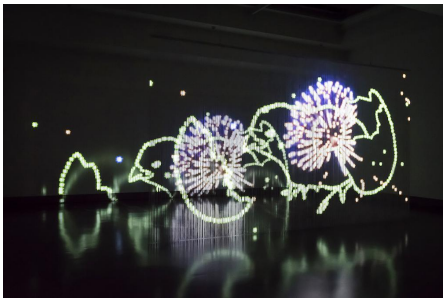
Nature at its Queerest

by Ulrike Gerhardt

Published on 20.05.2017



Alicia Frankovich, *OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND* (13' 59''), installation view Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf 2017, curated by Eva Birkenstock. Photo: Katja Illner.



Performance *TWINS & LOVERS* by Alicia Frankovich at Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf 25.3.2017. Photo: Katja Illner.



Alicia Frankovich, *Even the Jellyfish, it's Perfect*, 2017, plexiglass dome, steel, moving light mechanism, magnesium chalk cubes. Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf. Photo: Katja Illner.



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HUM is pleased to publish Ulrike Gerhardt's essay in response to Alici a Frankovich's first major solo show in Germany, at Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf. OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND*, curated by Eva Birkenstock, was on show from February 17th to April 9th 2017. The New Zealand-born artist has been based in Berlin since 2010, when she took up an artist residency at Künstlerhaus Bethanien.*

"Time inhabits all living beings, is an internal, indeed constitutive, feature of life itself, yet it is also what places living beings in relations of simultaneity and succession

with each other in so far as they are all participants in a single temporality, in a single relentless movement forward."[01]

Elizabeth Grosz

Alicia Frankovich's artistic work is clearly informed by what people call 'corporeal feminism' of the 1990s[02] as well as its development through cyborgian, trans- and posthuman theories redefining biology, technology and gender. Its advocates are especially invested in understanding how the sexually differentiated specificity of bodies matters, how corporeality provides a basis for cultural inscription. In other words, they try to understand the relationship and interdependencies between biological complexity and the variability of culture. One key feature of 'corporeal feminism' is the thinking and conceptualising of time, more precisely the research of temporal economies of living and nonliving bodies and their interconnection with biological and cultural evolution. Frankovich's solo exhibition *OUT SIDE BEFORE BEYOND* (2017) at Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen translates her sensual performative practice into the format of an exhibition in motion; using a distinct sculptural and installation-based formal language to analyse the modalities, forms and effects of space and time.

Frankovich's exhibition title refers to her interest in exploring the action of annulling fixed points of time and space, in favour of a scenario where the works on display constantly reconfigure themselves within the given confines of the exhibition space. *OUTS IDE BEFORE BEYOND* consists of an eponymous two-channel video installation, pitched at either ends of the darkened space and projected onto string curtains, alongside an embedded parcours of sculptures guided by a corresponding light choreography. The negative space left between each string of the projection screen allows for a second projection on the wall behind it, and opens up a penetrable 3D moving image zone for the visitor. Accompanied by a soundscape produced by Teresa Stroetges (Golden Diskó Ship), the arena of works within the exhibition space oscillates between theater stage design and white cube aesthetics. For the duration of 13:59 minutes, the set time of this exhibition, the viewer becomes

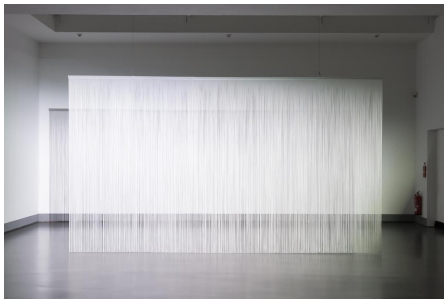
part of a theatrical, spatio-temporal configuration that exceeds temporal continuity and playfully takes up the concept of 'queer time' or 'queer temporality,' – which can be defined as a temporality that concentrates on living beings, and their immersion into the unstoppable movement of time, especially its multiple ruptures, nicks and cuts.[03]



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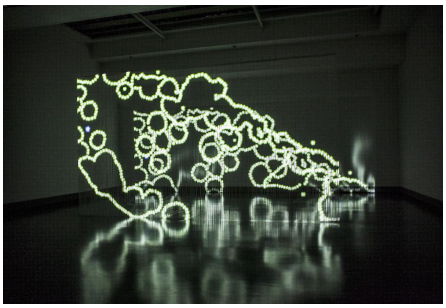
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During the exhibition period, Frankovich presented two additional performances as events in other parts of the building in which bodies appeared as spatial and temporal beings placed in an institutional laboratory environment: *The Opportune Spectator* (2012) and the newly commissioned performance *Twins and Lovers* (2017) – which was performed on two occasions in different parts of the Kunstverein, and in differing conditions.

For the latter, five performers formed a multi-bodied, five-headed and decapod creature, that could be seen meandering through the foyer of the Düsseldorfer Kunstverein. While long-windedly moving

and crawling on the ground, the 'twenty-somethings' spoke about their intimate lives, specifically about their personal relationships. "What really turns you on?", "What makes you want to share intimacy with someone?", "Did you ever have a relationship with more than one person?" "Have you had all your desires fulfilled by one person?" etc. Intimate stories about parental bonds and burdens, childhood traumas, friendships, relationship concepts, the creation of a nonconformist sexual identity, blurred gender boundaries, desires and expectations were told by each of the performers while physically building a polyvocal and transhuman collective body. The most striking was the queerness of the performers' collective poses, of their performative enactments. For instance of a 500 million-year-old cephalopod, an animal with a hyperadvanced nervous system and a long mythical history,[04] or of Rene Magritte's painting *The Lovers* (1928). Whereas in the painting the two lovers can most likely be identified as a man and a woman (the woman wearing a sleeveless red dress and the man a suit), Frankovich decided to let two male performers tie up their shirts over their heads and kiss. My use of the term *queerness* here is detached from sexual identity and rather relates to a queer way of life including subcultural practices, imaginative life schedules, alternative alliances, strange temporalities as well as wilfully eccentric economic practices and modes of being.[05] It is inspired by the idea of developing nonnormative logics of time and space and discovering other ways of life and being. *Twins and Lovers* was the first time Frankovich decided to let her performers speak candidly – not only for themselves but also for the "thousands of others"[06] they are related to via a moving, corporeal assemblage of humans.



Performance *TWINS & LOVERS* by Alicia Frankovich at Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf 25.3.2017. Photo: Katja Illner.



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Frankovich's 'transhuman octopus,' emerging in this performance, recalls the first part of her newly produced two-channel video installation *outside before beyond* (2017) within the exhibition experience in which humans pay homage to fruits and plants, underscored musically by an ambient, hypnotic soundscape with synthetic sounds of birds' twittering and tropical rainforest noise, covered in a nocturnal melody. Framed by sunrise and sunset, and accompanied by images of botanic and domestic gardens at night, the first part of the video installation shows another group of five performers slowly exploring a dark space. Like a sworn community, they imitate the phenomena such as the starburst effect in photography and then reinterpreted by the performers' colored hands forming a delicate, manifold star. Tinted fabric, dyed with

vegetable substance in which natural colors meet man-made colors, are held by one protagonist as an offering. Using their bodies and voices, the protagonists' actions and movements are divided into several episodes of showing and telling (non)natural, organic and global findings such as exotic flowers and plants, avocados boiled in textile, fresh orange peel and a nashi pear.

Frankovich seems to engineer the performances in her videos like a queer natural scientist; first comes the deterritorialisation, the isolation of the object of study from its context, then a discursive and corporeal response from the protagonists. These responses are enigmatic and performative enactments in which protagonists introduce their materialised experiments: "It's a starburst effect.", "This is avocado.", "This is purple carrot." etc. Frankovich is seriously engaged in showing the entanglement of matter and meaning in Karen Barad's sense.[07] Matter, such as the chalk in Frankovich's kinetic, domed light sculpture *Even the Jellyfish, it's perfect* (2017), appears as a dynamic expression of the world in its 'intra-active becoming',[08] seen here in the perspex sphere filled with chalk blocks that become illuminated by a moving spotlight within the exhibition parcours. The delicate, whirring shadow of the bowl recalls aquatic and prehistoric imagery, the phenomenologies of a jellyfish, the oldest multi-organ animal, and the cretaceous period as a time of enclosing and 'printing' invertebrates from the deep sea.

Also among the illuminated works of Frankovich's timed choreography is the image work *World is Home Planet: This is Purple Carrot* (2016-17) which is fixed to one of the scaffolding structures that form the space. This large-scale macro photograph of a peeled biodynamic purple carrot looks like a surrealist landscape painting inspired by satellite imagery or cosmic cinema and also appears in the video installation previously mentioned, held and signified by a female performer. In another component of the exhibition – entitled *Tights* (2017) and situated left of center in the space – overdimensioned tights, complete with 80s style, directly refer back to the tights worn by a female protagonist in the previous video installation. This large-print, image-based 3D sculpture is like the similar patterned 2D print *Fruit and Legs: tights* (2017) strewn amongst acrow props[09] that playfully elicit many of Frankovich's sensual and ontological experiments.



Alicia Frankovich, *OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND* (13' 59''), installation view Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf 2017, curated by Eva Birkenstock. Photo: Katja Illner.



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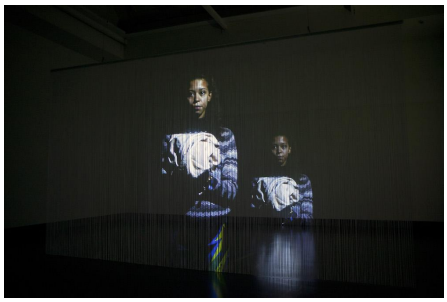
Alicia Frankovich, *Tights*, 2017, custom-printed lycra, acroprops, metal pole, 344 x 38 cm. Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf. Photo: Katja Illner.



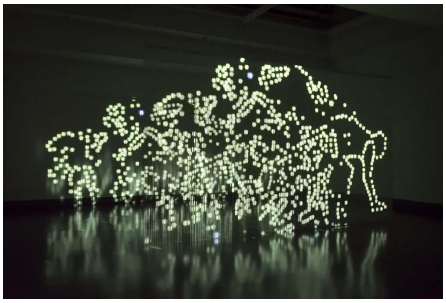
Alicia Frankovich, *Fruit and Legs: Tights*, 2017, large format print on vollplane vinyl, acroprops, metal pole, 166 x 450 cm. Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf. Photo: Katja Illner.



Alicia Frankovich, *OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND* (13' 59''), installation view Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf 2017, curated by Eva Birkenstock. Photo: Katja Illner.



Alicia Frankovich, *This is Avocado, OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND* (13' 59''), installation view Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf 2017, curated by Eva Birkenstock.



Alicia Frankovich, *OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND* (13' 59''), installation view Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf 2017, curated by Eva Birkenstock. Photo: Katja Illner.

In her collaborative lecture named *Stars and Tribes* together with poet and geophilosopher Daniel Falb in March 2017, Frankovich

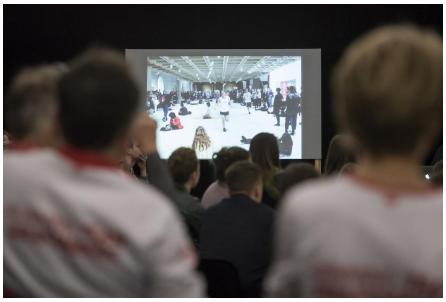
elaborated on her long-term interest in collective formations by referring to the term and concept of the multitude, which takes its roots from 17th century Dutch philosopher Baruch de Spinoza's political philosophy (Tractatus Politicus, potentia multitudinis) and was reinterpreted in the 2000s by post-operaists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri as well as by Paolo Virno. Speaking from within the art institution, she aims to broaden the idea of the multitude by adding plants, animals and nonliving bodies to the people's mass and by bringing in Haraway's idea of 'co-shaping' between companion species. However for Frankovich this 'co-shaping' does not affect animals, humans and cyborgs only – her exploration of companion species kinship also involves props, fruits, plants and technotopic innovations.[10]

The second part of Frankovich's video installation *outside before beyond* (2017) consists of an animation where human and nonhuman organism-formations, as well as ecological and cultural icons, are presented as matter in constant flux: as soon as a shape appears clearly, it immediately merges into the next. Made of luminescent green dots that are digitally produced through a starburst effect, the work opens a timeless cyber-evolutionary panorama. Numerous illuminated pixels form a series of outlines, from the outlines of plants to humans of various genders, as well as various ages, and include ambiguous, genderless bodies, neanderthals, skeletons, persons with helmets, stingrays, leopards, cats, dogs hybrids, dolphins, sharks, bats, butterflies, prawns and DNA. Bodily cells begin to multiply and expand, slimy mould appears and grows, as well as hills, stars, confetti, stalactites, smoke rings, fireworks, viruses, stars, atoms and helicopters. Like in many of Frankovich's works, the computerised iconography of human and non-human species is inspired by popular and entertainment culture. Additionally, there are narrative segments including the signature flip 'The Biles' by current world and Olympic gymnastic champion Simone Biles, or the silhouette of the Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku, Azerbaijan by architect Zaha Hadid where a giraffe runs past before transforming into a horse and then dissipating into mere stars. After a few seconds, each figurative element dissolves to instantaneously become something new. The animation's recurring states of becoming and undoing, the phases between old and new figurations are at once futuristic, and

aesthetically reminiscent of mid-90s videogames and old-school data-processing of the nascent digital era.



Stars and Tribes - A collaborative lecture with Daniel Falb (Poet & Geophilosopher, Berlin) & Alicia Frankovich / Performance, Düsseldorf 23.3.2017. Photo: Katja Illner.



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OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND thus illustrates, through a parade of multiple living and nonliving beings in succession, transitional renderings and sculptural manifestations, the nonlinear movement of 'queer time'. Alicia Frankovich's exhibition breaks the laws of evolutionary history because it interconnects humans, animals, plants and other things in a deterritorialising, phantasmatic and proto-technological fashion. The apparent randomness of Frankovich's cultural-biological, organic and manufactured figurations, and her obscure selection criteria, recall the aesthetic results of a google image search or other 'wild' algorithm processes. Hence, her video works and performances can at once be understood as exercises that challenge technologically and culturally channeled affect and presumption through the creation of cross-species and collective bodies living in fleeting habitats.

Footnotes

01. Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time. Politics, Evolution and The Untimely*, Durham: Duke University Press 2004, 5.

02. See the following group of Australian feminist publications: Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 1994; Elizabeth Grosz & Elspeth Probyn, *Sexy Bodies: Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, New York: Routledge 1995; Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality*, New York: Routledge 1995; and Vicki Kirby, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal*, New York: Routledge 1997.

03. For the concept of 'queer time', see: Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time. Politics, Evolution and The Untimely*, Durham: Duke University Press 2004; Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place. Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, New York: NYU Press 2005.; Elizabeth Freeman, *Time*

Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories, Durham: Duke University Press 2010; and Mathias Danbolt, *Touching History: Art, Performance and Politics in Queer Times*, Dissertation, University of Bergen 2012.

04. For instance the hybrid philosophical fiction of Vilém Flusser, Louis Bec, *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis. A Treatise, with a Report by the Institut Scientifique de Recherche Paranaturaliste*, Minneapolis: Posthumanities (University of Minnesota Press) 2012.

05. See Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place. Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, 1.

06. Rosi Braidotti in a recent conversation with Maria Hlavajova: "[...] we are an assemblage, and together, the two of us relate to thousands of others." Rosi Braidotti in conversation with Maria Hlavajova, A missing people, in: *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989*, ed. Maria Hlavajova & Simon Sheihk, Cambridge, MA/ London: The MIT Press 2017, 580.

07. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2007.

08. "In an agential realist account, matter does not refer to a fixed substance; rather, matter is a substance in its intra-active becoming–not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency. [...] Discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to each other; rather, the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity. The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior." Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 151, 152.

09. Acrow props are adjustable steel props, mostly used for shoring.

10. *The Opportune Spectator* (2012), which was reenacted in Düsseldorf at the end of the lecture with Falb, is a performance in which a group of people enter the exhibition space directly after a long run, sweating and with high pulse. Dressed in functional sportswear, slowly peeling and eating oranges, their high-pitched energy gradually transmits to the audience. After a few seconds, the runners become spectators themselves: heavily breathing out towards the audience, they stare into the exhibition space. For a better understanding of the possibilities of relationships between companion species, see Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People and Significant Otherness*, Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press/University of Chicago Press 2003.

Biographies



Alicia Frankovich (b.1980, Tauranga, Aotearoa New Zealand) lives and works in Melbourne. She has formerly been based in Berlin and Canberra. Frankovich has a BVA in sculpture from AUT, Auckland (2002) and an MFA from Monash University (2016). Frankovich is one of the leading Aotearoa artists of her generation, known for her performances, sculptures, videos, and her enquiry into exhibition situations, that engage viewers within exhibition formats.

She has been short-listed for the Kunstpreis der Böttcherstraße, in Bremen Germany, 2018 and the Walters Prize, New Zealand, 2012. She has presented solo and two-person exhibitions and performances at Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2017), Gebert Stiftung für Kultur, Rapperswil, Switzerland (2015), Kunstverein Hildesheim (2013) and at Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2011). Her group exhibitions and performances include: *Transcorporeal Metabolisms:* The 12th Performance Project of LISTE Art Fair, Basel (2016), *12th Swiss Sculpture Exhibition: Le Mouvement: Performing the City*, Biel/Bienne, Switzerland, *Framed Movements*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (2014), and *The Real Thing?*: Nouvelles Vagues: Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2013). In 2016 Frankovich was a Creative New Zealand resident at the ISCP New York.



Ulrike Gerhardt is a PhD candidate at Leuphana University where she is working on a thesis exploring cultural memory on the post-socialist transformation, horizontal art history and feminist theory. She also works as a writer and artistic director of *D'EST: A Multi-Curatorial Online Platform for Video Art from the Former "East" and "West."*

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