

As I Project into Your Future, You Sit in My Past:

A fictional double interview on the performance project *You are here*

by Ilana Reynolds and Sabrina Huth

How can absence create stronger agency to act? How can material and immaterial traces of another's absence create a fictional body?

This fictitious double interview is done while sitting together, in two separate rooms, in two different cities. We write and exchange questions and answers simultaneously.

How did you get to this point?

We were supposed to meet in Vienna during the 6th IDOCDE (International Documentation of Contemporary Dance Education) Symposium¹ called *You are here*, hosted at ImPulsTanz Festival Vienna 2018. Leading up to the symposium, we were invited for a weeklong residency called Mind the Dance. The theme of the residency was artistic and reflective practices in dance documentation.

One of us didn't make it to Vienna. To this day, we have actually never physically met, but nonetheless, we have been collaborating since the initial point of the residency.

What came out of this initial "never meeting" during the residency at ImPulsTanz?

Well, resonating with the overall theme of the symposium (*You are here*), the physical distance between you and me shaped our collective research: ² How were we going to collaborate without ever physically meeting? After our first sessions—conducted through Skype, email, and WhatsApp—we determined a time frame, possible scores, and tasks for the project. We distilled our conversations and experiences into the following topics: **Absence** of the other, **Fiction** of the other, and **Space in between** each other.

• Absence

What does a trace tell us about a missing process?

How do we create and feel together in the absence of the others?

Can we wonder and wander ³ with an absence of direction or specific intent?

Do we need to see/sense traces of one who is absent in order to experience them?

• Fiction

Allows me to imagine the place you are in, which bridges the gap/absence/in-between-ness of another

• Space in between

Like the suspended leg before the next step

Inspired by *The Go-To How-To Book of Anarchiving*,⁴ we approached these key topics anarchivally. Rather than documenting the content of the event, anarchival processes capture traces of the event's liveness, which might set the stage for a next event to occur. We thought of movement tasks and perception scores that could be performed simultaneously in our respective spaces. We documented, traced, and recorded them. The traces of these tasks and scores led the research process into new processes, becoming a digital/virtual/tactile collage of what happened.

A Movement Score

Move in the memory of someone else's actions...

You have not seen this/these person(s), nor their actions.

You have never been close physically to this/these person(s).

You haven't inhabited the same place.

Yet you are sharing the same process.

Wander and wonder...

For 6 or 60 minutes

Thank you for sharing your process. And how did you communicate your research with the public during the IDOCDE symposium?

As a form of presentation, we invited participants from the IDOCDE symposium to step into our ongoing research. We set up the space with a 4 x 5m live projection of you (who joined the whole session via Skype) and an anarchival pathway on the floor consisting of the printed pages of *The Go-To How-To Book of Anarchiving*. Scores stemming from our research and written on colored cards led and guided the group into a participatory anarchival process by which participants created new traces and lived in the becoming of those events and its traces. It is important to mention that all anarchival processes have some sort of sharing.

Sabrina Huth's hand in the performance of *You are here*, exhibition window at Foundation Jetty, Amsterdam, January 16, 2019.



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Research presentation score

Wonder and wander for...

Enter the space separately.

Prepare your space. Prepare the space. Or start the process.

Make the choice to discover the whole space or your own space.

Make choices as a result of other people's choices.

Leave the space or enter a new space.

Focus on distinct senses.

At any moment you can observe (active reception) or contribute (active generation).

Attend to the moments when there is some "thing" crystallizing.

Be aware when you are "feeling" (experiencing) and when you are "performing your feeling" (making visible your experience).

Collect artifacts and bring them into the space.

You are always part of the score/event, no matter if you are "in" or "out" of the space in which the event is being held.

As mentioned above, traces have become essential for your research. Can you describe more precisely what you mean when you talk about traces?

Traces are, in essence, an anarchive of experiences that cannot be fully possessed due to their ephemerality but can be impulses to push the research further. In an anarchival sense, traces are the tip of the iceberg. A trace is multiple:

A trace is formless memory (of an event).

A trace is a mediator in the proof of our existence for another.

A trace is a container, a snapshot, leftover coffee drips on the edge of a paper cup.

A trace limits the past's unlimited potential to unfold in the future.

Our lives are composed of traces, outlines, pathways, images, sketches, memories, narratives.

Everything is a trace of something else. Not all traces are meant to last forever.

It's the letter left behind asking:

What makes you real? I want to challenge the limits of getting closer and closer but not meeting. Maybe getting closer is weaving a web with more and more connecting strings. Getting closer is cumulative. Getting closer is to become more and more relational to each other. What if a body is defined by its capability to build relations with other bodies?

And how did the idea come up to continue the project after the residency?

We were enchanted with how to encounter another without ever sharing the same time/space. Our imagination and fictional projection of each other provided a potent space to work from. After Deleuze and Derrida, who both reconciled presence and absence no longer as opposites but rather as a related and interchangeable pair,⁵ we wondered: How do we move in the present absence of the other where these binary terms actually switch roles and absence becomes a different kind of presence? We continued asking questions:

How can we trace each other's absent movements?

How can we activate the other's absence through immaterial traces?

What does a trace tell us about the other's absence?

What do we share in the other's absence?

What is the physicality of absence?



Ilana Reynolds reading aloud to an absent audience in the performance of *You are here*, exhibition window at Foundation Jetty, Amsterdam, January 16, 2019.

From this point, we needed to find shared tasks/objects that served as connecting mediators. We set up collective reading times. We picked the same book—in this case, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* by Yuval Noah Harari—to read at the same time, in separate places. We created a “30-day/30-second dance” score. Every day, individually, we instantly composed a 30-second dance and filmed it. We then sent these dances to each other. We sent unfinished stories via post for each other to finish. These collected and created traces became the material to continue the forward-feeding process for our performance installation in Amsterdam, also called *You are here*.

Would you describe the set-up for the performance installation *You are here*?

In January 2019, we had the opportunity to share our research with passersby in a semi-public performance space in the de Pijp neighborhood of Amsterdam.⁶ Since we were both in Amsterdam, our spatial proximity was increasing. We inhabited the same exhibition space (a former shop window) separately at different times over a period of five days, for five hours each day. First, you would inhabit for two and a half hours. I would come in after you had left, for another two and a half hours. We’d continue this cycle each day. The shop window served as a threshold of in-betweenness from inside to outside, from private to public. It allowed for transparency to flow between inner and outer spaces. Each day we arranged and rearranged objects, materials, and our bodies; we wrote letters and left notes for each other; we used different materials, like chalk, string, tape, and paper, while performing in and with the present absence of the other. Our performances accumulated material and immaterial traces of each other’s absence. Words became a medium to describe the visibility of one and the invisibility of the other.

Wait a second, you just mentioned that written and spoken words became a medium to connect to each other’s absence. Can you further elaborate on that?

Sure. Let’s say in language there are always multiple voices that weave through time continuums of present, past, and future. Reading your notes, memories, or stories articulated your past through my present/future. Your thoughts expanded in reverberation with my body’s presence. They vibrated through my skin. They vibrated through space and through the architecture of the window. As I project into your future, you sit in my past.

And what about movement? How did you expand your bodily presence into the presence of each other’s absence?

Sometimes moving in stillness was my only response; sometimes I moved by imagining how you might have moved before me. But indeed, moving in the memory of someone you have never met—or moving with an intention of layering movements upon the absence of another—was quite challenging. Through the material traces you left behind, I tried to imagine your immaterialized body choreographies. I found myself measuring my body in order for you to have a sense of my size. Maybe that could be the closest trace of my physicality. The performance space was filled with pieces of string naming body parts or the relation between body parts—connecting points, separating surfaces. Connecting us? Movements themselves are untraceable. How do I leave movements behind, untethered to any trace, piece of paper, string, chalk, or words? How to move in, from, and with the present absence of the other?

Do you want to share any other insights you had during the performance or its reverberations?

In line with Derrida's conception of presence and absence as something beyond a static binary "that once connected presence to an absolute truth or origin, and absence to imitation or copy,"⁷ I experienced absence and presence as being in a blurry, occasionally confusing relationship with each other—not defined by opposition. Rather, they are layered into each other; they are autonomous from each other as much as they are not; absence and presence do not follow linear measurements. Absence activates different experiences of time. As I am writing you this letter, I project into your future. When you read the letter, you sit in my past. Since we developed shared tasks that happened at the same time but in different places, and in the same place but at different times, we swam in the sea of temporalities, where past, present, and future actions merged, overlapped, and intertwined.

During the five-day performance, both of you were staying in Amsterdam. What would have happened if you had accidentally bumped into each other?

I guess we would have turned around and run away as fast as possible. I can also imagine that we would just stand still. Take a moment. Then turn around and walk quietly in opposite directions.

One last question: How would you describe the relationship you have been building (while never meeting) during the past year?

I would describe our relationship as one of disorientation rather than anything linear, and in that, a tremendous amount of closeness has developed. As I wander in my steps, an imagination of you is by my side. With you, I come closer to sensing the multiplicity of time/events. These conditions create an experimental context to train trust, care, and solidarity; a way of being-with and working together that exceeds boundaries of space and time and quantifiable measurements. Proximity and distance are playfully entangled, without seeking to close the gap between us.



ENDNOTES

¹ IDOCDE is an international online and offline platform for the dissemination of contemporary dance documentation and education. Every year, it hosts a symposium within the frame of the ImPulsTanz Festival Vienna. We participated in the Mind the Dance residency leading into the 6th IDOCDE Symposium (July 27–29, 2018).

² Our research group consisted of Ilana Reynolds (US/GER) and Sabrina Huth (GER), as well as John Taylor (NL) and Nicolas Hubert (FR), who supported the research process.

³ Dutch curator, writer, and researcher Christel Vesters explores the potential of *wandering* as an alternative way of knowing and being in the world. According to Vesters, "Wanderlust refers to a curiosity-driven mindset, the longing to discover uncharted terrain without a settled plan or fixed objective. Guided by chance, the figure of the Wanderer embraces whatever they come across. It is in this sense that art and literature both adopted the figure of the Wanderer as the personification of the romantic, free spirited, the unbound vagabond. However, there is a dark and dystopian side to the figure of the Wanderer as well—the Wanderer who is not only geographically lost but also mentally disoriented; lost in their own mind, their own way of thinking, their own logic." See "Unfinished Systems of Non-Knowledge, PART 2: On Wandering," accessed July 2018, www.unfinished-systems-of-nonknowledge.org/part2/part2.

⁴ Andrew Murphie, ed., *The Go-To How-To Book of Anarchiving* (Montreal: Senselab, 2016), <http://senselab.ca/wp2/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Go-To-How-To-Book-of-Anarchiving-Portrait-Digital-Distribution.pdf>.

⁵ Amanda Bell, "Absence/Presence," accessed May 29, 2019, <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/absence-presence/>.

⁶ Since 2005, the artist-run Foundation Jetty (stichting la Jetée) has been running an exhibition window in the de Pijp neighborhood of Amsterdam. It is located at the corner of Ferdinand Bolstraat, not far from the crossing with the Ceintuurbaan. The public for this window includes passing shoppers, children, tourists, and art lovers. The window is a platform for artists to create an installation specifically for this location. The narrow insular space in relationship to the street is a new starting point for each exhibition.

⁷ Bell, "Absence/Presence."

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Sabrina Huth measuring closeness and distance in relation to the absent other in a performance of *You are here*, exhibition window at Foundation Jetty, Amsterdam, January 17, 2019.