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Besideness: distance and proximity as queer disorientations to inhabit projective moving image installations¹

Danilo Nazareno Azevedo Baraúna

In this article, I explore the queer affective experience of disorientation in projective moving image installations through a case study of the artwork *Swinguerra* (2019) by Barbara Wagner and Benjamin de Burca. Key literature on the uses of projection in contemporary art has described the experience of moving image installations as disorientating.² However, this literature has not fully addressed the complex meanings of disorientation or explored this experience in academic writing. Furthermore, a segment of this literature, published in the first years of the 2000s, approaches the experience with projection as phenomenological due to the wandering of the viewer in the gallery, as it occurs in installations that use multiple-projections. Conversely, this literature also approach the necessity to understand projection from a psychoanalytical framework in regards to the experience with works that use single-projection and apply elements such as storytelling, which would incorporate the need for greater concentration and result in a process of absorption³. Consequently, some accounts address a presumable experience of absorption emerging from the contact with works of the 1990s onwards as too passive and lacking on corporeal engagement, while others argue that the process of wandering around the gallery results in a distracted viewer that lacks critical engagement with the moving image. This highlights the binary wandering/absorption as the one most commonly used in the work of moving image art scholars writing in the 2000s, even if not directly or explicitly attached to psychoanalytical or phenomenological frameworks.

Nevertheless, the literature that emerged in the second decade of the 2000s challenges these binaries by arguing that a process of absorption does not mean a lack of corporeal involvement,

and that wandering around the gallery does not necessarily equate to a lack of critical engagement.⁴ However, disorientation as a phenomenological concept remains unexplored even in this context, as it is always only briefly mentioned to describe the experience within projective moving image installations. In order to address this theoretical gap, I employ a case study analysis informed by queer phenomenology and autoethnography, and connected with methodological accounts of “queer-life-writing”⁵ and self-narration in the realm of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick named “experimental critical writing”.⁶ I adopt autoethnography in this study as a queer methodology that “engages personal experience, reflexivity, memory, and storytelling device” critically to address lived events and create what Tony E. Adams and Derek M. Bolen indicate as intense and vulnerable descriptions of these events through performative writing that engages with the experience of the body in a specific time and space.⁷

Sara Ahmed conceptualises disorientation as the living of specific moments of queer|failed orientation.⁸ This means that being disorientated is related to how we react to the moments in which we feel out of place. Disorientation occurs when a common ground fails to support some bodies whilst experiencing certain orientated lines. At this moment, this non-supported body becomes oblique, strange, slips away from common experiences. Ahmed proposes that moments of disorientation can be a phenomenon that we must learn from, as they allow us to look at and read the world differently; i.e., queer the world.⁹ According to Ahmed, one of the main results of feeling disorientated is a body that ultimately acts in “disturbing the others”, the core phenomenon of disorientation that will be explored in this study.¹⁰ Disorientation happens in the process of destabilisation of both the bodies and the ground as a continuum feature, becoming a phenomenon that continuously moves around the space and affects how people decide to gather around specific objects to build a common ground.¹¹ Therefore, whilst moving around in the art gallery, it is important to understand our role as potential agents of

affective transformations in the non-hierarchically sensorial environment produced by the process of becoming a disorientated body and consequently disturbing the other bodies. The case study analysed in this article evoked an experience of disorientation due to the constant and confusing process of having to decide which way to look, which room to enter, which side to walk towards, whilst spatially positioning myself (distancing and approximating) regarding the projections and the bodies that shared the common ground of the gallery with me.

Therefore, the main argument developed throughout this article is that the positionality we take in the art gallery concerning the distance and proximity to the projection, both physically and affectively, disturbs the other bodies differently, as it is necessary to implement a *besideness* attitude in relation to the other visitors and the content in the projected moving images. Consequently, *besideness* is the key concept used to discuss the disorientating phenomena of disturbing the others in projective moving image installations. Sedgwick conceptualises *besideness* as a positionality that challenges stable, hierarchical, and binary spatial positions such as beneath and beyond and dualistic thoughts such as “cause versus effect, subject versus object”.¹² Sedgwick further explains that *besideness* is comprised of “a wide ranging of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivalling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations”.¹³ Consequently, Sedgwick claims that *besideness* is about creating affective spaces for several objects to exist alongside one another as conflicting elements that can foster the building of collectivity whilst drawing attention to particularities. In this direction, I understand *besideness* in dialogue with Katharina Lindner’s appropriation of this concept, as a spatial and affective attitude to opening yourself to the “spaces of possibility” that shape other people’s bodies according to their positionalities.¹⁴ According to Lindner, this is to reach an affective engagement that allows non-normative forms of relationality and queer embodiments to

emerge.¹⁵ Hence, affectively approaching *besideness* requires an attitude of looking to your side, to what resides beside your body, which means close but not equal to, a distant proximity or a proximate distance.

This process of spatial orientation and decision-making is responsible for affectively activating *besideness* as an attitude that needs to be conveyed to face the moving image content, as the artwork *Swinguerra* exposes a *besideness* position regarding the relationalities established with the people that appear in the film. Barbara Wagner and Benjamin de Burca do not seem to represent someone. Instead, these artists speak nearby the bodies in the moving images, in the sense that Trinh T. Minh-Ha understands as not objectifying or speaking from a distance to the subject that speaks, but one that gets close enough to the subjects and amplifies their voices without undermining their competence of speaking for themselves.¹⁶ To speak nearby is to establish a *besideness* attitude to give space to voices and positionalities that are frequently silenced in a heteronormative social arrangement, thus addressing the inequalities inherent in the voices that are allowed to speak easily and make decisions for others.

In the following pages, I present an analysis of the experience of visiting the art gallery in which *Swinguerra* was installed during the 58th International Art Exhibition *La Biennale di Venezia* in 2019, considering the role of the *besideness* attitude in establishing affective relationalities towards the objects in this space, these being our bodies, the projections, and the subjects in the moving images. I first offer an affective orientated description of this experience and subsequently theoretically explore the disorientated moments of this encounter in the section *Distance and proximity as practices of inhabitation*. I discuss the role of positioning myself, distant or proximate to the projection, in the creation of the *besideness* attitude. First I argue that, in moving image installations, projection can become a peripheral element because

the visitors are distant from it, as they have to deal with the affective disturbance of the other bodies in the gallery. Conversely, I demonstrate how this process can be approached through the lenses of affective proximities with the projected moving images that do not necessarily require physical proximity in the gallery. Lastly, the subsection named *Inhabiting beside* approaches how articulating spatial distance and proximity can help us to understand the implementation of a *besideness* attitude and its developments in the space of the gallery through empathising with the content of the projected moving images.

***Swinguerra* (2019), by Barbara Wagner and Benjamin de Burca**

I wander through the streets of the Giardini in Venice, feeling the sweat running all over my skin and embracing the wetness of my body under an overwhelmingly blue and sunny sky, one that keeps my head facing down towards the warm stone floor since looking up is a sensory battle in which my eyes struggle to remain open while they are led by a nostalgic sensation of having felt this before. A few metres from where I stand, the Brazilian flag flaps smoothly on the national pavilion, and while I walk towards the entrance, my body seems to recognise the temperature that surrounds me as a sign of proximity incited by a potential encounter with a familiar environment. I move into the space, carried by an expectation of finding someone with whom I can establish a proximity, one that leads to a certain comfort from being in the presence of what is easily recognisable. A recognition of language, of a body that could move like me, talk like me, while at the same time an upset stomach and breathing movement that seems to travel slowly but heavily through my chest and throat, appearing out of the tension of meeting someone that could match those expectations.

I walk rapidly changing my movements and almost tiptoeing around as if running away from an encounter with proximities that I am not completely sure I want to embrace. Meanwhile, I

distance myself from the main entrance of the pavilion and now walk towards a song I can hear from a distance. While listening to this high frequency sound and enticing beats echoing throughout the environment, I quickly move towards the confrontation of an overcrowded and bright second gallery, where the natural light invades the space, filling every inch with a clarity that seems to introduce to the inside space the heat experienced outside in a constant rising of the temperature. While walking, I still perspire, this running water sticking my clothes to my skin, because of the almost tropical warmness, one that weakens my mobility, as if the warmth is pulling my body to the ground and turning my feet into being a heavier element that balances my weight in space and orientates my drowsy body.

In this lethargic itinerary, the song I can still hear drags me forward to the encounter of the amalgamation of bodies that, a few metres from me, seem to gather around, compressed by the sounds that still emanate from an unidentified source. I follow the music and consequently start shaping an encounter with these bodies because I can identify the loud beats as something that will lead me to the encounter with the projection. The high-frequency and frantic sounds reverberate in my body as if I am in a nightclub, one that is clearly overcrowded and where dancing is about the inevitable and accidental touching of other people`s bodies and the mixing of fluids that pass through our skins. I cannot avoid the touch of the other while attempting to find a space for myself to further explore the gallery. Inside of me, the strident tune seems to wander through my bones, energising every inch of my body, and each hair on my arms moves as a result of the random and fleetingly overwhelming movements and spasms that my muscles and organs employ in response to the beat of the song reaching my ears and caressing my skin.

I lose myself amongst the other visitor`s bodies, as it is not clear which way to go to find the films I am looking for. As this proximity increases the warmness in the space, the fleeting and

refreshing wind emanating from the movement of the fans in others' hands alleviates the sensorial tension resulting from the occasional friction of skins that occurs in the barrier that the gathering of these bodies creates at the entrance of this gallery. The thickly textured beats, however, remain as an atmospheric magnet that keeps me moving towards the unknown settings of the space and to trespass on the space of the mass of bodies I am facing until I finally identify two projections on opposite sides of the long and narrow gallery. Situated in the middle of the space, between the two projections, I repetitively look from one side to the other, glancing around in a movement that strains my neck, and I mimic the same confusion I notice in other people's behaviour, as they keep rotating their bodies from side to side.

I cannot seem to recognise differences in the films that would help me with choosing which way to move forward. I turn to the left, throwing my hands forward to intercept the space in between the other people around me, attempting to open a way that will allow my body to slowly move towards one side or the other, breaking the distance from the projection by infringing on the space in which the crowd is gathering in the middle of the gallery. On this side, the song echoes through my body as if an endless gust of wind is attached to the projection and is keeping my eyes open since I can hear lyrics in Portuguese and recognise a queerness in the bodies that I see dancing in the film. The comfort of listening to my mother tongue loosens the tension I feel in my muscles while I push my body against the wall, paralysed by the warmth from the laborious effort of trespassing on the amalgamation of the other bodies.

Watching the people dancing in the films provokes my own body to move as if attempting to sustain the high energy that encloses the space through the fast and uncontrollable beats, where the uneasiness of my tense muscles and rapid heartbeats of my seemingly immobile body viscerally drag me towards a self-questioning movement. What if I am missing something by

not watching the film projected on the other side? While turning around to look back, I face again the other bodies and can identify, at a distance, the slight differences of camera angles in the films. I choose to stay here on the left, as the thought of the stressful journey of moving around in this gallery leaves me unsettled since the struggle to again trespass in the space where all these bodies are positioned does not account for the affective and moving relationships I established with the dancing bodies in the films.

While the loudness of the frenetic song seems to increase, I stare at these bodies in the film as if recognising in their movements my own possibilities of inhabiting this space. As if their dancing gestures can somehow mirror movements that are not only employed as a means of confrontation in this dancing battle that I seem to also live, here in the realm of a queer positionality in the gallery. Paralysed by the contact with the film, I move back to my earlier experiences in Brazil while seeing myself virtually beside a diversity of people with whom I can establish an affective proximity precisely because their movements gravitate around my daily gestures in the Brazilian landscapes I can also recognise in the film. After a while of standing by the wall and watching the film, I leave the gallery by walking away and crossing in front of the bodies that face the same projection as me, interrupting their view with my own movements re-energised through contact with the familiar bodies in the projections.

Distance and proximity as practices of inhabitation.

The previous section described the affective experience of disorientation whilst visiting this article's case study, as an attempt to capture, as closely as possible, the queer affects and sense of disorientation emerging from the live encounter with the artwork. Using the term "encounter" to describe this action is also an attempt to address this moment as one involving "surprise",¹⁷ "conflict",¹⁸ "messiness",¹⁹ "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps,

dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning”,²⁰ or the unexpected (sometimes pleasurable, other times frightening) where disorientation can emerge as a queer embodied affect. In a queer phenomenological approach, this embodied encounter is crucially informed by how moving images move us through the kinaesthetic experience of walking, breathing, or shivering but also through the histories and sedimentations that shape our bodies concerning gender, race, class, and sexuality.

For instance, Jenny Chamarette argues that, in a film-phenomenological account, description plays a crucial role in understanding the affective qualities of encounters with films.²¹ The description is understood as unseparated from criticality since the act of describing already takes into consideration an analytical relationship between the viewer’s body and its contextual surroundings. Therefore, description is the most suitable method for capturing the fleeting disorientations and queer affects that emerge in the contact with projection. More than approaching queer phenomenology as a theoretical framework, in this article I highlight its use as a queer methodology that can provide queer, non-normative, destabilising and disorientated modes to analyse the experience within projective moving image installations. Consequently, queer phenomenology is understood as a mode to interfere in the academic form, voice, and style of moving image installations’ analyses, highlighting the role of embodied description, positionality, autobiographical approaches and first-person voice as crucial for this endeavour.

Therefore, the use of queer phenomenology and autoethnography includes the possibility to build up a critical analysis of moving image installations that connects the experience of the projection-related disorientation and the disorientations that shape queer lives. This theoretical alliance can help foster queer insights that challenge phenomenology’s universalist ideas of the bodily experience. In this section I will explore the role of the continuum between distance and

proximity as a phenomenon that can lead us to build a *besideness* attitude in the space of projective moving image installations based on the affective description undertaken in the previous section. Barbara Wagner and Benjamin de Burca's work *Swinguerra* made me inhabit disorientating environments in which the constant shift between distancing and approximating shaped the modes of relationalities with the projection and the other bodies in the gallery.²² According to Anne Cvetkovich, art installations are spaces that "facilitate new forms of embodied experience, including feelings that take the form of moods and sensibilities rather than specific emotions. Refusing stable boundaries between the interior and exterior of both self and space, it creates new forms of collectivity and sociality".²³ Hence, my focus in this analysis is not to highlight the discrete characteristics of distance and proximity as two different phenomena concerning inhabiting the space of projective moving image installations. Instead, I argue that these concepts, which seem to be part of an opposed binary, are interconnected as a mode to create relational affects in the spaces we inhabit as social and collective environments.

Proximity can connect us to something to occupy a space but detach us from the place we leave behind in a non-binary overlay of spatial and temporal dimensions. In this occupation, Ahmed argues that we orientate our attention towards something whilst failing to notice other objects around us.²⁴ Consequently, distancing from objects we have been attached to means leaving something behind whilst potentially creating an affective contact with other objects. This is in order to create proximities and supportive contacts that can make our positionalities less disorientated as we can detach from harmful affects that may have shaped our lives. Therefore, the continuum between distance and proximity presumes movement. This movement affects other that share the same ground as us, as the desire to distance from or approximate something is informed by the orientated tendencies that shape our bodies.²⁵ It is important to notice that

in discussing the affective qualities of distance and proximity, Ahmed refers not only to physical movements of bodies but also to the relationality that is built based on similarly affective, historical, theoretical, or sexual orientations. The experience with *Swinguerra* demonstrated that distancing and approximating from objects is a decision-making process that is entangled with an interplay of being in the physical space and affective distances and proximities with what resides outside the gallery and that is embodied through our movements in this same place.

Alison Butler addresses the role of distance and proximity in moving image installations by arguing that these works are imbued with a deictic aspect, where binarisms such as “here and there, now and then, us and them” appear and can allow the viewers virtually to access locations in the world that they would not usually be able to, an affective movement that can provide us with affective displacements in the immersive space of the gallery.²⁶ According to Butler, whilst these binary positionalities can sometimes appear to be fixed, they can turn into a dialogical endeavour.²⁷ I would like to advance Butler’s arguments by demonstrating how a process of disorientation occurs not in the rigidity of either here or there, distance or proximity, but in the continuous movement of recognising the materiality and positionality of our bodies whilst establishing a *besideness* attitude with the content of the projected moving images and the other bodies in the gallery. Consequently, the magnetising aspects of a projective moving image, as eliciting gatherings and proximities in the gallery, lead to the access of queer affects that can disorientate the other bodies located in our surroundings or build queer communalities that turn the space into a queer space.

Based on the claims of Ahmed, I employ the idea of *other* not as a matter of negating or undermining the existence and experience of someone who is not me, but as a form of mutual

bodily extension materialised through the queer affects that can emerge from the collision of different subjectivities. Hence, the other is not me but exists in the conflict of occupying a space beside me, where, according to Ahmed, desire plays a crucial role.²⁸ A desire to establish proximities with something else as an “affective social force, the glue”²⁹ brings to the experience a consciousness of what is not me. Nevertheless, an affective confrontation does not imply turning this mutual extension into a single body, as to Ahmed, establishing proximities does not equal merging with or completely understanding other body’s histories.³⁰ To identify an *other*, thus, is to recognise the limitations of our histories in addressing the diversity of experiences that shape the bodies that inhabit the same space as we do. A *besideness* affective attitude towards the other is a confrontation with the limitations of our bodies in speaking for the other, which can sometimes mean ceasing to speak. In the art gallery, my body and the ones I shared the space with mutually affected and disturbed one another, resulting in kinaesthetic empathic responses that were either orientated towards the moving image content or towards the other visitors during the moments of experiencing the work *Swinguerra* in-between distance and proximity.

In this direction, to distance is sometimes to leave a space towards the encounter with the uncertain, unsettling and disorientating, as the new objects that arrive close to our bodies might not support an orientation that allow us to move forward. Distance is, according to Ahmed, “the expression of certain loss, of the loss of grip over an object that is already within reach”.³¹ Hence, the proximity of some bodies can prevent us from moving affectively, but other objects around us may work as an orientation device that redirects us towards more productive ways to proceed with our journeys. To Ahmed, this usually occurs when similar tendencies are followed, as “we tend toward that which is near, just as what is near shows us our tendencies”, and common ground is built to turn the space of disorientation into a queer space that supports the emergence of queer affects.³² In the experience with this article’s case study, the physical

distance from projection, for example, exists because of the proximity of the bodies that prevented me from moving towards the moving images, whilst the contact with the atmospheric qualities of sound worked to establish affective relationships that orientated me towards the subsequent encounter with the projections.

Inhabiting the middle of the gallery in *Swinguerra* affected my body as a sensorial temporal suspension of the process of decision-making. This happened because I could not move forward without having to engage in a kinaesthetic struggle in relation to the others' presence, which consequently put me in contact with a queer embodiment in the process of implementing unusual gestures that I normally associate with overcrowded nightclubs, as mentioned in the case study's description. Imagine you are dancing amidst a large number of people in a nightclub: Your skin will accidentally touch another person's, you might become shy when someone faces you, you might deny any further interaction, or you might embrace the gaze as a possibility for building an affective relation. You dance moving your arms, your legs, and your head in different directions, as the sound seems to dominate your full body whilst you respond to the spatiality created by the movement of the other bodies that are not yours, but directly affect your sense of spatiality because their proximity disturbs your dancing movements. This is exactly the experience of queer embodiment and disorientation that being in the middle of the gallery in *Swinguerra* provided me. Now picture yourself dancing in the same nightclub, in the middle of the dancefloor, and you decide to go buy a drink in the bar you can only reach visually from a distance by looking to the other side of the space. You have to open space by positioning your leg amongst other legs, by using your hands to open a way to the bar. By using your hands, I mean not only moving them away from your body. Your hands metaphorically excavate the dancefloor, gesturing with distorted fingers that seem to challenge the normality of their orientation, because the small qualities of your fingers allow

you to access the small and empty spaces between the bodies that prevent you from moving. This was my kinaesthetic engagement in the art gallery when attempting to distance myself from the amalgamation of bodies and move towards the projections on the left, whilst the energetic beats of Brazilian funk music kept viscerally moving my insides. However, whilst the amalgamation of bodies kept me fleetingly away from the projections, some other elements approximated me to them.

Consequently, what happens when we physically approximate objects? As Ahmed argues, “Some proximities exist to “support” actions – some surfaces are there to support. The work of support involves proximity and is the ground for the experience of other proximities”.³³ Approximating an object, in queer phenomenological terms, means establishing relationalities that can either start supporting our movements in the common ground (rescuing us from disorientation) or create hostile spaces from which we will need to distance ourselves because they can be extensively or fleetingly traumatic and disorientating for the senses.



Figure 1. *Swinguerra* (2019), by Barbara Wagner and Benjamin de Burca, Installation View. Photography: Riccardo Tosetto
Photography / @shooting_different. Published with the authorisation of the author. Available from: <https://www.riccardotosetto.com> (Accessed: 24/11/2021).

In *Swinguerra*, the positionality of my body amongst an overwhelming and suffocating crowd of people was decisive for me to quickly implement decisions regarding which side of the gallery to direct my attention to and physically move forward. It was the disturbing and disorientating affects resulting from the proximities of the other bodies that put me in closer contact with the surface of the distant projection on the left side. The previously mentioned space crowded with bodies in the middle of the gallery demonstrated the potentiality of the encounter with projective moving images as forming areas of conviviality that consequently were zones of conflict and destabilisation that affectively disturbed the occupants of the space.³⁴ In the middle of the gallery, the elements that seemed to orbit around the projections were responsible for helping the bodies to choose which side to go or decide to maintain the disorientating experience of staying between the projections. The latter decision might happen

as the moving images could not provide an affective relation that provoked some bodies to move towards the projections and approximate one of the sides.

In my experience with *Swinguerra*, the sound turned out to be mainly responsible for the emergence of a queer affective relationality. I decided to leave the gathering because I could not establish a proximity with the bodies around me. I moved to the left, approximating the projection because of the affective and kinaesthetic relationship that I had started building with the bodies I could see in the films, as they portrayed a queerness that conversed with my Brazilian body's response to the contact with the Brazilian music that we were all sharing in the gallery and in the moving images. As Giuliana Bruno claims, "Film moves, and fundamentally "moves" us, with its ability not simply to render affects but to affect in transmittable forms and intermediated ways. This means that such a medium of movement moves to incorporate and interact with other spaces that provoke intimate yet public response".³⁵ By subsequently taking the position of moving whilst affected by the moving images and closely facing the projection, I could finally identify common grounds that put my body in contact with queer affects supporting my occupancy of the space, as the previous contact with the other visitors did not provide me with any commonalities. The potential encounter with bodies that could look like me, talk like me, or move like me, did not happen in the gathering of bodies or in the first steps I took in the gallery, but in the affective displacement of contacting the bodies in the projections.

Therefore, the experience with the case study demonstrates how distancing from the other bodies in the gallery, either arbitrarily or intentionally, could create disorientating personal and intimate spaces. Conversely, approximating other people in the gallery was disorientating when these bodies did not support, and even disturbed, the movements I intended to employ towards the projections. In the disorientation emerging from the *distant proximity* or *proximate distance*

from the bodies in the gallery and the projections, a *besideness* attitude emerged as a possibility to build an affective reconciliation with the queerness that shaped this process; this will be explored in the next section.

Inhabiting beside

In the previous section, I demonstrated how the binarism presumably inherent to the ideas of distance and proximity is instead formed by a continuum of distant proximity or proximate distance. This means that distance and proximity can only exist if understood in relation to one another, as a fluid and non-binary phenomenon that affects what it touches whilst moving to enable connections with different objects that can either support or undermine this movement. It might not be possible to inhabit a space without leaving behind the one we were occupying, the backgrounds, privileges, and histories that affected us, including the disturbing presence of other bodies throughout the temporal developments of our lives. However, it is conceivable to move forward carrying along and beside us a series of objects and affects that will help the improvement of queer movements because they turn the space into a queer space, providing common grounds for people who may live through disorientating lines.

Hence, a *besideness* attitude towards the other emerges in the fluid temporal and spatial movement of distancing and approximating from different objects, and of identifying who and what lies beside us, to find a common and supportive ground to build and maintain queer spaces. During this process, we might discover that experiences that look distant may have more proximity with us than we would consider. An experience that is not mine and does not affect me does not mean an experience with which I cannot empathise with and establish a *besideness* attitude to overcome harmful social disorientations that happen, for example, in the life of queer people whose existence challenges heteronormative lines of relationality.

However, as stated in this article's introduction, this means understanding when to talk beside the other. In this section I will explore how the recognition of bodies I encountered in a distant proximity or proximate distance to the surface of the projections rescued me from or pulled me towards disorientation. This happened due to the kinaesthetic empathy with the movements and histories of these diegetic bodies or the installation settings, which led to the rise of *besideness* as a mode of relationality with the moving images.

I would like to review briefly the kinaesthetic experience of being in the middle of the gallery and amongst the other visitors in *Swinguerra*. As previously stated, at that moment it was the suffocating atmosphere and the disorientation generated from the proximity of the other bodies that made me choose which side to go, even though I was not secure about the differences in the two projections that I could see from a distance. The initial sustained visual contact with the content of the moving images projected when I stood beside one of the walls to watch the films can easily be read as the moment in which my body established a kinaesthetically empathic proximity that subsequently led to a *besideness* attitude. Therefore, the first layer of a *besideness* attitude emerged in the encounter with the others and the disorientation caused by their bodies, and consequently my body, in the middle of the gallery. As discussed in the previous section, it was necessary to embody queerness as a mode to inhabit the same place with other bodies, thus having to implement movements that could only exist in the relationality with the others beside me. Through queer movements, informed by a *besideness* attitude, we all needed to move with each other, move because of the others, or open space for the other bodies to move, if we intended to reach the projections as a collectively desired object.

The subsequent decision of walking to one side seemed to relate to choosing which side of the battle portrayed in the films I was supporting in the gallery. However, it became virtually

impossible to distinguish what side of the battle was chosen. This is because by moving to the left and staying there, it became impossible to access the film projected on the opposite side of the gallery since the amalgamation of bodies prevented me from visually reaching the projections and the sound playing around the environment was the same for both films. Through this process, Barbara Wagner and Benjamin de Burca's installation appeared to implement in the space the second layer of a *besideness* attitude concerning their work, since moving to one side was based on the kinaesthetic reverberations of the act of looking at the bodies dancing in the moving image that, to some extent, affected my body. This affective relationship emerged as the bodies implemented movements informed by a queer kinaesthesia. Lindner draws on the work of Jonathan Bollen³⁶ to define queer kinaesthesia as the modes in which our bodies can move in the space, disrupting social expectations related to our assigned genders.³⁷ This is to disorientate normative modes of approach to binarisms such as femininity and masculinity, which according to Lindner are informed by the background of the bodies that implement this queer kinaesthesia, and are consequently intersected by relationships with class and race.



Figure 2. *Swinguerra* (2019), by Barbara Wagner and Benjamin de Burca, Installation View. Photography: Riccardo Tosetto
Photography / @shooting_different. Published with the authorisation of the author. Available from: <https://www.riccardotosetto.com> (Accessed: 24/11/2021).

Lindner points out how queer bodies inhabit space differently because of the disturbance of binarisms, sometimes leading them to be considered socially wrong, deviant or inappropriate due to the differences implemented in relation to touch, distancing, approximating and contacting other objects. The bodies dancing in the moving images created a zone of conflict not only to keep the bodies of the visitors together but to keep us beside one another to choose which side to go in the dancing battle that happened in the films. Meanwhile, we had to deal affectively with the differences in inhabiting the space. It was the contact with the queer bodies on the screen that turned the space of the gallery into a queer space after the relative sensorially traumatic experience of inhabiting the middle of the gallery along with such a large number of bodies that prevented me from moving. By turning the space into a queer space, the films provided me with an affective mechanism to initiate a walk on common grounds and thus

reconnect with the queerness of my body as a mode to overcome the previous stressful disorientation.

This argument does not imply that inhabiting the gallery with the other bodies was an unproductive experience. Rather, the queerness of the bodies in the moving images was potentially responsible for maintaining some other bodies in the middle of the gallery for a larger period than the one I undertook, as these other people may not have established proximities with the bodies in the moving images. However, even if a process of kinaesthetic empathy does not emerge for some visitors as a process of “in-this-togetherness”³⁸, as seeing themselves in that context, they could have potentially worked as mechanism to “raise awareness” and build an extended *besideness* attitude towards the dancers in the films and the bodies beside them in the gallery.³⁹

The music video documentary format of *Swinguerra* opened up space for these bodies to speak for themselves by bringing their dancing movements to the surface of the projections through their own means of social and spatial engagements. Barbara Wagner and Benjamin de Burca created a film in which they do not approximate those queer bodies as if they were part of their context. Instead, they employ a *besideness* attitude, in the sense of letting the dancers shape their means of showing how their bodies can be portrayed in the moving images. Therefore, dancing in this film became a great example of what Lindner states is a spectacular way to re-orientate normative embodiments⁴⁰, opening space for the gallery visitors affectively to “investigate questions of gender, sexuality, and desire by paying attention to ‘movement style, spatial negotiation, or relational positioning’”.⁴¹ In the sustained contact with the queer bodies in the moving images a sense of ‘feeling at home’ emerged through recognition of those bodies as part of a cultural context that affectively talked to me as a Latinx American.

According to Cvetkovich, this sort of commonality is crucially informed by affect as it intends to underpin alternative relationalities and “modes of being, and being with others, when established cultures and institutions might not be available”.⁴² In the recognition of a Latinx context, a home from which I had been geographically distant, I quickly established proximities with the moving images because the normative aspects of the art gallery did not support my affective movements amongst the other bodies. Regarding being distant from home, Ahmed argues that “‘distance’ is also an effect of an orientation we have already taken, which makes what is ‘near’ close to us in more than a spatial sense”.⁴³

Ahmed’s words exemplify Cvetkovich’s discussion of an affective common as not existing in fixed physical locations, but as a sensory experience that is shared by the people who gather around common affectivities.⁴⁴ Therefore, the ‘at home’ feeling as mentioned by Ahmed, does not equal a specific territory but is instead a metaphor for a place that supports gatherings.⁴⁵ In this context, a *besideness* attitude is about the possibility of bringing someone close to allow them to inhabit a space beside us and make them comfortable even if sometimes at a distance, even if we do not completely embody their histories. This non-coincidence of experiences is an important element to review when approaching the establishment of *besideness*, an empathic attitude towards experiences that are not ours. I cannot embody experiences I have not lived but I can activate a *besideness* attitude by trusting the bodies that claim to have lived common, sometimes distant but proximate disorientating experiences.

In *Swinguerra* a proximity to the projection could only be established through disorientation, as an attempt to disturb and affect the bodies who do not live the experiences portrayed but who can move beside in parallel disorientating common grounds, to re-orientate similarly social experiences that are harmfully based on prejudices regarding class, race, sexuality or

nationality. As mentioned before, by putting so many different bodies together in the same space, this moving image installation created gatherings that lead to the confrontation of the affects that travel around, affecting everyone mutually. Cvetkovich reminds us that understanding these relationalities through the point of view of queerness is to approach sensory politics, “a way of making space not only for different kinds of bodies but for different modes of perception, and ones that are fully embodied or material”.⁴⁶

Through opening space for a *besideness* attitude to emerge, the case study explored in this article built spaces of conviviality through the gathering of different bodies in different circumstances, turning “physical gatherings meaningful as the ways people come together to form collectivities, especially against concerns that such gatherings are too small scale or atomized”.⁴⁷ Inhabiting the space of the gallery in *Swinguerra* allowed common queer affects to emerge as possible mechanisms to disorientate expectations and normative modes of relationalities within the gallery through the constant suspension and restatement of the freedom to move around. These commonalities, however, are crucially informed by conflict, particularities, “ambivalence, mixed feelings and negative affects”.⁴⁸ The specific process of empathising differently with the bodies in the films presented in *Swinguerra* exemplifies how these conflicts were created as a mode to destabilise my body through the establishment of affective distant proximities or proximate distances.

Consequently, in the process of moving around the gallery whilst distancing or approximating other bodies, the projections could become a peripheral element in the immediate spatial experience, as the bodies of the other people disturbed my freedom of movement in the space, highlighting the potentialities of projective moving image as a magnetising element that elicits gatherings through either proximate collectivities or intimate distances. In this context, distance

and proximity might imply a level of physical movement, wandering around by leaving a location of the gallery to get physically close to the projection. However, distance and proximity can be understood as a level of absorption, since distancing from one place in the gallery means establishing a sustained proximity with the content of the moving images that will still make you move viscerally. They co-exist as a fluid endeavour.

Through employing a *besideness* attitude in this context, the experience within projective moving image installations changes what seems far away from our histories into something considerably close to our affective experiences. *Besideness* undermines the binarism of wandering and absorption in projective moving image installations by establishing distant proximities and proximate distances. In the artwork analysed, we affectively move the bodies in the gallery or the films that seem distant from us to our side to move beside and along with them. In establishing this attitude, small-scale collectivities can be built based on the queer affects that emerge from socially disorientated commonalities concerning sexuality, race, gender, and nationality.

Notes

¹ This article partially results from my PhD research titled ‘Projective Moving Image Installation as Disorientation Device: a Phenomenology of Queer Encounters’, fully funded by the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education (CAPES) – Ministry of Education of Brazil (Process number 88881.128292/2016-01), and developed at The Glasgow School of Art.

² For instance, Chrissie Iles (2002), Malcolm Turvey *et al.* (2003), Sean Cubitt (2007), Mary Ann Doanne (2009), Maeve Connolly (2009), Kate Mondloch (2010), Tamara Trodd (2011), Erika Balsom (2013), Giuliana Bruno (2014), Catherine Elwes (2015), and Alison Butler (2019).

³ For instance, these two approaches appear in the works of Chrissie Iles (2002), Malcom Turvey *et al.* (2003), Dominique Païni (2004), Sean Cubitt (2007), Liz Kotz (2008), Gregor Stenmrich (2009), Mary Ann Doanne (2009), Tamara Trodd (2011), Maria Wlash (2011).

⁴ For instance, Kate Mondloch (2010), Christine Ross (2011), Erika Balsom (2013), Giuliana Bruno (2014), Catherine Elwes (2015), and Alison Butler (2019).

⁵ Scott Herring and Lee Wallace, *Long term: essays on queer commitment* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021), p. 18.

⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Teaching ‘Experimental Critical Writing’”, in *The ends of Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

⁷ Tony E. Adams and Derek M. Bolen, “Tragic Queer at the Urinal Stall, Who, Now, Is the Queerest One of All? Queer Theory | Autoethnography | Doing Queer Autoethnography”, *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* Volume 4, Issue Number 1 (2017): p. 104.

⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, Others*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 157-158.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151-152.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 152-153.

¹² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁴ Katharina Lindner, *Film Bodies: Queer Feminist Encounters with Gender and Sexuality in Cinema* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2018), p. 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁶ Trinh T. Min-Ha, “‘Speaking Nearby’: A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-Ha”, *Visual Anthropology Review* Volume 8, Issue Number 1 (1992): p. 85.

¹⁷ Sara Ahmed, *Strange encounters: embodied others in post-coloniality*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 6; Lindner, *Film bodies*.

¹⁸ Ahmed, *Strange encounters*, p. 6.

¹⁹ Heather Love, “Queer Messes”. *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly*, Volume 44, Number 3 & 4 (2016): 345-349.

²⁰ Sedgwick, *Tendencies*. p. 7.

²¹ Jenny Chamarette, “Embodying Spectatorship: From Phenomenology to Sensation,” *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), p. 315.

²² *Swinguerra* (2019) was installed in the Brazilian National Pavilion located in the Giardini, one of the main exhibition spaces of the International Exhibition *La Biennale di Venezia* in the city of Venice Italy. The work occupied the two galleries of the pavilion. In the first gallery a series of photographs were installed on the walls. In the second gallery, the films were projected onto two screens located on opposite walls of the long space.

²³ Anne Cvetkovich, “‘It Feels Right to Me’: Queer Feminist Art Installations and the Sovereignty of the Senses”, *Feminist Media Histories*, Volume 7, Issue Number 2 (2021): p. 44.

²⁴ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 165-166.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

²⁶ Alison Butler, *Displacements: Reading Space and Time in Moving Image Installations*, (Switzerland: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2019), p. 116.

- ²⁷ Ibid, p. 137.
- ²⁸ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 114-115
- ²⁹ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 128.
- ³⁰ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 128.
- ³¹ Ibid, p. 166.
- ³² Ibid, p. 126.
- ³³ Ibid, p. 166.
- ³⁴ Some authors in the literature about projection in contemporary art, such as Maeve Connolly (2009), Sven Lütticken (2009), Giuliana Bruno (2014), and Matthew Noble-Olson (2016), Alison Butler (2019), discuss projective moving images' ability to create areas of conviviality in the art gallery.
- ³⁵ Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: matters of aesthetics, materiality, and media* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 145.
- ³⁶ Jonathan Bollen, "Queer Kinesthesia: performativity on the dancefloor", in *Dancing desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).
- ³⁷ Lindner, *Film Bodies*, p. 81.
- ³⁸ Ami Harbin, *Disorientation and Moral Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 110.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 66.
- ⁴⁰ Lindner, *Film Bodies*, p. 79.
- ⁴¹ Ibid, p. 81.
- ⁴² Cvetkovich, "'It Feels Right to Me'," p. 33.
- ⁴³ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 126-127.
- ⁴⁴ Cvetkovich, "'It Feels Right to Me'," p. 34.
- ⁴⁵ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 126.
- ⁴⁶ Cvetkovich, "'It Feels Right to Me'," p. 46.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 47.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 34.

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