

Lisa Moravec, PhD Research on Human and Animal Dressage Performances: Archival Research and Conference Presentation in the States

For some years, I have been interested in the work of a hand-full of American artists, working with performance across media. In my PhD, focused on the performance practice of human and human-horse dressage, I am theorising and historicising a selection of their rather underexposed performance works in relation to the body of work of a selection of European artists. With the support of the Una Ellis-Fermor Travel award, I was able to spend ten days in the US to visit archives in New York City and LA, and to participate in the 'Animal Engagement' working group at the American Society for Theatre Research in San Diego.

My research trip started in New York, where I visited the archive and library of MoMA. Within two fully-packed days, I managed to read and photocopy some documents of Robert Morris' early writings and looked through the archive of Joseph Beuys, which pointed me towards many more overseas connections and changed my perception of his work. In addition to the archival work, I was able to see two of MoMA's large retrospective exhibitions on the work of two artists that I am researching. One was on Yvonne Rainer's work and her involvement in the NYC-based Judson Church, and the other was a large retrospective of Bruce Nauman's work. I was extremely lucky as the curator of one of the shows found time to talk me through the exhibition and the artist's practice. The timing of my visit was perfect in all respects. After visiting the same exhibition again by myself to spend more time with the video installation that I am writing about in my thesis at PS1, I went straight to the airport to catch my plane to LA.

Once on the other side of the country, I pursued my scheduled archive visits. I spent my four days at the Getty Research Centre, looking through many boxes, and at an art foundation. After more archival and oral history work, I also had the chance to explore parts of the city to get some kind of feeling of the cultural life/style, which very much inspired me. After collecting the documents that I wanted to see, and some more that I did not expect to find, I went further south to San Diego.

The next day I headed to the campus of the University of California, San Diego where the ASTR forum (La Jolla) took place. The large annual conference was supposed to take place at a hotel, but as the hotel workers went on strike, the conference shrunk to the size of a much more intimate forum—which meant that we still proceeded with our planned off-site visit at the San Diego Zoo and had working sessions on campus. Weeks before the meetings we sent in our essays and exchanged feedback. Meeting with the people of the online group in person to discuss our ideas, to go on a small adventure together at the zoo, and exchange stories was a remarkably wonderful, supportive, and inspiring experience. I am so happy that I could connect with international researchers at ASTR, exchange research, and start (still ongoing) discussions. Coming down to San Diego after my research trip was literally the cherry on top of the ice. I am very grateful that I could undertake the trip, participate in the conference and connect with researchers whose work I very much appreciate.

Overall, my research trip to the US has been one of the best experiences I have made since starting my PhD—mainly because of the people that I had the chance to talk to. Unfortunately, the trip was far too short, which means that I have to go back there. Thank you for awarding me the Una Ellis-Fermor Travel award and for supporting my research work.

