

# Addressing the Situation. Xavier le Roy's *Retrospective* and Aesthetic Subjectivity

Gerald Siegmund

Justus Liebig-Universität Gießen, Deutschland

**Abstract** This chapter offers an insight into Le Roy's 'performed exhibition' and argues that dance, when taking place in museums, draws the viewer's attention to the fact that all artworks in the museum are performative in their address to spectators that bring the work about. Looking into the creation of a public in the museum space, I will unpack the public's ongoing redefinition of the relation between aesthetics and subjectivity, which I see as a way of producing a notion of aesthetic subjectivity. The chapter ultimately shows how the situations created in *Retrospective* produce a notion of aesthetic subjectivity that takes place after modernism.

**Keywords** Dance in the museum. Re-enactment. Situation. Address. The public. Aesthetic subjectivity.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Living Archives. – 3 The ephemeral, or: Dance in the museum. – 4 Addressing the Situation. – 5 From Work to Situation. – 6 Aesthetic Subjectivity. – 7 Materiality and Objectivity. – 8 From a Universal Subject to Questions of the Universal.

## 1 Introduction

A couple of steps lead down into the big entrance hall of Hamburger Bahnhof, which is the museum for contemporary art in Berlin.<sup>1</sup> I cross the floor and walk past a huge white wall that separates the hall in the middle. Together with several other visitors, I enter the space behind that is empty besides four people gathering in the centre. For a second I am not sure whether these are other visitors to the museum that have entered the space before us or whether they are actually performers waiting for their cue to start whatever action is required by them. After a short glance in our direction, the group disperses as if we had startled them by our presence. They run off in all directions only to re-enter almost immediately, almost as a movement

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<sup>1</sup> The museum is called Museum der Gegenwart, The Museum of Today. I have visited the performance on Saturday 31 August 2019.



quotation from Xavier Le Roy's production *Low Pieces* (2011), in which the dancers performed movements of animals, plants and stones.

The show at Hamburger Bahnhof is announced as a *Retrospective* of dancer and choreographer Le Roy, a retrospective of his previous work, which explains the quotation from one of his earlier pieces. It soon transpires, however, that *Retrospective* is not a classical retrospective of an artist as one would have come to expect. While retrospectives of dance or theatre artists in museums often rely on written and visual documents, photographs and video recordings, props and costumes to document the absent work of the performance itself, this gallery space does not put any objects on display. Unlike a museum and more like a theatre, it contains nothing but moving bodies. At the same time, these bodies do not perform a sequence of Le Roy's integral pieces that make up his oeuvre between 1994 and 2014. Instead, for the next hours we witness a series of small performances that take place simultaneously in the space and that consist, for the knowing eye, of fragmented bits and pieces from Le Roy's oeuvre. As quotations, these fragments are re-assembled and re-enacted by the dancers to form an entirely new work.

Since its 2012 premiere at the Antonio Tapiès Foundation in Barcelona, *Retrospective* has been shown all around the globe in 13 other places like Beirut, Bogota, New York, Rio de Janeiro, Paris, Hamburg, Singapur and Taipei amongst others. For each city, a new group of between 8 and 20 dancers was cast, and not all of them are present the whole time during the museum's opening hours. In Berlin, it was staged between 24 August to 8 September 2019. They perform in shifts and also take turns in what they perform so as to give each dancer a greater spectrum of tasks and possibilities to engage with the spectators (Cordeiro 2014). These tasks have in common that they take as their starting point a year in the dancers' lives in which one of Le Roy's pieces was premiered. The numbers of these years are regularly shouted out aloud, which serves as an orientation for the dancers as to what to perform next. They either perform excerpts from Le Roy's piece of that year or they take the same year as a starting point for their own biographical stories including the demonstration of movements they themselves performed then. Instead of being true to the original work, the performers use Le Roy's oeuvre as a cue to unfold their own dance histories.

Traditional retrospectives serve to accept and welcome the artist into the canon of art history by giving an evaluative overview of his or her work. They do so by ordering his or her work chronologically or thematically thereby arranging a journey that the visitors are to follow. In *Retrospective* the linear chronology of the museum walk is interrupted by the fact that several pieces can be seen and heard at the same time. Here Le Roy's work is disseminated and re-appropriated by dancers of different professional, regional, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and with individual dance histories to tell. As a consequence, it is not Le Roy that is characterised as a seminal figure in recent dance history. His work appears as part of a much larger network of dance histories that is established throughout the duration of the performance by the stories of the performers. Many of these stories are hitherto untold. *Retrospective* reveals dance history as a global and ongoing process of inclusions and exclusions. Thus, *Retrospective* is a re-enactment because it transmits a specific repertoire, that of Le Roy, both on the basis of documents and oral and physical transmission. Famously, Diana Taylor distinguishes between the archive as a set of mostly written documents and the



Figure 1 Xavier Le Roy, *Retrospective*. 2019. Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin.  
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repertoire as an embodied practice of transmitting (historical) knowledge (2003). Along these lines, Le Roy's *Retrospective* sees the archive and the repertoire work together to make claims for a situated contemporary art practice that, as I will argue, addresses the public in a specific way.

## 2 Living Archives

*Retrospective* is another contribution to the ongoing debates about re-enactment, the archive and performances in museums as an archival practice.<sup>2</sup> As Bishop pointed out, the production structurally follows *Product of Circumstances* (1999), an older piece by Le Roy (Bishop 2014, 94). The piece is a lecture performance in which le Roy traces the history of himself leaving behind his academic research into molecular biology to become a dancer and choreographer. With its mix of showing and telling, demonstrating and contextualising, the performance allows for both physical and verbal interventions, dancing and story telling. Therefore, it displays both the ephemeral dimension of a performance and the documentary function of an archive. It exposes a body that is, as Le Roy says in the performance, "contaminated" (1999, 67), i.e. that is interwoven with history and society on a cultural and biological level making it impossible to abstract from the materiality of the body. Here the body itself becomes an archive that performs its history in relation to and next to others [fig. 1].

*Retrospective* puts its own function as an archive of documents on display. Behind the performance room in Hamburger Bahnhof there is a sec-

<sup>2</sup> Baxmann, Cramer 2005; Gehm, Husemann, von Wilcke 2008; Schneider 2011; Clarke 2018.

ond room that serves as a more traditional archive room. It provides several computers where visitors may watch recordings of Le Roy's pieces or browse documents and material relating to the respective pieces. On the tables there are also books, photographs and articles dealing with Le Roy on display. In this room visitors may bump into dancers that use the materials to develop their own trajectory through the performance, or they engage in a conversation with the dancers to exchange their experiences. The archive room lays open its processes of becoming. What the dancers prepare there will later be seen and heard in the adjacent performing room. *Retrospective* thus is its own archive consisting of performing bodies, visual and written materials. It opens up its own memory, because the materials the performance consists of are all present in the archive room. Furthermore, the visible and audible transmission of material from dancer to dancer marks the material itself as remembered, or re-enacted and re-performed. Thus, *Retrospective* contributes to the debate about re-enactment in the sense that it enquires into the nature, identity and transmission of a singular artistic repertoire to the use of other artists and their respective biographies.

### 3 The Ephemeral, or: Dance in the Museum

The discussions about *Retrospective* have so far focused around its importance for the phenomenon of dance in the museum and for a contemporary definition of what a museum is and can do. The theme that underpins this discussion is ephemerality. In what follows, I will inquire after the importance of embodied performative practices (dance) for the museum beyond the fact that museums create attractive events or that dance becomes institutionalised by being included into museum collections. I argue that the embodied performative practices that take place in museums trigger not only a reflection on the museum, but also help to uncover the foundational principle of dance and theatre. Dance in museums therefore ceases to be only part of a museum practice but also becomes part of a larger contemporary art practice that cuts across disciplines and institutions by working through certain precepts of the arts and the performative arts 'in general'. Dance helps to uncover the truth about art as an experience that is 'also' in operation in museums. I hold that every artwork including objects in a museum is performative since it addresses spectators that help bring the artwork about. By bringing the artwork into being, spectators and artwork (here the individual performances of the dancers) enter into a relation that I call 'a situation'. Thus, what connects dance, theatre, and the museum as their underlying principle is that all three of them create situations.

Pamela Bianchi sees these truths to be in the ephemeral nature of performances that museums seek, while dance and theatre look for the documentary qualities a museum provides. Because it is ephemeral, dance changes the points of view on existing exhibits, and the architecture of museum buildings or becomes a veritable scenography of moving bodies that for the viewer highlights "the ephemeral and random nature of relationships" (Bianchi 2016, 93). With regard to Le Roy's *Retrospective*, French art historian Marcella Lista focuses on the different temporalities theatres and museums put forward and that challenge each other.

The two norms of temporal economy now existing in museums are brought into question there: on the one hand the linear course with its one-way narrative spectacularization; on the other the time of events, designed at set times to involve the audience in something beyond formats of collection and display. (Lista 2014, 21)

By making several performances take place simultaneously in the same space and during the entire opening hours of the museum, Le Roy's *Retrospective* messes up the linear dramaturgy of exhibitions, and the sequential walking from one room to the next. He thereby produces "cross-rhythms" (Lista 2014) of heterogenous temporalities, and sticks to the apparatus of the museum and its conventions of a dispersed economy of attention that each spectator may engage with at his or her liberty. He only changes the spatial arrangements, and to complicate them further, in prior editions of *Retrospective* a third room, entirely dark, existed referring to Le Roy's *Untitled* (2005) by including a puppet dressed in black that could be confused with a live performer.

For Mark Franko and André Lepecki, dance in the museum takes its historical cue in the 1970s from critical art practices in the field of the visual arts. In what has since become known as institutional critique, artists reflect upon the institutional framings of their work with its mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and the logics of the art market. The immaterial nature of artworks and their ephemeral nature become important to the museum, and performance and dance provide a new legitimacy for the museum as a contemporary institution for there is simply no more object to sell or market. Via the museum, dance is thus included into the neo-liberal capitalist economy of the global art market. The dancers and their fleeting art have since become the epitome for immaterial and affective labour that serve as ideological underpinnings of the new economy with the ephemerality of dance being considered equal to the volatility of capital (Franko, Lepecki 2014, 2). But maybe the museum was never as stable and non-ephemeral as these positions suspect.<sup>3</sup>

In my argument, I will substitute the ubiquitous notion of the ephemerality of dance that for one reason or another is attractive to the museum as an institution with the notion of address. The notion of address allows me to take into consideration both museum and dance/theatre practices as equal practices when thinking about dance in museums. Le Roy's *Retrospective*, this is my main argument, does not primarily contribute to the debate about the visualisation of movement that happens when dance is displayed in museums or galleries. Nor does it address the objectification of movement by means of visualisation (Franko, Lepecki 2014, 3). Nor is it merely another event that contributes to our contemporary culture of events as an expression of our neoliberal economies and politics. I argue that *Retrospective* focuses on exploring the various modes of addressing an audience or spectators. These modes become evident when the *dispositif* or apparatus of the museum and the theatre are confronted with each other. As a result, the production creates situations that include both performers/dancers and members of the audience, and it *performs an exhibition* by generating situations *between* physical bodies. These situations are established by various

<sup>3</sup> Cf. also the work of Dorothea von Hantelmann on the performativity of museums (2007).

modes of address, which allow different sets of relations between individuals that engage them in their subjectivity. Since these situations are never (only) personal or private, address also creates a public that re-defines the relation between aesthetics and subjectivity. I suggest that these situations are grounding for both museum and dance practices alike because they produce a notion of aesthetic subjectivity after modernism. Neither universal and abstract nor personal and specific, subjectivity here is recast as a negotiation between personal and general or social concerns.

#### 4 Addressing the Situation

The starting point for this argument is Le Roy's observation that, as opposed to the stage, the museum space allows for several things to happen simultaneously. As Le Roy says:

Museum exhibition allows several works to be shown in the same space or the same building at the same time so they can be experienced simultaneously or in juxtaposition. [...] So I decided to make a retrospective of works of mine, which were originally made for the theater, which would force me to transform them on the basis of the difference between the apparatus of a theater performance and a museum. (Le Roy 2014, 245)

The difference between the space of theatre and the space of a museum manifests itself in the various ways the public is addressed: "We researched how every moment of the work is performed and thus addressed to the spectator" (253). Therefore, addressing informs both form and content of the performance. It consists of various addresses that are also their own topic.

Structurally, *Retrospective* is played out along two axes that establish four performance areas at their respective ends. From the position of the spectator that enters the gallery space at Hamburger Bahnhof a vertical axis stretches out towards the back of the room. This line is intersected horizontally by a second line that runs from the wall to the left-hand side of the gallery to its right-hand side. The two axes stand in opposition toward each other, but they are also made up of oppositions in themselves. The vertical axis offers the option for the dancers to speak to the spectators whereas on the horizontal axis not a word is spoken. However, the two modes of spoken address differ considerably. "Hello, my name is Saša", a dancer introduces himself to the visitors gathered around him, "and I just showed you an excerpt of *Untitled* created by Le Roy in 2014, and this is also the beginning of my retrospective for this exhibition". In the very same year, he informs us, he danced also the following movement. He goes on to show it to us, but as soon as he perceives a new spectator coming in, he interrupts his presentation by saying: "But we have to welcome a new visitor" [fig. 2].

The dancer at the back, on the other hand, is unperturbed by these interruptions. S/he invites the audience to listen to her or his personal biography in relation to dance, his or her personal dance history. As this may take a while we are asked to sit down. The short welcoming speech near the entrance is impersonal, because the gaze and the speech are not directed to anybody in particular, whereas the conversation at the back includes its audience by establishing a more intimate situation between the dancer and members of the audience. On the right-side end of the horizontal axis a danc-



Figure 2 Xavier Le Roy, *Retrospective*. 2019. Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin.  
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er performs poses or stills, in which the spectator, if s/he is familiar with Le Roy's oeuvre, may recognise figures from his previous works. The poses are actually taken from photographs that at the time were meant to document the performance for the press and the public. In front of the wall to the left, whole sequences of previous performances are re-enacted. These excerpts are short: they last 70 to 90 seconds and are performed in a constant loop. Because of its use of verbal language and narrative, the vertical axis signifies a theatre situation. The horizontal axis with its object-like bodies as stills and loops comes to signify the context of an exhibition. This distinction is supported by another opposition, that of time. Whereas on the vertical axis time is allowed to flow, often interrupted in the front, more calmly in the narratives that unfold at the back, the horizontal axis signifies a a-temporal universal standstill that is embodied in the objectified bodies.

Because all these diverse activities and modes of performing with their own notions of time unfold simultaneously, Bishop characterises *Retrospective* as "addressing temporal accumulation" (Bishop 2014, 96). I want to add here the 'accumulation of address' that goes together with these different temporalities that overlap. Even the two object-like performances at the sidewalls, which do not try to capture the gaze of the visitor, are explicitly addressed. As soon as the dancer in the front spies a new visitor entering the gallery, s/he interrupts his narrative by uttering a siren-like call. The sound is also a quote from another performance by Le Roy, *Self Unfinished* (1998). Upon hearing it, three of the four dancers, except for the one talking at the back, turn round and run from the room. Upon their re-entry they shift their positions by 90 degrees to the effect that the dancers performing objects will in due time also be allowed to address the audience as subjects by telling and sharing their own stories. The mechanical interruption draws attention to the fact that even the museum exhibits are explic-

itly staged and performed for an audience. In any case, the audience or the spectators are recognised.

For Bojana Cvejič, *Retrospective* functions as a “choreographic machine”, which re-starts every time somebody presses the reset button (Cvejič 2014b, 10). Cvejič’s comparison of the performance to a machine underlines that its mechanical aspect does not only address its functioning. *Retrospective* is also a machine because it triggers modes of perception that are influenced and shaped by media. Although we actually see human beings performing, their modes of presenting evoke sculptures, images or even technological apparatuses like the video recorder with its constant replaying of filmic loops. In this sense, theatre, dance and museum are also media with their specific protocols and viewing conventions that are present in the room. They mediate between our perceptions, their possibilities and strictures. What we see and how we see it, however, do not exist independently of our media-shaped ways of perceiving. The human body of the dancer, here, is the medium that carries all the others [fig. 3].

## 5 From Work to Situation

The shift from visual artwork to embodied performance changes the way we relate to the work of art. For the museum the shift implies a shift towards the recognition that meaning with art objects does not reside in the artwork, but that it results from an encounter of bodies with the artworks. For art philosopher Juliane Rebentisch, meaning production as an aesthetic experience is always a performative act that oscillates between the materiality of the body/object and the spectator (2003). The shift of dance from the theatre to the museum draws attention to the fact that (different forms of) choreography is not only a structuring of movement in space and time but also a gathering of people. In the open gallery of a museum, *Retrospective* emphasises the coming together of different groups of people that engage with each other over the subject of dance. Since coming together is the condition of possibility for all kinds of theatrical performances including dance performances, *Retrospective* draws our attention to the fact that our encounter with any kind of artwork puts us in a situation with the artwork. Therefore, dance in the museum underlines the very foundations of art production and reception as situations.

The notion of situation has recently gained a lot of traction in various scholarly publications (Siegmund 2020; Meyer 2020; Primavesi 2020). Here, it suffices to remind us that for Erving Goffman a situation emerges when at least two people come together and engage with each other, and it ends when one has left the room. What is more, to speak of a situation also implies taking the space where one meets into account. The meaning of situations varies according to the spaces they take place in and they are created by the encounter of people (Goffman 2019, 159). Specific actions are only possible in some designated spaces and not in others. A situation, therefore, engages at least two people and the space they are in.

But what happens when you say and do things in a space that is not appropriate for these actions? What happens when you do theatre and dance in the museum? Here, the distinction between an everyday situation and a situation in the context of art emerges. What is hardly possible in everyday life without violating the rules of politeness or social acceptance and jeop-





**Figure 3** Xavier Le Roy, *Retrospective*. 2019. Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin.  
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ardizing the success of a communicative strategy may be successful in art. *Retrospective* mixes situations and their designated spaces to the effect that the underlying principles of performances become apparent. Thus, one can say that an aesthetic situation, as opposed to an everyday situation, is only a situation when it reflects upon the foundational principles of works of art as performative. *Retrospective* is a self-reflexive performance that uses various modes of address to refer to the situation both dancers and spectators create together.

Conceiving of 'every' artwork as performance - and this is what I believe that dance in museums does - marks a fundamental rift in our understanding of aesthetic subjectivity. Since every artwork ultimately addresses a spectator, in which respect does *Retrospective* differ from older ways of conceptualising address? As has already become apparent, in the case of *Retrospective* to stage the performance as a situation appeals to the individual subjectivities of both spectators and the dancers who unfold their own narratives. This stands in stark contrast to high modernist ideas of how works of art address the subject that, after all, on the one hand produces the work, and on the other receives it. The next section, therefore, explores the difference in concepts of the subject by drawing on modernist notions of aesthetic subjectivity to use them as a backdrop for highlighting contemporary changes.

## 6 Aesthetic Subjectivity

In his detailed archaeology of the notion of subjectivity, philosopher Christoph Menke underlines the co-emergence at the turn of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century of the modern notion of subjectivity with that of aesthetics. Thus, subjectivity and aesthetics are intertwined in the sense that to look at things aesthetically means to look at them in regard to the subject and its understanding of itself (Menke 2003, 735). The modern notion of the subject is not primarily defined as a *sub-jectum*, as somebody who is oppressed by the worldly or clerical powers-that-be. Rather, following Descartes' notion of the *cogito*, it is to be understood as an 'I' that is in possession of certain faculties that it calls its own. "The subject is somebody who assumes his behaviour as his own" (Menke 2003, 735). The philosophical discipline of aesthetics, therefore, defines aesthetics as a medium "for the definition and unfolding of subjectivity" (735). Thus, art as the privileged realm of aesthetics unfolds subjectivity. To look at art is to look at the subject and at what it is, what it can do and achieve.

The foundational relation between aesthetics and subjectivity, however, is turned on its head in the course of the twentieth century. For modern critics and philosophers like Theodor W. Adorno the artwork is entirely desubjectified. Artworks speak of subjectivity only by a dialectical 'negation' of the subjective. Aesthetic subjectivity is a movement or an effect of negativity. Adorno argues against the notion of art as facilitating experience, empathy or expression, because experience can only be subjective and contingent. Works of art do not talk to the individual subject or person. They do not address them in their subjectivity.

This subjective experience [*Erfahrung*] directed against the I is an element of the objective truth of art. Whoever experiences [*erlebt*] artworks by referring them to himself, does not experience them; what passes for experience [*Erlebnis*] is a palmed-off cultural surrogate. (Adorno 1997, 246)

Furthermore, artworks are "apersonal" because "[t]he expression of artworks is the non-subjective in the subject; not so much the subject's expression as its copy" (113). The artist in making art transcends his or her own subjectivity. (S)he objectifies it in the work of art. As Rebentisch has shown, the two strategies of depersonalisation Adorno puts forward concern the techniques of production and the nature of the material used (Rebentisch 2003, 282). By dealing with the current state of affairs concerning the principles of construction and their technical devices, the artist is not entirely free to choose. (S)he is constrained by a historical necessity of how to make art, by what is possible and what not.

Mimesis is itself summoned up by the density of the technical procedure, whose immanent rationality indeed seems to work in opposition to expression. (Adorno 1997, 114)

Secondly, the materials used to follow their own logic. They are resistant to just any subjective or expressive use the artist may make of them.

## 7 Materiality and Objectivity

Le Roy's use of material in *Retrospective* follows Adorno's call for desubjectivation. He only uses material produced before, and existing independently of his doing in various medial, technological and therefore objectified formats. The material becomes objectified when it is fragmented, treated as reproducible, and disseminated. *Retrospective* presents material that only Le Roy has danced, by handing it over to a group of dancers that make their own use of it thereby spreading any kind of subjectivity that the artist may have formulated through the works. At the same time, the material pre-exists the dancers' use of it. The movement phrases function as quotations that remain exterior to their subjectivities. In this context, the machine-like quality of its dramaturgy gains significance as it objectifies any kind of expressive intentions the dancers may have when using the material. At the same time, what they perform cannot be completely abstracted from their own bodies, which defy any kind of final interpretation. And yet, other subjectivities use the material to tell their own subjective biographies as dancers while spectators sit and stand, listen and watch making something out of the material. Some kind of subjectivity, therefore, must remain with the artwork.

For Adorno, too, it is evident that even the objectified or "apersonal" artwork needs some kind of subjectivity to which it may refer. After all, the I 'experiences' art's objective truth as directed against itself. Drawing on Hegel, for Adorno the subject accompanies the work of art, it is with art (*Dabeisein*, cf. Menke 2003, 780; Rebentisch 2003, 217). Thus, subjectivity becomes a constitutive moment of art, but it loses its status as art's foundation or condition of possibility. What is more, *Dabeisein* (being with) aims at realising an objective truth by following the work's compositional principles that safeguard its objectivity (Rebentisch 2003, 216-17). Truth is in the work of art, not in the subject that does not interact with the work of art but merely 'is with' it. When we are with art because of its technically objectified status we become aware of a lack (*Desiderat*) of subjectivity. The objective and objectified truth in the artwork serves as a semblance (*Vorschein*) of a utopian true subjectivity that speaks of a subject that is free because it is not alienated.

Many contemporary dance productions resist modernism's claim to objectification. They address social and political issues and deal with questions of racism and queerness. They explore the ways bodies relate to other bodies including nonhuman bodies trying to build communities. As is often the case in dance productions that take place in the museum, performing bodies share the same space with spectators thus tearing down the audience-performer divide that since the eighteenth century facilitated the notion of the artwork as an objectified quasi-subject. In short, performances like *Retrospective* very consciously take the spectators and their bodies into account.

But as a consequence, is aesthetic experience merely subjective in the sense that, as Adorno fears, it is expressive of a mere subjective modality of feeling or seeing the world? Do we then live in a time of the artwork as a 'cultural surrogate' in the form of an event that substitutes real and sustainable social encounters with temporary and fake ones in the museum? Do we give up objectivity for identity and political concerns that require identification with a specific social and political agenda? Art then would really be partial only ever addressing peer groups that share the same beliefs and

views on the world thereby stabilising preconceived opinions like reverberations in an echo chamber. On the other hand, can art ever be objective in the sense that the subject's engagement with the work of art is reduced to realizing an objective compositional structure that transcends its subjectivity? Is experience always a surrogate as Adorno holds or can it be conceptualised more productively? Le Roy voices a similar concern when he says:

My concern is to trigger contextualization and subjectivation related to the moment, and not to bring the personal in the performance out. (2014, 265)

For him, being true to the moment as a 'shared concern' rescues the performance from being merely personal. Thus, there is something objective even in experiencing the artwork subjectively.

It seems, the question of aesthetic subjectivity needs more than just a 'being with' the work of art. As an archival project, Le Roy's *Retrospective* presents three distinct modes of address that emanate from the encounter between the respective 'dispositifs' of the museum and the theatre. These modes of address provide the objective or general form of the production that speaks of subjective issues (the dancers' biographies). Even in contemporary productions the subject's engagement with the artwork is still a question of form (composition, dramaturgy, the way things are presented) as a safeguard for (machine-like) objectivity and its relation to matters of content (what is presented, social issues, relations).

The different ways of addressing the spectator correspond to three different ways of conceptualising the spectator in times after Adorno's high modernism. If the principal tenet of aesthetics still holds today, looking at *Retrospective* in an aesthetic way always implies the question about the subject and the kind of subjectivity it produces as an artwork. What types of subject positions, then, does *Retrospective* put forward when the production clearly rejects modernism's claim to objectification by explicitly addressing the people in the room? The answer I gave above is that by addressing spectators and visitors, *Retrospective* establishes a situation between performers and audiences by address. How, then, can we understand subjectivity in relation to the situation that is *Retrospective*?

## 8 From a Universal Subject to Questions of the Universal

Let us remember the various modes of address that *Retrospective* employs to create one or several situations with spectators. The impersonal address that welcomes the entering spectators directs gaze and speech away from the individual into a neutral distance and space. Thus, the story of the dancer's personal retrospective that ensues is addressed at an audience function that negates a personal response. The audience experiences itself as audience: in the function of an audience. The medial transformation of physically performing objects or video loops against the walls of the gallery does not solicit any gaze from the spectators. Bodies are transformed into objects of an exhibition. The interference of live body that belongs to the theatre and dead object in the museum put the spectator in a position to reflect upon the viewing conventions of the respective institutions. The most personal address of a dancer telling her or his story without paying atten-

tion to the changes in the room allows for detailed listening and gestural or even verbal communication with the dancer. Remembering together (for instance, what did I do in 1998?) weaves a web of interpersonal memories that, although they remain individual, nonetheless in the situation they build a common horizon of reference, the potential of a 'we' that remains divided.

Therefore, one can say that the three modalities perceive subjectivity against the horizon of a public sphere that, like Adorno's universal subject, does not exist but as a potentiality and a 'question'. Michael Warner in his *Publics and Counterpublics*, therefore, speaks of the public as a "practical fiction" (Warner 2014, 73). The place of Adorno's universal subject that unifies all subjectivities in their desire to be free is now occupied by questions regarding the relation between the subject, the general, the social and, ultimately, the public. For Warner, publics only come into being when they are addressed, i.e. the address is a performative act that retroactively constitutes what it presupposes, namely the public (66). This act of addressing, however, implies that the address is always also directed to strangers, people not familiar to me, or even people that are not actually present during the event. Thus, the address is at the same time personal and impersonal (77). The impersonal address to strangers creates a "stranger sociability" (105) that marks me as part of another, larger public, which is constituted by the possibility of circulating discourse and exchange. Thus, Warner can say that "strangerhood is the necessary medium for communality" (75) and that

[t]he appeal to strangers in the circulating forms of public address thus helps us to distinguish public discourse from forms that address particular persons in their singularity. (85)

For Warner, therefore,

The known element in the addressee enables a scene of practical possibility [what we can actually do during our encounters in the museum]; the unknown, a hope for transformation. (91)

The porous spatial situation that *Retrospective* creates with its open-door policy makes audiences 'a' public temporary and fleeting, it opens the public (as audience) to other public outside the museum. It also makes 'the' public a symbolic space where discourse circulates amongst strangers that already belong to our world, although they may not share our opinions.

Since the coming together of visitors can only be fleeting and temporary, the values that could lead to build a community or a public cannot be positively affirmed. The performance shies away from community building rituals that would allow for at least a temporary community, as anthropologist Victor Turner conceives of it, to be established (Turner 2001). In this regard even the moments of subjectivity in a theatre or dance situation include a moment of modernism's negativity. We do things in public, yet how it functions remains implicit in institutions such as the museum as rules of behaviour or modes of seeing. The situation addresses the visitors in their subjectivities and asks them to become participants in a space, which stages conflicting modes of address that may not be easy to resolve. Because of the protocols of the museum and the theatre that are made explicit in the performance, the visitors are made to reflect on their singular position and modes of perception. The empathetic response of theatre and the disinterested viewing

of the museum situation overlap. If, as Warner holds, a public is only constituted by acts of address, this address, then, does not necessarily produce an imaginary identification with the situation or the artwork. In retrospective, various modes of address interfere with and contradict each other. Thus address, here, also functions on an impersonal symbolic level that cuts across any personal issues. It addresses 'the' public by creating 'a' public or different kinds of public as particular audiences asking the question just what it is that constitutes 'the' public and how we may go about producing it.

In as far as categories of identity and belonging (of gender, class and race) are part of the subject's fabric, they are part of the performance as 'subjective moments' (not as identity categories). Le Roy's *Retrospective* facilitates an encounter between different personal stories and histories and allows them to circulate in the situation the performance establishes. The production takes place in the public space of a museum or an exhibition hall. It questions the public and its dominant representative practices of remembering and displaying knowledge in one of the very institutions that are assumed to represent 'the' public. It questions the way dance history and dance authorship are to be exhibited and the public's received notion of them by expanding on their coming into being. It does so by challenging our modalities of viewing thereby confounding received notions of what a museum exhibition or a dance performance is and how to look at them. It draws attention to our individual responsibility as participants in the situation to help build a public by relating over issues that may also divide us.

By unfolding an aesthetic situation with culturally situated subjects, *Retrospective* differs from classical and modernist claims of a utopian universal subject. It does not, however, express subjectivity in the sense of a purely private statement or as representative of a political agenda. The treatment of its pre-existing and non-recuperable material, its machine-like operations and the way they are addressed alienates both dancers and spectators from their 'own' experience. Aesthetic experience and its correlate, aesthetic subjectivity, therefore, still depend on an objectification and the impersonal aspect of address that makes the proposal of the artwork a general and a 'public' one. It makes us question and reflect upon the ways we do things while we are doing them. In this sense, even *Retrospective* is committed to a movement of negativity, albeit not in the form of a non-alienated subjectivity. It also aims at something non-existing or non-given in the performance: a general public, which still holds as a utopian meeting point for people coming together, discoursing, answering back, addressing and being addressed, and engaging with each other in a situation. Thus, *Retrospective* questions the general idea of a pre-existing public space and its subjects in favour of an inquiry after what and who constitutes this not (yet) given public and its values.

"[W]orking and performing at the same time", as Le Roy puts it (2014, 254), we assume responsibility for the moment we meet. We show a coming together of people while at the same time we are performing it. Le Roy's material and the histories the dancers construct on its basis function as an objective exterior to our own subjective experiences, but about which we communicate and to which we may relate through questions and our own memories. Addressing the audience creates a public that asks for a different public or for different ways to conceive of this public. It introduces an ethical dimension into the performance, which is allowed to reflect its own conditions because its ethical relations are unfolding in a situation framed as aesthetic.

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