the venue the better. It was thrilling not to be entirely in control. As I was not in a theatre, the surprise, kept my attention level soaring. The energy exchange that flows between a body in performance mode and its environment is electrifying and adds to the practice of communicating an idea in real-time while subjected to some fast transformations. I embraced those days when a bystander interrupted our well-laid planned performance and turned it into something else, which usually became far more interesting, much more authentic.

The spontaneous reaction was my staple for creation. A reaction is not a rehearsed action. An immediate response pertains to the moment, to make instant decisions. I felt like I was learning another skill, going outside the norm. I did not forget all my training. I set aside the complications of stage performance. I would just allow myself not to be in control.

Nevertheless, the thrill of "being there" was halted during the Pandemic, forcing me to abandon the in-locus experience and dive into the 2-dimensional *Zoom* world. This breaking up with my penchant for "anything can happen" fix in an open-air or non-traditional environment chal-

lenged my thoughts about art and the performing process. I had to reinvent what I took so quickly for granted and be aware of the fact that I could not go anywhere, physically speaking. I was obliged to form a syllabus for an undergraduate remote course where students would study the many different areas that site-specific employed.

Pre-pandemic, we were still holding classes in the classroom. In order to draw the students into the ambiance of the subject matter, I would ask them to modify immediately the classroom space and move objects around every time they entered the room. Two weeks later, the University shut down, and we learned about the *Meet* platform (pre-*Zoom*), which I initially thought was a dating site (we quickly discarded *Skype* as it became obsolete).

When I introduced a pedagogic process into my Site-Specific studies for my undergraduate students I swore I would never do this since I considered the nature of Site-Specific to be a spontaneous art. I was concerned that teaching a syllabus would stifle the ingenious immediacy of the performer/student. I was afraid of institutionalizing this spontaneous spirit. How does something uncodified fit into a curriculum? I realized that I was developing a transformational and methodized format by organizing strategies and teaching the premise that non-conventional spaces bring out non-automatic responses. By watching my dance students, I realized that site performance is not just about moving through a specific area but about reclaiming a kind of inner knowledge.

In Site-Specific I taught that movement emerged as a response to the environment's landscapes and features. What does a particular space give to both the performer and the watcher as visual information? What brings the performer and space together? What is their common ground? Bodies encounter new sensations when the performer engages in a place where something else besides the performance is happening.

What unlocks a dancer's creativity? What becomes a visual manifestation of dance imagination, and how is it constructed? During an improvisation, dancers do not repeat codified phrases or sequences but draw from images and sensations deep within themselves. The use of time and space is a spontaneous decision in an improvisation. I was even paying attention to the non-intentional. When one of my dancers did something accidentally, I

liked to keep the mistake. I would call it a cosmic decision because the accident seemed much more organic and original movement and came from somewhere within the performer.

In her article, *Creativity as evidence of having persisted through time*, Joy Hendry (2005, p. 36) discusses creativity as a way to “demonstrate a kind of continuity with the past and a confirmation that the people whose material culture is displayed, did not die out” Hendry (2005, p. 41) says, “[...] artists can at once be innovative and at the same time draw on ideas inspired by their ancestors. Though the latter need not be recognizable to a uniformed viewer”.

Performing in non-traditional venues began with small interventions and improvisations with the people and objects identified with a place, trying not to call much attention to the performer. Instead, the performer weaves into the rhythm of that place little by little, connecting with the ordinary activities attached to the venue, and allowing for gradual interventions. The performers might start a sequence of actions that could be easily transformed, all the while listening, seeing, and responding to each other’s signals while moving from the artist to the space to the spectator as a kind of three-party collaboration.

In an urban setting, the measure of pace, time, and speed flood the performer’s body with provocative elements, transforming their actions and movements. It is a symphony of *becomings*, encounters, and intermediations between the performer and everything they see, smell and hear. An observer may identify with many images around the presentation. In art, people can be brought back to deep visceral knowledge. Once, an onlooker commented that the movement appears like a cobra in a desert looking for food. Animal images are primordial and are immediately recognizable and relatable. Images as source material help a performer obtain an original movement, which he does not connect to in any previously learned activity or dance.

My dance is an autobiography penned on my skin.
An indelible memory of events woven into my body.
All things turn into markings.
All markings into poetics.
(Albertarelli apud Siddique, 2021).

Cia. Domínio Público

Original movement comes from responses to new and unfamiliar settings or stimuli. Each location has an identity and a dynamic, like walking quickly in a city street as opposed to leisurely strolling in the countryside. We recognize how different places affect us by reading the body and recognizing behavioral codes, identifying the type of energy expressed in a movement or gesture, its relationship to its space, intentionality, and physical contact with someone or something. Although very structured pieces, both *Posso dançar para você?* (Cia Domínio Público, 2015) and *Suportar* were dances that altered their configuration in every performance, in real-time. The performers made adaptations whenever they encountered new places, and people, acting as catalysts for exploring other procedures while in the process of deciding if to abandon or not their narrative.

Domínio Público, created in 1995, was a research group in contemporary dance, seeking to develop and deepen new expressions of body language, and aiming at developing different modes of creation in dance and performing, production, and circulation of artistic work throughout Brazil. The company was named as such because its mission was for people of any age, social class, or region to have access to dance. In this sense, the company increasingly sought to break barriers between the artist and the spectator, opening itself to the experimentation of the body in different spaces. It is intended not only to establish new possibilities of exchange and connection with the people who use these spaces but also to foster new forms of creation and art making.

For *Domínio Público*, the dance was always informed by the space. We would set up game strategies that allowed the performers to engage in typical things found in public spaces. This would touch off a dynamic relationship between what is seen and unseen, present and absent. Playfulness is also essential because it allows the performers to change course at a moment's notice, react to a pedestrian or an object, and move the performance path sometimes into an entirely different direction. How do these ideas resonate for a contemporary performance group? *Posso dançar para você* and *Suportar* are works that directly intervene with the places and the people that frequent these places. The dancers arrange themselves in places in a plaza, park, or other public spaces, witnessing its people, architecture, and dynamics. Since

every location has a specific dynamic or pulse, we noticed how sound also occupies space and is perceptible. Next, the performers appropriate elements within the site, blending in with the public indiscriminately.

A venue provides us with so much information and instructs a dancer not only where he/she will move but how he/she moves. The period of observation and appropriating the performance space before beginning a piece is essential to incorporate the site as a transmutable element in the creative process. A performer's body abandons the responsibility of presenting a choreography every time in precisely the same way. Even a score that indicates a sequence of actions is entirely subject to public interference.

Even without knowing the specific history of a space, the performer might be immersed by his/her contact with the architectural structures around him, with the passerby, and with the rhythm or pulse contained in a place.

As mentioned, many factors are provocations for innovation, such as the speed at which people walk, the noise, the traffic, and the voices that permeate the sound space in the location. All these elements organize a performer's response. They are not performers on a stage, so the way the body reacts, whatever path is followed, is not repeatable as in a choreographic sequence. There is always something, or someone intervening that alters the performer's design, direction, or intentionality of the actions.

Memory is a mysterious archive deeply rooted in the performer's body, a predisposition for movement. The performer's body enacts with the physical world in a kind of inert arena. The tool is in the muscle memory of the performer. It can be quiet and subtle or explosive like shouting from the rooftops.

Dance today offers a perspective and a prophetic attentiveness to one's era. What is left behind is not a tangible memory, like a sculpture, a manuscript, or a musical score, but a sensory experience, untouchably profound and expressively dynamic. When we improvise, we tap into an archaic archive; information flows into the body and is released as movement or gesture. Dance knowledge transpires from an immeasurable source of history carried in each performer's body.

On one of *Domínio Público's* many tours, the dancer, Sara Mazón describes in a diary some of the sensations she felt during the performances.

She comments how sometimes the public is positive but also frequently negative. There are real factors involved in these presentations, such as the risks of interacting with drunks, or angry pedestrians, vulnerability to weather conditions, diseases from pigeons and animal feces, and so on. The following are comments made in her diary during her tour, which involved traveling and performing in one or two different cities each day. The tour was sponsored by PROAC (Cultural Action Program), through a public notice issued by the São Paulo State Department of Culture, which promotes dance in the project's circulation area (Cavrell, 2016 p. 7-8)

I understand time.

Catanduva, SP July 28, 2015, Tuesday, 12:15 pm. Republic square.

The nose and throat were dry. The desire was to bathe in the fountain in the center of the square, as did a beggar who lived there. His abode was filled with a frightening calm, time was suspended. It was great to be there to be seen, and there we stayed, lined up, for a long time. There was a beautiful boardwalk, the streets were narrow, lots of bars, and a popcorn vendor. I was still standing when Lineker hugged me, I desired to stay there, but the desire to remain was not as great as the need to inhabit the space. Gradually we started our dance, supporting and giving support.

Bebedouro SP (performance number 100)

The emptiest square of all so far. Few people passed by. According to the residents, it is the end of the month, and with the crisis, nobody goes out to buy anything. We walked around the entire square trying to figure out what would be the best point to stop and start working. We are looking for a corner, wider, with space to move around. Sometimes this is a problem because sometimes we feel that there is not enough space to do all the moves. As in Barretos, SP, we decided to start straight in pairs, hugging each other. We noticed that, once again, it worked better to intervene to generate a clearer image. We realized that there was a lot of estrangement regarding our appropriation². We were being viewed with more revulsion than welcome. Estrangement is part of the characteristic of this work, but not repulsion and rejection.

During our movement in pairs, some people soon stopped, and saleswomen left the stores — most were empty because of the crisis, remember? And soon a pleasant atmosphere for dancing was established. I felt a great calm, I managed to pass by people, looking them in the eyes, and exchanging smiles.

It's time to ask someone to dance. It's always the moment that I try to stop, look, and choose someone to share my dance with. This moment is always very intuitive. The person who is smiling is not always the one who is most open, and avail-

able to receive our dance, but I believe that something leads me to each one of them.

Interestingly, right from the appropriation, we were able to perceive the vibe of the place, a place that seemed to be a challenge to dance to.

In the end, I danced for the man who sold balloons. He was wearing a cap and was extremely shy with my request. Even though he said yes, he seemed to want to say no. Still, I danced. He could barely look at me, he kept his head down most of the time, his eyes hidden by his cap, he seemed to see only my feet.

Time does not belong to us, there is no space to cultivate relationships so that they appear spontaneously... (Sara Mazón, 2015).

Sara was constantly reinventing her script, the sequence of actions that were predetermined but that allowed for choosing new movements. This spirit of uncertainty gives an edge to the performer's choices, capturing in real-time the new circumstances she encounters. It becomes an immersive and transformative experience for both doers and watchers. The performers work with the environment and integrate themselves with the surroundings, and in working with a space they become in a way part of the community, especially when they return several times to the same place. There were days when in returning to the same plaza the shopkeepers would join in during several sections. A few times even the homeless inhabitants would sweep the space beforehand. It was not always welcoming. Occasionally, we encountered religious fanatics who would chase the performers claiming their movements were those of the devil.

Little by little, the purpose of bringing art or theatre to the streets took on new meaning. In an open space there is no frontal orientation as that of the theatre space. The performers open different spatial paths for viewing. Martha Bowers's interview in the book *Site Dance part 4, Civic Interventions: Accessing Community*, comments that

[...] movement can easily become dwarfed by the enormity of the space or lost among the many types of movement already in the site. A different movement palette is required. A movement phrase that seemed extremely fast and beautifully detailed in the studio can seem like just a lot of flailing around outside. I want to work to echo the culture of the community... Can site work provoke questions that aren't being asked, encouraging us to reawaken our critical analysis of social conditions and move toward action? (apud Kloetzel; Pavlik, 2009, p. 287-289).

What interests me is seeing how performers navigate public spaces, as a confluence of place, history, artistic intervention, spectatorship, and especially the recognition of community and social identity.



Figure 1 – Claudia Millás e Ivan Gomes from Cia Domínio Público dancing *Suportar* at Rodoviária de Campinas, SP, in 2015. Source: Photo by Marco Flávio.



Figure 2 – Cia Domínio Público private collection. Sara Mazón, Talita Florêncio, Gustavo Vazezi, Linker from Cia Domínio Público dancing *Posso Dançar pra Você?* at Praça Rosário. Source: Cia Domínio Público private collection, photo by Coronel Mostarda.

Mural Arts

Murals seem to be a natural tendency since cave drawings (Muralarts.org)

‘People in a modern City are like rats in a Maze. E.C Tolman’s experiments on the behavior of rats in mazes, performed in the 1940s, proved that both men and animals create a tentative, mental map to recognize and learn environmental relationships. They need a tool of space recognition to get acquainted with the environment they have been forced to live in. Historically

towns owed their uniqueness to deep roots in local tradition'. For example, '...the central market square constituted the heart of the town'.

'Tolman's discovery of the process of constructing and accumulating spatial knowledge, casted a new light on the perception of urban space. The mental mapping method also allowed to discover what kind of attention people paid to particular places and what role artworks played in recognition and identification of urban space' (Januchta-Szostak, 2010, p. 1-3; p. 7).

Cities are generally designed to perform a range of commercial and/or residential functions. This is part of how districts are constructed and may represent how and where the identities of neighborhoods are concentrated and sustained in developing communities. Modernization, although important to urban renewal, may eliminate the origins of a community or eradicate them for economic reasons such as gentrification and redevelopment where poorer areas are purchased, rents surge, and wealthier people replace communities. The mural culture, although precarious in establishing ties and strategies of sustainability with a city owing to difficulties in obtaining permits and bureaucratic loopholes, is a crafty and illustrative way to embrace a social culture.



Figure 3 – Muralarts.org. Source: Photo by Private Collection, Philadelphia, PA 04/30/2022.

I first became aware of the richness of public art through murals in July 2021 while I accompanied my daughter to Philadelphia to help her settle into her year at UPenn. As we walked around the streets, I became acutely aware of the wall paintings throughout different neighborhoods. I began to investigate who was the person, and the movement behind the NGO I saw on the murals. I learned that the initial spark behind this movement was because the graffiti in Philadelphia had taken on a severe degradation of the city.

Buildings, public transportation, and many public venues were subject to the etchings of these random artists. Therefore, Jane Golden, an art teacher, took her classes into the streets and began turning graffiti walls into

works of art, creating an anti-graffiti network by reimagining public art and later involving the community to paint a collective memory of the space. In many instances, the collective derived from a group of artists and members of the community who would be painting a narrative history of the place, and in order to recover what was unknown, developed content through research, popular cultural imagery, life experiences, collective metaphors consulting both professionals and non-professionals. The project seeped into other areas. As an educational experience, public art helped develop citizenship from the minute there were murals; there was no more graffiti since there was a sense of ownership and collaboration. It is considered project-based learning. The volunteers for mural painting might come from trauma centers, institutions for addicts, and convicts reinserting themselves into society (Muralarts.org).

As an example, the Porch Light project, an appendage of Muralarts.org with the City of Philadelphia aims to introduce an important liaison with the community through exhibitions of social stigmas around issues of emotional and mental wellness. This year-long project turns personal journeys, people who want to reenact and transform their traumas, into ways a neighborhood confronts their struggles. It purposefully goes beyond pure aesthetic intentions by offering restorative messages to heal a neighborhood fraught with difficulties. The goals are to rebuild self-esteem and educate youth by working not only for personal aims but working alongside renowned artists both from Philly and internationally. To help the public better understand Philadelphia's Mural landscapes, Muralarts.org offers guided tours where the spectator learns about the history, the social context, and the artists involved in its creation. Murals are symbolic maps that show the meaning behind each design.

How the Mural Culture illustrates Public Memory

Several questions seem to navigate the venue choices and content of the murals. How does someone navigate exhibitions of public art with shared memory? Whose story gets remembered? Whose story gets told? How does a traditional manifestation relate to the present-day context? How does someone get people to regularly take notice of the Murals and continually create bridges between the community and the city? When thinking about what should be in a public space, advocacy of what kind

of art is relevant, what does public art mean for a city? Possibly one aspect is that creating and maintaining public art will teach people about ownership of their spaces, preservation, and conservation.

By interviewing Judy Hellman³, director of special projects at Muralarts.org, I learned how a group of artists and community leaders developed most of the projects. The dynamics of making a Mural are similar to a 'dance', a choreographed movement. Yet even though there are bridges formed between the community and the city there is still so much animosity toward creating murals. Because the idea of public art is socially significant, there must be a separation between not-for-profit public art and political candidates wanting their faces plastered on a wall. Many political and social barriers prevent more murals from being created. Sometimes it comes down to who holds the purse strings. Many contracts are canceled, and important funding is withdrawn or reallocated to other areas.



Figure 4 – Muralarts.org. Source: Photo by Private Collection, Philadelphia, PA, 04/30/2022.

Performing Site-Specific

Like murals, the performers' bodies should activate their environments. A spectator will take notice of more than just the performer, even re-

imagining the performer's space. The viewer gets to know the city differently, watching the bodies perform in public spaces.

Ricardo Mesquita, a student of mine, commented on his final project, “*Eles têm de sair*” (They must leave):

At that moment I just wished I was there... on the other side
Moved by a force that took absolutely all my history; my entire suitcase
along with me... And yet, I wondered what was out there... what was the
limit beyond what my eyes could see? What were the flavors? What were the
textures? Like an animal that doesn't know what's outside that cave... A
space of comfort even within its risks...
I close my eyes and move on... And then I'm blinded by the energy of what
I now touch...
From this meeting... we breathe again... we exist today again... We heard
yes,
that “art in unconventional spaces” was no longer new to anyone... but who
is anyone? We found obstacles that strengthen the sense that art is sur-
rounded by a specific environment, proper to art... we resist.
We proposed to de-characterize some preconceived logic initially in us. We
found this space of constant construction in ourselves; this space of desire
for what is to be but is not... this becoming (Cavrell, 2016, p. 3-4).



Figure 5 – *Eles têm que sair*, 2016, Nicolli Tortorelli and Ricardo Mesquita. Source: Photo by Maitê Larceda.

When someone chooses a site, according to Miwon Kwon (2004) in her book *One place after another*, someone realizes that a site is not simply a geographical location or architectural setting, but a network of social relations, a community, and the artist must envision artwork as an integral ex-

tension of the community rather than an intrusive contribution from elsewhere (Kwon, 2004, p. 6). But is a community a coherent and unified social formation? Kwon (2004, p. 7) proposes the “[...] idea of community as a necessarily unstable and inoperative *specter* thinking beyond formulaic prescriptions of community to open onto an altogether different model of collectivity and belonging”. So, these variations indicate the extent to which the very concept of community remains ambiguous and problematic in public art today. In looking at different performing venues consider how your memory affects your ideas on presence, absence, distance and proximities, and ruptures of time and space. The venue permits a continuous and exchangeable dialogue between the performer and the watcher.

We are often, comforted by the thought that a place is ours that we belong to it, even come from it, and therefore we are tied to it in some fundamental way. Some places reaffirm our sense of self, reflecting a basic or grounded identity. Miwon says that this kind of continuous relationship between a place and a person is what many consider to be lost and in need of in contemporary society. A wrong place is thought of as a place where one feels one does not belong – somewhere unfamiliar, disorientating, or even threatening. However, is a stressful relationship with a space a bad thing, or can we think of a wrong place in altogether new ways? We are exclusively bound to the physical actualities of a place. Noticing how life continues to present itself in layers that jump from the objective to the subjective and back again actually becomes a tool for the performer, juggling the inner and outer stimuli as he improvises.

Kwon (2004) says that movement textualizes spaces and spatializes dialogues and that this experience is not a map, but an itinerary, a fragmentary sequence of events and actions through space, a nomadic narrative whose path is articulated by the passage of the artist. Operating as an itinerary will allow the performers to pick from the social, political, and economic contexts that inhabit their process as performers (Kwon, 2004). This triangular experience involving the performer, the venue, and the spectator forms observation points where presence and absence play off the venue. Although the physical attributes of a landscape nourish the performer imaginatively, the relationship of the work requires the presence of an observer for the work to happen. All the elements come together in the mind of the spectator.

Writing about performance and Final Considerations

How does one bring the same kind of unhinged energy to text, literally and figuratively? During improvisation, the performer discovers new movements and sensations even if the body is programmed to repeat what feels good. The tendency is to look for that familiar dynamic or movement quality each time someone improvises. So, the idea is how not to make copies of the former experience. In other words, break away from the traditional model of repeating familiar and favorite phrases of movement. Recondition experience and allow this to reboot a textual experience. Revisit and reinvent the ordinary experience in order to produce the extraordinary. This will also nourish the textual experience. One's practice derives from research and research derives from practice.

The interchangeability of drawing from art to writing and clarifying through words what an artistic practice means is an important exchange of mindsets. The performance is not a narrative, although there are many narratives mixed in. Additionally, the mind of the spectator is not a blank slate. The spectator brings a myriad of information and personal history that mixes with the venue and all the elements that constitute this venue. How is this translatable to text and how does one give the reader an idea of the inner workings of an improvisation? One solution is that the reader is also a participant and is responsible for the choices he makes. Mix up the text, and let the sections be aleatory. After all, when one enters a space that is not a stage with its calculated dimensions and delimitations of light, there is no control over what will happen. Someone cannot control how the space will permit him/her to appear to an observer. Something else is created by altering the perception of a traditional space. What do we see? Is the focus primarily on the artist or is the performance a shared experience?

Public + Place becomes the baseline sustained in the performer's experience. Behind every action, seemingly uncontrolled and illogical is a logical construction though not in the way we think of it. A coherency of parts in favor of allowing LIFE to affect what happens. True to the letter when John Dewey (1980) wrote *Art as Experience*.

My opinion: learn new behaviors by experimenting with time and space in a more aleatory and perceptive way. Marina Abramović offers clues

to reaching new levels of perception and eliminating the older habits that regularly make up our choices. Her method consists of simple mental and physical activities. Such as:

Drink a glass of water as slowly as you can. Pour yourself a glass of pure water and observe the liquid for as long as you can. In slow motion, bring the glass to your lips. Drink with the smallest sips possible. In slow motion, return the empty glass to its place. Repeat: multiple times throughout the day. Water will never flow the same way twice and neither will you (Abramović, 2022, Water Study(b)).

No matter where we are or how old we are, learning new behaviors is imperative. Marina's exercises, she says, teach endurance, concentration, perception, self-control, willpower, and to confront one's mental and physical limits. The choices we make in public spaces depend on how aware we are of everything around us and of recognizing that assimilating new strategies liberates and connects to the world around us.

When someone takes their art into public spaces, he/she unknowingly sends a powerful message which radiates to whoever is watching. There are, however, questions that remain open: Can my art create change? Can my words in writing about performance elicit the same responsiveness as my body in performance and are they as powerful as my movements?

The choices we make may appear to hide our innate logic. From the experiments of *Cia. Dominio Publico*, to performing in public spaces, applying a variety of approaches to improvisation, and finally to the mural culture, a thread is visible. Sometimes there is no strict idea proposed on a space, while other times a distinct landscape of memory of the place or the event is imprinted spatially in a performance. The venue has made the performing experience a collaborative one.

Expand your imagination and senses. What brings you to places that you cannot visit physically? What triggers memory? The smells, the sound, the light?

I'd begin by listening to the grass grow.

Notes

- ¹ Mural culture: works by artists painting directly on a wall and whose content preserves the cultural heritage of a place or community.

- ² Appropriation is a preparation the dancers use to observe the locale before the actual performance - the space, the passerby, the physical environment, the dynamics, trying to take in everything about the space so that when they entered, they would be part of the locale as if they had always frequented this place.
- ³ Interview with Judy Hellman, director of special projects, Muralarts.org. 21 of April 2022. Both people were in Philadelphia but spoke remotely through Zoom platform.

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