VARIABLE PERFORMANCE

A CONVERSATION

Sylvie Fortin & Lynne Marsh

Fast-paced and wide-ranging, the following conversation weaves together many strands of our shared decades-long engagement with images and movement, which continues to inform our work. It also seeks to welcome readers into Marsh's process, its experimental ethos, its conceptual and political commitments, and its fearless engagement with sight, site, and history. Our conversation is about the variable performance that shapes her thinking and making. It also bears witness to the ways in which artists and curators trade ideas and influence each other.

Its formal genesis, if there must be one, was a series of recorded conversations that took place in March 2022, in my studio at Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha (where I was Curator-in-Residence at the time), followed by an intensive three-day session in Marsh's then newly acquired studio in the Lincoln Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles, in August 2022. These recorded talks, deliberately freewheeling, yielded a preliminary sketch, which has since been refined through numerous visits, Zoom conversations, and email exchanges, as well as in the course of making this book. For detailed descriptions and illustrations of the works, we invite you to consult the back section of this book, starting on page 148.

SF I'd like to start by asking about performance and the camera, which are key concepts in your work. In the early animations, you are the performer. What did performing entail for you?

LM In my early animations, my body led the viewer through the space. At the time, my work was informed by feminist performance-for-the-camera practices. Performing was a process of negotiating my subjectivity. It allowed me to explore ways of being in the world (both actual and imagined) while also finding ways to take hold of image culture, negotiate its pervasiveness, and make a space within it on my own terms.

I saw enactment as a way to understand a culture, which meant that I myself had to be in the work. But eventually, performing with my body in front of a stationary camera started to feel limiting.

SF Then you moved behind the camera. How did this shift occur, and why?

LM I purposely set out to remove my body from the work, which enabled me to test out and explore the performance of other entities. In the transitional works *Crater* (2005) and *Volcano* (2006), I experimented with letting the camera take on the performing role. Though I'm not on screen, I'm still performing the volcano by way of the camera.

The camera becomes a body that animates and activates the landscape. It produces movement and experience as if it were a performer—a body that I

inhabit, and that the viewer can inhabit. It's phenomenological: The camera's movements shape the viewer's perception and experience of a landscape or space.

Once I had learned to perform with the camera, I could imagine directing a performer other than myself.

SF This is when you also began to think in terms of installation. You ventured beyond the single screen and began to consider space and the materiality of the projected image-sound.

LM That's true. I began to think in terms of scenography: choreographing the relationship between screens, sound design, architecture, and the viewer's movement. I was processing Jacques Rancière's concept of the "distribution of the sensible," the system that organizes perception and participation in a society. Scenography became a way to think about what and who is rendered visible or invisible, and to invite viewers to reflect on what is politically significant.

SF In *Crater* and *Volcano*, you also give agency to the landscape. It is no longer just a background; it also begins to perform.

LM Yes, the landscape, generated from a 3D model of Mount St. Helens, is also a body. In *Volcano*, the camera animates the 3D landscape, and at the same time the mesh, the digital skeleton, is set in motion. It grows, morphs, and undulates before spinning into an abstract field while the camera drifts, circles, descends, and sinks into its terrain.

In *Crater* and *Volcano*, both the volcano and the camera act as bodies, each performing through the other's movements.

SF In *Stadium* (2008), you reintroduce the performing figure.

LM And here the relationship between the performer's movement and the movement of the camera is also crucial. Both are choreographed in relation to the site—the Olympic Stadium in Berlin—and its political and cultural histories. The Third Reich built the stadium for the 1936 Olympic Games, so I was working with that charged legacy. At the same time, I was thinking about the camera's performativity through Leni Riefenstahl's work, which was filmed in this very stadium.

SF Is the body something like a decoy?

LM In the early animations, where I'm performing, the body is a decoy. It lures you in and takes you elsewhere. Starting with *Stadium*, it is more like a proxy: It acts on behalf of culture, history, or ideology. Simultaneously, in many works, bodies act as avatars. They are threshold beings, entities to project onto and through.

SF Is it that culture, carried by the body, is captured by the camera? Or does a camera's movement around the body reflect the culture?

LM Both. In *Stadium*, the performer's gestures drew on research into female performance traditions—cabaret, film revue, *Ausdruckstanz*[1]—that were later appropriated by the Nazi regime. And the crane camera, operated by a technician who works in that stadium shooting sporting events, embodies the gesture of the culture by behaving like a virtual camera: an actual camera imitating the movements of a camera in 3D animation.

SF *Stadium* coincides with your move from London to Berlin. How did this impact your work?

LM Moving to Berlin was important. That is where the historical and the contemporary moments came together in my work. There contemporary life was unfolding against a history that was palpable in the architecture, the language, everywhere. Those became my working conditions, like NASA's Voyager missions in my earlier animations. I also began to think more about the legacy of fascism in the contemporary moment.

I became intrigued by the way Leni Riefenstahl's revolutionary camera work, her panoptic pulling and moving, shaped fascist imagery and gets replicated in computer animation. I wanted to point out the fascist camera at the heart of CGI. I had many conversations about the politics of camera movement with the artist Judy Radul. Much has been written on the social and political implications of gesture. But what are the implications of camera movement?

SF The performer initially conforms to the architecture, but then they start redrawing the space by straddling the seats. They produce space and story against the site's loaded history.

LM I was thinking about how the body could delineate and define the space. Many of my works hinge on techniques of the body as a way of inhabiting and producing space. This led to the ideas of drawing, tracing, climbing, and cutting through space.

I also wanted to address surveillance, and used the hoodie and exaggerated pedestrian movement to signify defiance. In the first part of the work, shot on location, the performer moves through the space in an assured, articulated fashion. The performance centers on their lower body as they traverse the space. Their stride is both grounded and automated. They climb the chairs because that's the most natural way to get to the next row of seats, to cut through the oppressive architecture.

SF In the second part, the camera goes a little crazy. Can you speak about the camera movement and its implications in this work?

LM Toward the end, the figure's performance, filmed off-site on a green screen, is composited with footage from the stadium. A correlation happens. Her arms swing and the camera follows, she spins and the camera spins, as in a dance. She ends up orchestrating the camera. I was thinking of *Fantasia*, when Mickey Mouse

conducts the storm. She becomes the conductor.

SF This dizzying, disorienting camera was a breakthrough. What did you learn from it?

LM This spinning, almost euphoric, excessive camera is the dramatic camera. It's also a camera of that time, reflecting the fascination with virtual space and impossible movement in the early 2000s. I was working with 3D models and virtual cameras, testing exaggerated, speculative movements liberated from physical constraints. It helped me think about how to use the camera in the real world.

SF In *Camera Opera* (2008), too, we encounter delirious cameras. Can you describe the installation and the camerawork?

LM Like *Stadium*, *Camera Opera* was a territorial infiltration insofar as it exposes the workings of the site. It's a two-channel video installation in which a news anchor stands silently, holding cue cards, poised yet deferring her address. Vulturelike, five operators circle her relentlessly with their pedestal cameras. We're looking, compelled. But her blank stare means that we can only project onto her. We don't have access to her interiority. She's all surface.

SF The anchorwoman resists objectification. She is not instrumentalized. She won't let them (or us) in. There's a back and forth between her and the cameras, an implicit struggle. By the end, she has taken possession of them and diverted their gaze. She's directing it elsewhere.

LM Yes. The camera operators circle her and the studio, approach and pull away, zoom in, and roll past. She's not there as an object: she has a role, with her glass of water and her cue cards. She's not waiting, she's holding time/space. She points to expectation and the future, which are recurrent dimensions in my later works. By the end, they are no longer filming her or the studio. They're spinning wildly, self-absorbed, caught up in their own excessive energy. It's as if they have forgotten where they are, have fallen in love with their cameras, and are waltzing with them. She has made them all spinners.

Here I was also trying to get to passivity as a place of resistance. What are we to do when capitalist culture drives us to objectify and self-objectify to the point that we are reduced to avatars? She resists by withholding her interiority.

SF Earlier, we touched briefly on the politics of camera movement. We also talked about the camera as proxy. What are we to make of the spinning cameras in *Camera Opera*?

LM They represent a release, a letting-go of control. Or, to put it another way, they claim autonomy. Instead of taking the camera away, I chose to unleash it. In much of my work, there is a tightly controlled, palpable tension. Something has to give. The release belongs to the camera.

SF While the cameras feel autarchic and accelerationist, there is a catharsis. The use of the loop is also very intentional.

LM *Camera Opera*'s crescendo is there to unsettle viewers. I want them to be shaken out of the delirium of the spectacle. While the loop brings viewers back to something a little more recognizable and conventional, it now carries a question. Together, my delirious camera and my use of the loop can awaken. They can show what's possible.

SF Can you talk about sound in this work?

LM In *Camera Opera*, the sound was sited. This marked a turning point in my thinking about diegesis and sound. Since then, sound has always been sited. I used a recording of Strauss waltzes, playing on a loop in the studio, to coordinate the movements of the five camera operators while we recorded. Initially, the music was intended only for the production, not for the public. During the editing process, however, I realized that it could not be separated from the image: they were too conceptually and performatively intertwined. Since the music and the image are synched, each image cut produces a hard cut in sound. These frequent, abrupt audio breaks produce something glitch-like, another way to awaken the viewer. For me, the glitch is never an accident, it's built in.

SF Following *Camera Opera* and *Stadium*, the single-channel installation *Plänterwald* (2010) also took on a politically sensitive, unresolved site. Shot in an abandoned amusement park on the former East German side of Berlin, it expands your practice in two ways: it's shot entirely outdoors and it does not mobilize a central, single figure. Can you speak about these departures?

LM *Plänterwald* goes back to *Volcano* and *Crater* insofar as the park is the central character. This park was an off-limits, mythical place that many wanted to enter. I thought of Plänterwald as akin to the "Zone" in Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* (1979), a place charged with supernatural properties fenced off by the government. Like the Olympic Stadium, this amusement park stood for a particular moment in German history. The park was a different kind of relic, a symbol of the failures of unification and privatization.

I worked with the security guards who patrolled the park. I saw them as elements of the park, like the rides and vegetation. The guards are mobile components of the park rather than subjects.

SF What about the camera? It's less steady, at times even vulnerable.

LM We used a Polecam system, a very long, lightweight pole with a tiny remote-controlled lens at its end. It allowed us to get seemingly impossible, slow tracking shots, guiding the lens close to the surface of things. It was precarious; the lens picked up even the slightest movement.

The camera not only documents the topography of the park but also describes it. I was aiming for a realist description, based on the details of what had been left behind, to create meaning. At times, you can't help sensing the tension between East and West. At other times, the description gets close to abstraction. I wanted to convey a sense of indeterminacy, open-endedness, and the unresolved state of the park, its uncertain future. That's the politics of camera movement.

SF The installation's surround-sound design puts viewers in the space, at its center.

LM Yes, much like the sound design of *Crater*, I wanted to create a sensorial immersion. *Plänterwald*'s soundtrack layers recordings that were captured on site. Its low rumbles, high-pitched whistles, crackling, and buzzing create a dense texture—another kind of detailed description—that draws the viewer close to both the site and the camera. At times, it feels almost spectral.

SF In your next two works, *The Philharmonie Project* (2011), the collective takes on a more defined presence. This was also the first time you worked with an ensemble cast. How did it come about?

LM The camera led me to *The Philharmonie Project*. Matthias Wahle, the crane-camera operator on *Stadium,* also worked at the Berliner Philharmoniker's Digital Concert Hall. He invited me to watch the technical team remotely operate cameras for live concert broadcasts.

It was exhilarating. The pressure was palpable, reminding me of a trading floor. I realized that the drama was in the labor of the four-member team working as a unit with mechanical precision. For *The Philharmonie Project*, I decided to turn the cameras on them, to pull into focus the coordinated gestures and the mechanics of production.

SF The *Philharmonie* works offer up the coexistence of different times, crystallized around musical scores that simultaneously archive and anticipate different temporalities: the time of composition, rehearsal time, the time of performance, and the installation's experiential time. The cameras capture this palimpsest.

LM The score anticipates multiple temporal layers. For the live broadcasts, the camera choreography is designed in advance, based on the score. In my installation *The Philharmonie Project (Nielsen: Symphony No. 5)*, one channel unfolds in rehearsal. Recorded during a dry run, a rehearsal of the full sequence of camera shots before the concert, it documents the empty chairs, instruments, and musical stands. The other channel belongs to the time of performance, with the team filming the live concert. While the two channels are synchronized in the installation, their temporalities remain asynchronous. The music, however, keeps both in time.

SF Speech also enables the technical team to straddle multiple temporalities.

LM They're speaking over and to each other simultaneously, referencing both the present and what's to come. It's a cacophony of counting and cues—from preprogrammed and upcoming camera positions to cameras going live—with directions from the past, present, and future folding into one continuous now of readiness.

SF In addition to the tension of anticipation, there is also complicity, pleasure, and play in the team's performance.

LM Yes, they seem to love their work, humming along to the symphony, joking, and cheering after a tricky camera movement. Their pleasure is woven into the labor.

SF In the dry-run channel, stage technicians are setting up for the musicians to come, musicians who are not yet visible. Does care play a role? Or is it more about support?

LM The technicians placing scores and adjusting music stands leans more toward support. Support becomes a choreography that sustains the performance. It's infrastructural. Care comes into play later, in *Tragedy* (2015–16), where crew members adjust costumes, hold props, or offer a performer a drink of water. In this film, care is conveyed through a choreography of attention.

SF The second work in this series, *The Philharmonie Project (Bruckner: Symphony No. 5, movements 1 & 4)*, feels very different.

LM *Nielsen* is a modernist work; *Bruckner* is Hollywood. The energy of the teams is very different. The Bruckner team is dramatic, histrionic, while the Nielsen team operates with sharp, fierce intensity.

SF The protagonist of your next work, the three-channel installation *Anna and the Tower* (2014), is also a conductor of sorts. She conducts the skies by using coded words and gestures.

LM Yes, *Anna and the Tower* further develops several strands of *The Philharmonie Project*, in particular, the concept of conducting and the exploration of a specialized, coded language. It also extends my interest in making visible the choreography of infrastructural labor.

I was drawn to air traffic control as another profession that requires extreme precision. I began seeing parallels between the technical team in *The Philharmonie Project* and air traffic controllers: both orchestrate distant movement across complex systems, whether between air and ground or sound and image.

SF Here again, the site is both crucial and unresolved. However, it's not as historically loaded. Instead, it represents an attempt by the state to stake a claim in the face of an uncertain future.

LM The site, a former Soviet airbase turned Western commercial experiment, also carried a living history. Much like the park in *Plänterwald*, it bore witness to the former East-West divide and to the unfinished work of reunification.

After repeated attempts, I was finally granted permission to visit a control tower to observe air traffic controllers at work. To my surprise, when I visited the Magdeburg-Cochstedt International Airport and met Anna, its young recruit, there wasn't a single plane in sight. The airport had been redeveloped but it remained largely unused, so I reimagined the tower as a studio and a stage, where I filmed my collaboration with Anna during her work hours. This was an exceptional situation. Using aviation phraseology, I wrote a script for her to perform, directing imaginary aircraft and weather conditions. In Anna's performance, her longing to command real air traffic binds artistic and physical labor with desire.

SF This work is quite theatrical.

LM I was drawn to the way Fassbinder approached the film set as a stage, merging cinema and theater. His use of lighting and his stagelike framing of action were important references. I was also starting to think about opera. Anna's performance presages that of Aby, Opera North's stage manager in my next work, the feature-length film *Tragedy*. Aby calls the cues that make their production of *La traviata* happen.

SF You mentioned earlier that *Tragedy* also marked a shift in your work, as you began considering labor and attention as practices of care. The film plays on defamiliarization by bringing us backstage, an unknown territory sustained by labor. We may be familiar with *La traviata*, know the music, the characters, and even the lyrics, but our displacement triggers a powerful and troubling mix of expectation, alertness, and curiosity, which parallels that of the characters on screen.

LM By shifting the perspective, my aim was to democratize the spectacle. You see the cast and crew working together offstage, making the opera happen through an intricate chain of technical moves, triggers, and cues that must be executed precisely on time. At the same time, you feel the intimacy, care, and love that goes into making this collective experience.

Over the course of the two-hour film, the cast and crew shift between states of intense focus and moments of levity—joking with one another, gossiping, talking about upcoming productions, singing along, or moving in sync with the music. They're integral to the opera, yet invisible to the audience. As they make the opera, they're also living their lives. We come to know them both as people and as characters in my film.

SF The multichannel video installation *Taking Positions* (2018) closes a chapter in your work and opens another.

LM *Taking Positions* was made as I was relocating from Berlin to Los Angeles. It came about because of an invitation to make a work at Kunsthaus Dahlem, the former atelier of Arnold Breker, a sculptor celebrated by the National Socialist regime. After decades of disuse, city officials decided to turn this contested building into a museum of postwar modernism in Germany.

SF How can one critically engage, in the present, with the legacies of this regime, this site, this artist, and his work. How did you begin?

LM I began by researching Breker and his work. Though he's best known for propagandistic sculptures advancing fascist ideology, he also made single-figure works. I decided to focus on these quieter pieces rather than his well-known heroic male figures. I looked at numerous black-and-white photographs of his work and eventually selected six sculptures of women.

These images became prisms through which I could ask: Can a gesture or a sculpture hold an ideology? Are the politics projected onto it fixed? How can the camera, as both apparatus and the embodied act of filming, undo that fixity? I had taken up these questions in *Stadium* and, to some extent, in *Camera Opera*. Here, working with six performers to remodel the poses, I was asking: what happens when you repurpose a gesture in a repurposed artist studio?

During this research, I discovered the catalogue of *Taking Positions: Figurative Sculpture in the Third Reich*, an exhibition curated by Penelope Curtis at the Henry Moore Foundation in 2001. The show's premise, as I understood it, was to juxtapose—to bring back together—figurative works by German sculptors favored by the Nazi regime with those it deemed degenerate. Working in different media and disciplines, Curtis and I were asking similar questions.

SF This is the first time you use the vertical image. What does that mean for the camera?

LM In *Camera Opera*, the cameras had a sense of autonomy, like performers: expressive, embodied, and excessive. In *The Philharmonie Project,* the camera had a sense of automation, functioning within a tightly choreographed system. In both, the camera is indiscriminate. It captures the subject and then moves past or beyond. The relation between subject and camera is indirect. They operate in parallel.

In *Taking Positions*, I wanted the camera to feel like a scanner—methodical, sensing. The vertical frame limits the field of vision, fragmenting and withholding the total image. Panning across the nearly motionless performers, whose static choreography recalls sculptures in an exhibition, the vertical frame slowly reveals and conceals as it travels. It surveys and suspends, which produces a different kind of tension.

SF Your panning camera presents indifferent encounters. Is there such a

thing as a free, autonomous camera?

LM In *Taking Positions*, I'm trying to get rid of the eye, or at least to unsettle it. What is the viewpoint in between the eye of power and the cameraperson's or artist's eye? I'm trying to get to that in-between.

SF Is it a disinterested camera?

LM It's a disinterested camera in the wide shot. In the close-ups, it becomes curious. It's searching, caressing, slowly looking at the body, at the parts. In the wider shots, it's more uniform, describing the space, surveying its environment. It's looking across, like Anna in her tower, scanning. It may even be an animist camera

SF When I think of Social Realist or Nazi sculpture, I think of something hard, monumental, and whole that keeps you at a dictatorial distance. By contrast, your camera grants us intimacy by breaking the whole into parts and fragments. It focuses freely on hands, folds of fabric, or gestures. These can carry multiple messages, which might undo the whole. Is that something you were thinking about?

LM I was thinking about how figurative sculptures are photographed—the way close-ups capture features, expressions, and gestures that subtly humanize the object. Not only does my camera's fragmentation of the figures convey intimacy, but my close-ups also reveal the fragility of liveness when, for instance, a quivering hand betrays a performer's physical exertion in holding still.

SF In the installation, light-pink, wheeled plinths hold up the vertical monitors. These wheels connote mobility, but the monitors' wires make me think of puppetry. They're not quite free: they still have strings.

LM I like the puppetry image. In the installation, the screens became video sculptures, stand-ins for figurative sculptures. With the wheels, I wanted to suggest live performance, as if the screen-bodies might start moving around the space.

SF Your use of color in both the installation and the footage seems to smuggle in a reference to painterly abstraction.

LM The work is about aesthetic regimes. It also reflects my move in 2017 to Southern California, where mid-century modernism and formal abstraction are present on a scale I hadn't encountered before. New abstraction was everywhere in the visual language of Los Angeles: modernist forms and palettes shaped by signage. In this new context, I felt I needed to bring another dimension to the material I had just filmed in Germany. This got me thinking about aesthetic regimes and how fascism had coopted figuration.

SF And how abstraction had been consecrated as the expression of liberatory democracy, with a healthy dose of moral certitude.

LM Exactly, and by the twenty-first century, the market's obsession with modernism had coopted abstraction into its own repressive regime. I thought of Josef Albers, who fled Nazi Germany for America, where he became very influential as a vector in the migration of modernist abstraction.

SF *Taking Positions* is asking us to exert care when we revisit this recent history because it's still very much alive. This leads me to the question of inspiration or influence.

LM Instead of inspiration or influence, I talk about use and methods. I wasn't inspired by Albers; I wanted to conjure his ideas and methods, to test how they could function in another context. I approached this in a questioning way. By making animations where planes of color slide across the screens, I was testing how his disciplined language has been absorbed into contemporary practice.

In a similar way, it's Curtis's curatorial methodology that I took away from her exhibition *Taking Positions: Figurative Sculpture in the Third Reich*. By taking sculptures that ideologies, morals, and fashions had alternately cast as "good" or "evil" and putting them on a level playing field, the exhibition shed light on aesthetic regimes. I wanted to make an analogous intervention by inserting contemporary bodies into the singularly coded space of Breker's studio, and by juxtaposing formal abstraction and figuration. I wanted to push those two visual systems against each other. But rather than framing them as opposites, I chose to have them glide together as if they were interchangeable.

SF Color takes on an unprecedented role in this work. Where did you get your palette?

LM I got the idea to use the Pantone Color of the Year series from Stephen Prina's *As He Remembered It* (2011), exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). I decided my palette would be made up of the colors selected by the Pantone Color of the Year program since its beginning in 1999. Since Pantone is a coded system, it was easy to translate the Pantone palette into video by using RGB values.

SF Does editing become a performative site in this work?

LM Yes, the scenes straddle three vertical monitors. The footage slides across the screens, as if on a stage. When the image travels, it disregards the physical space between the monitors, creating a friction between containment and movement—between what's fixed and what can shift. As the planes of color pan, they push and squeeze the footage of the performers. That pressure is important; it reflects a political agonism.

SF The five-channel installation *Ninfa Atlas* (2021) comes next. It extends some of the experiments from *Taking Positions*, such as the use of vertical monitors and the presence of the figure that is simultaneously singular and collective, in tension. It's an ambitious, experimental work.

LM *Ninfa Atlas* is a big jump but it leans back. It grew out of *Taking Positions*, continuing my experimental reworking of historical documents for the contemporary moment. In *Ninfa Atlas*, I sought to complicate and extend a gesture archive, namely, Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924–29). I don't think I'm quite done with it yet.

SF Few people would go near the legacy of Breker, whereas referencing Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* has become somewhat de rigueur.

LM Yes, and this was daunting. But I was asking different questions of Warburg's *Atlas*. I wanted to keep exploring the potential of the archetypal feminine gesture. I also saw this project as an intervention in the narrowing of identity politics that has led to the self-segregating practices of neoliberal individualism. I wanted to see what we can learn by acknowledging what we've inherited, tackling the Western image directly, and recognizing that it's plastic. We can recast, rethink, resignify, and reassign it.

SF What did Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* offer?

LM *Mnemosyne Atlas* is a visual archive composed of panels of photographic reproductions that trace recurring gestures and motifs across the history of Western art and culture. At first, it seemed to provide a solid framework, which was exciting. It also offered a protagonist: the motif of the Nympha, a carrier of affect that Warburg sought out in these images and through whose gestures he understood cultural modalities.

However, when I started looking closely at the images Warburg had assembled, I was horrified by the tropes of the feminine and their lingering social, cultural, and political implications. How could I work with this? I decided to work *through* it, asking what can be done with this legacy.

SF How did you work through it materially and formally?

LM I had to find strategies. Kathleen M. Gough's essay "Between the Image and Anthropology: Theatrical Lessons from Aby Warburg's 'Nympha'" was key.[2] She presents Warburg's Nympha as a time traveler and a recurring figure. She describes Warburg's attempt to free the images of nymphs from their frames and to engage with them as performative images in motion rather than static representations. The figure overstepping the frame and traversing different periods became my hook.

That's when I decided to use the green screen. In my work, the green screen is an important site: it's both highly specific and any place, both site and nonsite. The space of the green screen studio is real abstraction: everybody knows what it is, but it's the stand-in for any space. That was my first move. Once I began cutting out figures digitally, isolating them, and placing them against a green background, everything shifted. That was the liberating moment, though I didn't yet know what the final work would be.

My next move was to find a way to *perform* the archive—to transform it, to set it in motion through performance. So I created a score for dancers and performers.

SF Did you research iconography and meaning? How did you use this research?

LM Yes, that was a crucial part of figuring out what to do with the material. In making the score, I developed a new mapping of Warburg's *Atlas* centered on urgency. I grouped the images according to gestures: gestures of defense, of escape and flight, of composure and contemplation, of stride and guidance. Attacking figures also became important, as did gestures of support. This all happened during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Los Angeles uprisings against police brutality and systemic racism, which impacted my thinking and the work itself.

I gave the score to my five collaborators—dancers and movement/performance artists—and asked them to work associatively with the cutout figures, to take possession of them and invest them with their own experience, research, and movement aesthetic. Each performer ultimately took on a different aspect of the score: transition, flow, protest, capture, and violence.

SF Can you speak about your choice of imaging technology for this work?

LM I knew I wanted to work with the latest imaging technology. This made sense since Warburg is often seen as a precursor to a digital way of thinking. In addition, I believe that it's very important for artists to intervene in the latest modes of mainstream production.

I was researching volumetric video capture, a technology that records movement in three dimensions, producing a 3D model of a performer whose gestures are arrested in a repeating loop. This play between movement and stasis, object and image, mobility and immobility, was compelling.

SF Wouldn't you say that all your female figures have been nymphs?

LM Yes, in a way. Beginning with the early animations, they're all intermediaries, figures caught between structures, temporalities, or states of being, threshold beings who carry or transform meaning across boundaries. In *Stadium*, the figure moves through history; in *Camera Opera*, she suspends time, holding power through restraint; and in *Anna and the Tower*, she calls the future into being.

SF In closing, I'd like to leave our readers with an idea we've been exploring for

a while: the feminist camera. How would you describe this apparatus now?

LM I'm interested in the idea of the feminist camera and I'm still working through what it might be. I think of it as a mode of operation, a way of looking that disrupts dominant hierarchies. The feminist camera is not about representing women per se; its aim is to shift the relations of power between subject, camera, and viewer. In that sense, the feminist camera has the potential to reconfigure our understanding of social and political space.

It's a camera that witnesses things unfolding rather than one that cuts or extracts from the real. It does not seek to frame the scene or serve the viewer. Nor is it passive; it sees on its own and for itself, alongside us but not necessarily for us. It is curious: it hovers, searches, lingers, hesitates, and sometimes withholds or even leads astray. Endowed with its own agency and autonomy, the feminist camera is a relational camera that refuses narrative closure.

For instance, in *Ninfa Atlas*, *Crater*, and *Volcano*, the camera's spiraling orbit is part of the choreography, one of many bodies in relation, with its own rhythm and desire; in *Camera Opera* and *Stadium*, it performs and moves with and against bodies; and in *Taking Positions*, it observes with detachment, scanning rather than capturing. In each work, the camera is negotiating its own agency, sometimes relinquishing control, sometimes asserting it, always questioning its own power.

The feminist camera foregrounds distributed agency by assembling bodies, technologies, and histories in relation. It's a camera that refuses singularity and master narratives, hosts uncertainty, and remains open to the unknown.

NOTES

1 *Ausdruckstanz* (expressive dance) is a choreography style that arose in Germany in the early twentieth century and emphasized gesture as a carrier of meaning. Its insistence that the body can articulate thought, affect, and ideology through movement was essential for me.

2 Kathleen M. Gough, "Between the Image and Anthropology: Theatrical Lessons from Aby Warburg's 'Nympha,'" *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 114–30.