

# Exploring the Interface Between Performance Which Has Engaged With the Parthenon Sculptures Repatriation Debate and Digital Technologies

**How have technologies and performance interacted in terms of citizen engagement with this issue?**

Claire FRAMPTON, works for Ashmolean Museum, Oxford University, UK

**Keywords:** *technology—performance—Parthenon—engagement—issues*

**CHNT Reference:** Frampton,C. 2020. Exploring the Interface Between Performance Which Has Engaged With the Parthenon Sculptures Repatriation Debate and Digital Technologies. Proceedings of CHNT 25 2020

## Abstract

### Introduction to the cultural history of the sculptures

The British Museum holds a significant amount of the surviving sculptures of the Parthenon, The Parthenon was built as a temple in Greece in the fifth century BC. At the British Museum they are studied as a part of world culture. The sculptures are high profile in terms of contested collections; 'Since the early 1980s, Greek governments have argued for the permanent removal to Athens of all the sculptures in the British Museum' (British Museum no date). The sculptures are an important aspect of material culture relating to Greek cultural heritage, however they are not currently controlled by Greece. Hamilakis wrote that 'The group of artefacts known as Parthenon (or 'Elgin') Marbles has attracted enormous attention from scholars and the public'. There is a global interest; the sculptures 'contribute to the discourse of the social and political reality (and often the hyperreality) of the global diasporic communities which participate in the Hellenic national project' (Hamilakis 1999).

### Contemporary engagement through performance in relationship to space and digital technologies

This paper will explore aspects of continuing discourse relating to the sculptures; creativity in performance, and the relationship to digital media, and will look at the relationship of these aspects to citizen participation. It will explore how performance about the marbles relates to ideas about heterotopic space, since it creates an immersive space which facilitates engagement, it questions the current display arrangement of the marbles in London and explores their original context. Tompkins (2014) writes that 'Heterotopic space in performance 'reflects or comments on a site in the actual world'. A study of heterotopias could result in 'a more detailed examination of locations in which cultural and political meanings can be produced spatially' (p.11). How do technologies relate to this concept? The introduction to an article 'Stories, spaces and bodies: The production of embodied space through mobile media storytelling' states that 'One vital element of the production of space is the ways we use media to tell the social stories of a place, and... orient our bodies toward (or against) the narratives of these locations'. Technologies help create the meaning of a space through communication of stories (Farman 2015) help people to orientate, and and to create and document narratives from different perspectives.

### Example performance case studies

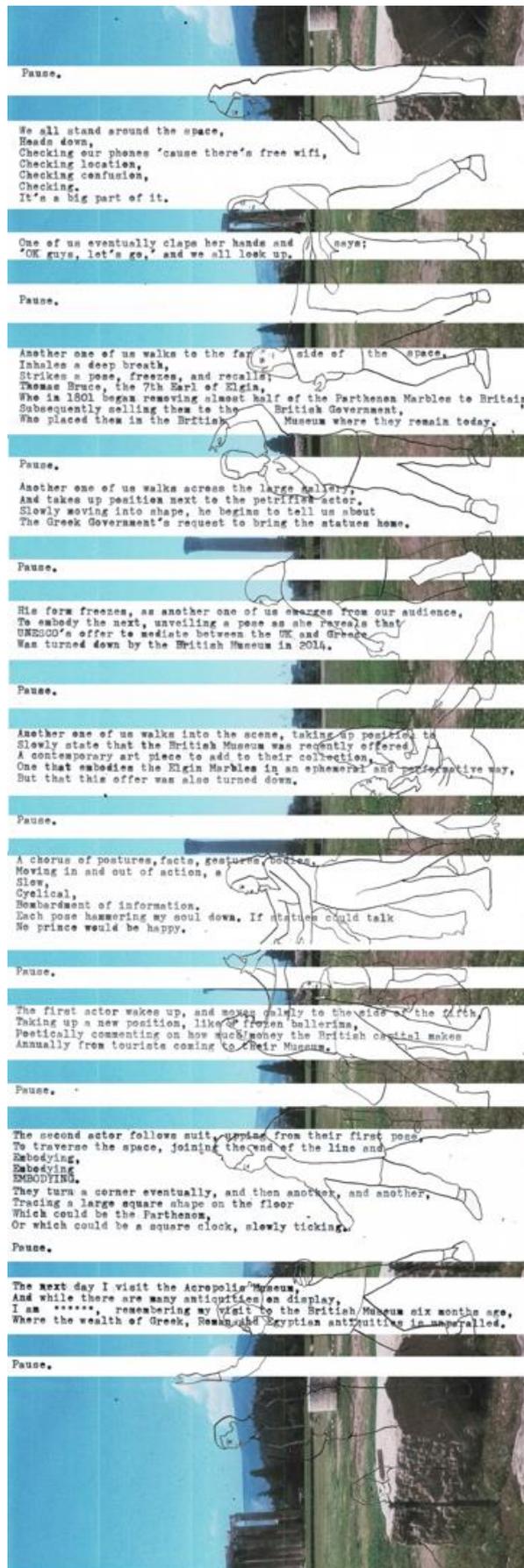


Fig. 1. deBurca (2017) ALEXANDRA PIRICI PARTHENON MARBLES (with permission of Ella deBurca)

Artist and choreographer Alexandra Pirici has developed an 'ongoing performative action', where the group of sculptures are embodied by five people, the piece is called Parthenon Marbles. It was designed to be performed 'in the Acropolis Museum at the site prepared for the originals' (KADIST no date), and has been performed in other locations. An artwork (fig 1) by Ella de Burca reflects on a performance which happened during Documenta 14, an art festival which in 2017 took place partly in Athens. An illustration of performers in relationship to the Greek landscape is integrated with text which references technologies and describes the experience of the performers (deBurca 2017). An online article about the experiences of people who had walked up the Acropolis to the Parthenon to see a performance describes a busy scene with students and tourists. After the action 'the performers re-integrated into the role of visitors'. Since this was an unauthorised action, audience members were asked to delete photos they had taken (Chakraverti-Wuerthwein 2017).

In 2014 a performance demonstration took place at the British Museum and in different locations in London with soprano Sonia Theodoridou and six other Greek women playing Caryatid statues looking for their missing sister, the lone Caryatid in the museum (Matsaidoni 2014). Theodoridou publicised 'A full photographic account of the event' through Facebook which is now deleted (Plantzos 2017). A video on Youtube documenting a protest performance near to the Greek Orthodox Church in London shows six women walking in the street. The group stop in a crossroads and perform a dance, accompanied by traditional Greek music. People in the crowd observing the performance appear to document the performance through digital devices (Theodoridou no date). This performance seemed to explore psychogeographical aspects; psychogeography 'focuses on our psychological experiences of the city, and reveals or illuminates forgotten, discarded or marginalised aspects of the urban environment', it also advocates 'purposeful walking' (Lyons 2017). The performers evoked architectural elements of the original archaeological context of the sculptures near Athens, in the city where they are currently.

## References

- deBurca (2017) ALEXANDRA PIRICI PARTHENON MARBLES Draff.net Available at: <https://www.draff.net/the-parthenon-marbles.html> (Accessed 20 April 2020)
- Chakraverti-Wuerthwein (2017) Future Climates/ the School of Redistribution: Ethics, Economics, and Precarity in the Contemporary Art World temporaryartreview.com Available at: <http://temporaryartreview.com/future-climatesthe-school-of-redistribution-ethics-economics-and-precarity-in-the-contemporary-art-world/> (Accessed 20 April 2020)
- Farman, J. (2015) 'Stories, spaces and bodies: The production of embodied space through mobile media storytelling' Communication Research and Practice Vol.1, 2015-Issue 2 Available at: [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/22041451.2015.1047941#\\_i7](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/22041451.2015.1047941#_i7) (Accessed 15 April 2020)
- Hamilakis, Y., (1999) 'Stories from exile: fragments from the cultural biography of the Parthenon (or 'Elgin') marbles' World Archaeology, Vol.31 (2): 303-320 The Cultural Biography of Objects
- Lyons, S. (2017) Psychogeography: a way to delve into the soul of a city THE CONVERSATION Available at: <https://theconversation.com/psychogeography-a-way-to-delve-into-the-soul-of-a-city-78032> (Accessed 15 April 2020)
- Matsaidoni, T., (2014) Innovative Performance for Return of Parthenon Marbles, Greek Reporter June 10 Available at <https://eu.greekreporter.com/2014/06/10/innovative-performance-for-return-of-parthenon-marbles/> (Accessed 15 April 2020)
- Pirici, A. (2017) Parthenon Marbles ongoing action commissioned and produced by Future Climates (Antonia Alampi and Iliana Fokianaki) and Kadist (Paris/San Francisco)
- Plantzos, D. (2017) 'Caryatids lost and regained: Rebranding the classical body in contemporary Greece' Journal of Greek Media and Culture Volume 3 Number 1 Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/32566808/Caryatids\\_lost\\_and\\_regained\\_Rebranding\\_the\\_classical\\_body\\_in\\_contemporary\\_Greece](https://www.academia.edu/32566808/Caryatids_lost_and_regained_Rebranding_the_classical_body_in_contemporary_Greece) (Accessed 15 April 2020)
- Theodoridou, S. (no date) London Marbles Protest [Youtube] Available at: <https://youtu.be/qvVLrWI97K4> (Accessed 15 April 2020)
- Tompkins, J. (2014) Theatre's Heterotopias England palgrave macmillan
- British Museum (no date) The Parthenon Sculptures in the British Museum Available at: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/parthenon-sculptures-british-museum> (Accessed: 15 April 2020)

Kadist (no Date) Alexandra Pirici Parthenon Marbles Available at: <https://kadist.org/work/parthenon-marbles/> (Accessed 20 April 2020)