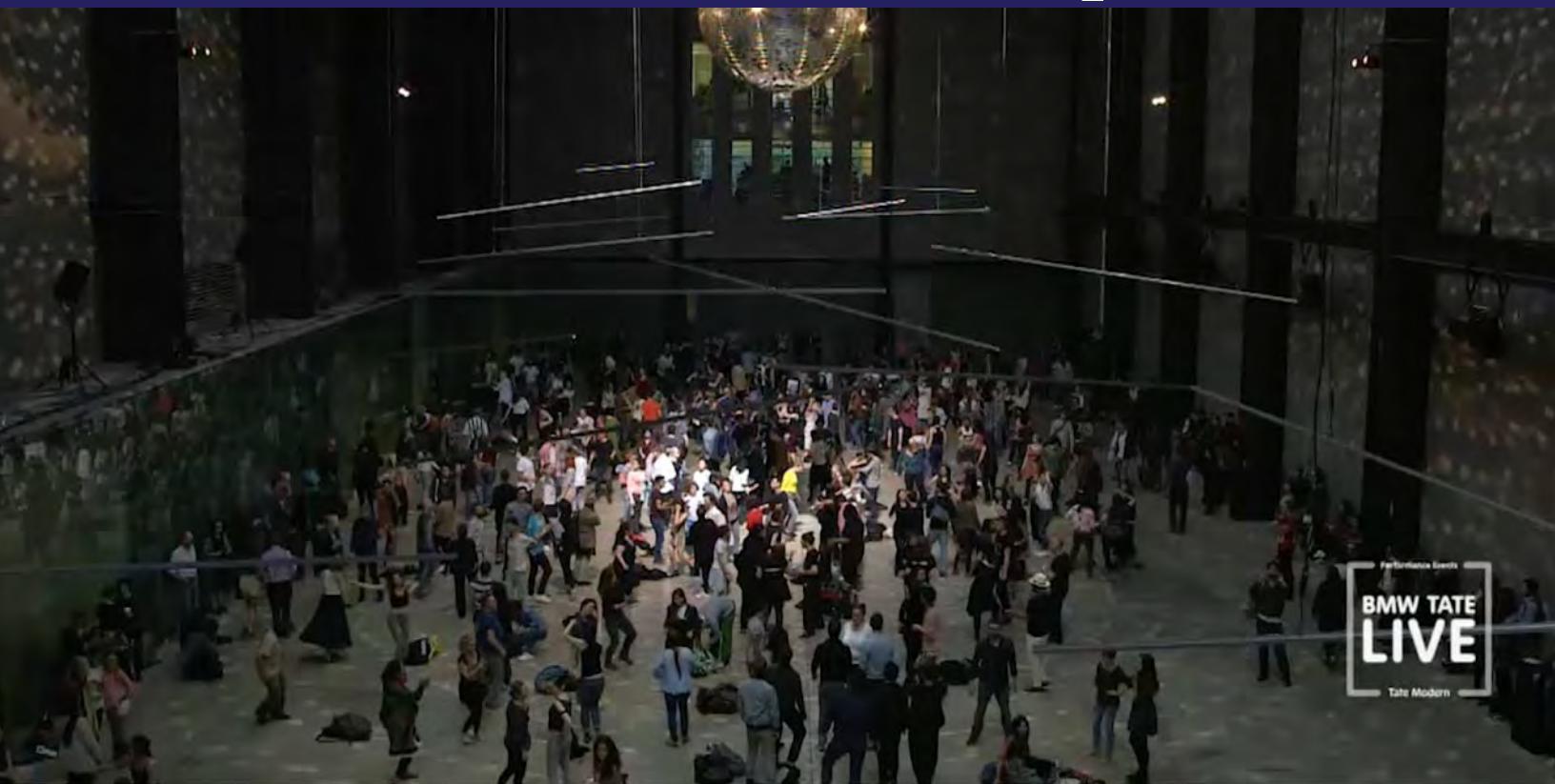


“Dance and Dispossession”



This event is free and open to the public

Tuesday, February 11, 2020

2:00 p.m.

Kaufman 208

This talk is about the violence that grounds white liberal choreographic fantasies. Exploring the work of Merce Cunningham and Boris Charmatz – two choreographers who create idealized forms of ‘democratic’ kinetics – I conceptualize Euro-American theatre dance as an act that promises to set bodies in hopeful or reparative motion while contributing to the social conditions through which groups of people are held in place, forcibly displaced, or experience the very impossibility of self-determination and material life. Following Saidiya Hartman, I search for practices of white domination in “those scenes in which terror can hardly be recognized” and ask how dance in progressive social spaces might do the work of rationalizing the violent materialities on which those spaces depend (1997, 4). I first consider Cunningham’s work in relation to his residencies at Black Mountain College and its utopian practices of land, community, and racial dispossession. When viewed in light of the College’s location in a Jim Crow rural South, Cunningham’s choreographies there may be understood to project a fantasy of individual liberty where spatial availability is figured as the guarantor of a white-settler conception of the land of the free. I then pick up Cunningham’s legacy in twenty-first-century London by reflecting on Charmatz’s disco in Tate Modern (2015) – part of his itinerant Musée de la danse – finding on this glittering dancefloor the expungement of colonial histories from his anti-institutional interventions into metropolitan institutions of display. Ultimately, I position these choreographies as cultures of white liberal ideality where foundational histories of antiblack violence are diffused into the consecration of ‘freedom’ as the mutuality of self-possessed individuals.

Arabella Stanger is Lecturer in Drama: Theatre and Performance at the University of Sussex, UK. Her current monograph excavates histories of spatial and racial dispossession underwriting idealistic dances of the Euro-American theatre dance canon. She is part of collaborative project with Royona Mitra (Brunel) and Simon Ellis (Coventry) on contemporary dance and racism, and is embarking on new research into rebellious bodies at sea.