

**Presentation for PhD Seminar at University of Roehampton's Dance Department,
2nd Dec 2020.**

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Hi, I'm Paul Hughes. I've just started this PhD, which is Techne-funded, and in collaboration Sadler's Wells Theatre.

Before I start: I wanted to express solidarity with staff facing and resisting the cuts to Arts and Humanities. What senior management are doing is short-sighted and deeply violent. Students can and will fight for their staff in all of this, just as staff have continually fought for their students.

This PhD project is prompted by various blurrings of choreography and curation over recent years in the UK experimental dance scene.

I'm thinking particularly of projects by artists through which they commission other artists to author their own work, such as Siobhan Davies' exhibition projects, Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion's 52 Portraits; but also performances by Jamila Johnson Small and Lucy Suggate; and also instances of freelance artists taking on curatorial roles in institutional platforms, like Jonzi D for Breakin' Convention or Matthias Sperling for Nottdance festival. And how all these coincide with wider conversations around the agency of artists within dance organisations, and their presence in structures of governance.

I'm going to give you a speedy overview of some of the questions I'm working with. This is an introduction, so I'm prioritizing breadth over detail – if there's anything I say that resonates with what you're working on, I hope we can find a time to chat more.

1)

To start: this research stems from, and is grounded in, my collaboration with Rohanne Udall as Chatum Tanning. The images I will show are mostly our collaborative work; but my name is individually attached to this PhD, and of the two of us it's just me here speaking today. Our practice is in dialogue with the institutional frameworks in which it is situated and rubs up against; the university is no exception.

2)

What is the relationship between choreography and curation? We are engaged in practices of invitation, hosting, and holding space. What could the historic discourse within visual arts about the 'artist-as-curator' contribute to dance studies? How do the specific sensitivities, intelligence and ethics of choreographic practice contribute to this discourse?

3)

What are these ethics? How do we negotiate asymmetrical power-relations as we cross in and out of the institution? Embroidery, wounds, wildflowers, debt. I think

about the peer-networks and economies of extra-institutional practice, and Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's question as they turn away from institutional structures: "How do we want what we've already got?"

We work with notions of challenge, mediation, compassion, transformation, and love. 'Love', not as a neat answer but rather a whole set of problems; and inextricable from the material realities of employment rights, showing up for each other, fair budgeting, and mutual aid.

4)

What do we mean by 'the independent artist', and when does the 'independent' become an 'organisation'? I am highly ambivalent towards any framing of artists as being especially moral or professional agents. We turn to demons: fickle, malicious and unmanageable weirdos. One solution to the artist-institutional relation is for artists to unionise as a class of exploited workers. What does it mean to resist such organising, and to remain an incoherent, wild and self-contradictory group?

5)

How much can an artist – or any other profession for that matter – engage in governance or administrative labour before that becomes their entire role? What is the particular relation between the work of governance (salaried or not), and the autonomy of art, or what Suhail Malik describes as art's 'continually-deferred promise of escape'? Can one undertake art-making as governance, or indeed governance-making as art? This image is Chatum Tanning's Business Plan for the 2020-21 financial year.

But back to demons. To know a demon's name is to have power over it. Which brings us again to hosting: Derrida argues that to have a name as a guest is to be subject to the law. Can a hosting practice hold space in an institution without subjecting its guests to those institution's laws? What kinds of dis-organisation or un-management could we practice in their place?

6)

What is an institution? Mick Wilson defines institutions as trans-generational projects. To work with ghosts is to attend to those who came before or will come after⁹ our necessarily absent fellow stakeholders. One way of optimistically understanding those who hold institutional office – who maintain and temporarily govern our organisations – is as stewards, liaising between these different generations. But what happens when we lose faith in these stewards? What does a vote of no confidence mean, or achieve?

And what does it even mean to hold office? What is the distance between the person themselves and their role they hold? I think of the phrase on social media: 'Views my own'. But also of embroidery again, and the sense of vestiture, of being invested in office. There is an important relationship between clothing and responsibility.

7)

What are the transparencies and opacities of governance: how can one be held to account? This is not only a question of confidentiality; but also of the exhaustive nature of information. How is the institution's complexity made legible to the fleeting, non-expert and non-salaried stakeholder?

8)

So: what can we see of the institution? But also: what can the institution itself see? I think of cruising, cash-in-hand economies, and covert resistance; practices that are secret or inscrutable to governance; and are therefore un-documentable, un-evaluatable, un-remunerable, un-insurable. What would it mean to generate knowledge within the university through a practice that never officially happened?

9)

What is beyond the institution? Gurinder K Bhambra points out that the wealth of the post-war welfare state came from colonial theft, extraction and dispossession. The imperial foundations of the UK's institutional landscape also forms the bedrock of any 'independent practice'.

And so I question my initial expression of solidarity. David Roediger's history of solidarity emerges with European industrialised working-class fighting for their share of a wealth derived through colonial dispossession. I would say that the 'generosity' and 'good-will' that some dance scholars claim to imbue and sustain the field of experimental practice is inextricable from the racism of last year's Bonnie Bird Awards. I think about my position here, within the racist structure of the UK academic system, drawing on this anti-imperialist work; individually invited into and financially remunerated through this institutional role, that stems from a collaborative practice engaged with a wide group of unsalaried peers.

Rather than anything particular new or unique, I would suggest that this is something that many of us are implicated in as we operate across the highly extractive, compromised and compromising fields of art and academia.

10)

To end: what is this PhD? What can it do? I recently came across, and can't stop thinking about how María Lugones defines intimacy as "the social relation between those not acting as a representative, or holding office". I think I'm trying to test that. To understand how a hesitant practice of intimacy might operate not only despite, underneath or against these highly questionable institutions; but also with, as, and through their structures of governance.

Thanks.

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