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Photo Essay

Installing Performances of Spatial Labour

By Beth M. Weinstein

My doctoral examination exhibition titled *Performing Spatial Labour* (2019), and the four performance-installations it assembled, catalysed a praxis of 'spatial labour' to render previously invisible labour and spatial conditions not merely knowable, but 'sensible' (Rancière). Spatial labour, as developed through my practice-based doctoral research (2016-2020), incorporated architectural practices and building actions related to the 'making up', 'making real' (Scarry), and making sensible of spatial conditions. I employed architecture's primary instruments—drawings, models, and texts—reinterpreted performatively to give precedence to the actions that call forth space or produce its '(un)becoming'¹. I leveraged spatial labour to explore invisible spaces and forms of labour (in)activity associated with two sites of internment. The first of these were demolished WWII-era Japanese American internment camps in the US where internees wove camouflage nets, fabricated scale models, and moulded bricks. The second was the razed Centre d'Identification de Vincennes (CIV), a detention centre in Paris from the Algerian War period used to prevent the interned from working.

The exhibition immersed visitors in a multisensory milieu that choreographed their forensic² (Gibson, Weizman) labour to make sense of the (in)visibilities within and of architectures of interment as evident in the four exhibited performance-installations: *Intern[ed]*, *States of Exception*, *Palimpsest* and *Razing Manzanar II*. While the exhibition spatialised traces of these performance-installations, it also hid material, embodied, and affective labour, including acts needed for the exhibition's (un)becoming—orchestrating, sourcing, procuring, forming, assembling, and recycling materials. The labour itself was obfuscated by its visible outcomes. Yet it was through not only the visible evidence of past labours, but also the visitors' more-than-visual experience of the exhibition and their embodied detective work that the camps' recurrence and invisible-ised labourers became sensible.

1 I define '(un)becoming' as both the less-than-beautiful quality of things or spaces when coming apart and, through parentheses inflecting this and other terms, recurrent oscillations between states.

2 Drawing upon Eyal Weizman and Forensic Architecture's practices, 'forensic' practices include seeking and uncovering truths, engaging artefacts' expressive potential, and bringing evidence to the forum (Forensic 746-8). In Gibson's practice, the gallery visitor is a 'forensic audience... looking to construct a worldview' (104-5) and a viewer-investigator in motion (135-6).

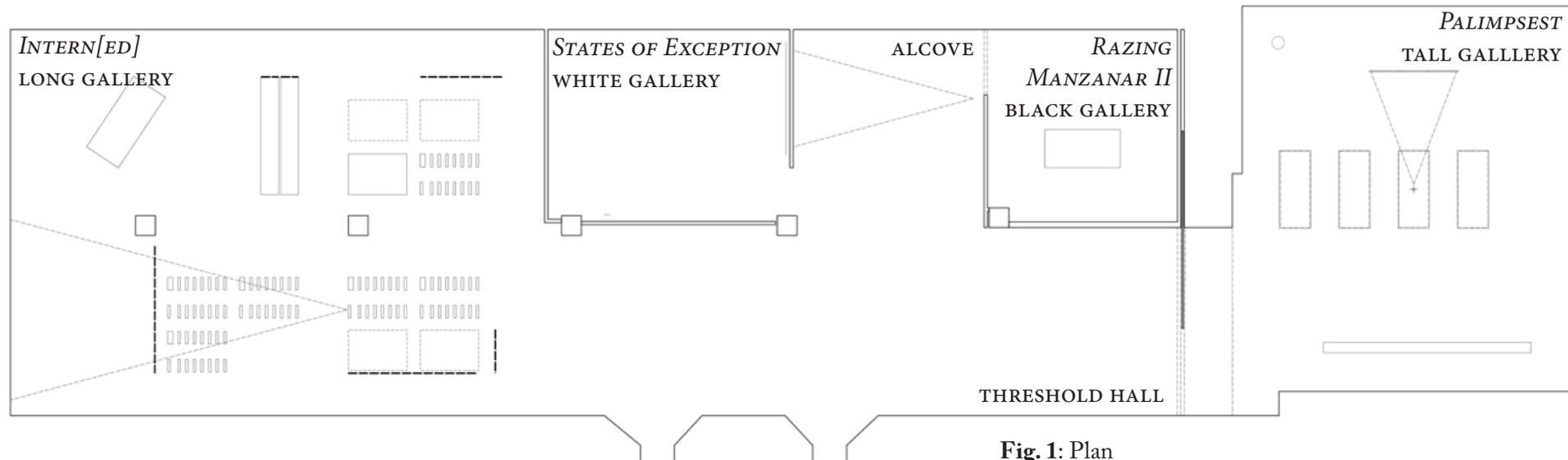


Fig. 1: Plan
Performing Spatial Labour, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart, 2019

Spatialising Traces

The Plimsoll Gallery's 'dumb-bell' configuration, with its 'long' and 'tall' galleries at opposing ends of a linear hall, afforded a spatial opposition between my explorations of the US internment camps, where internees wove camouflage, moulded bricks, and fabricated scale models (*Intern[ed]*), and of the CIV, where Algerian labourers were detained and restrained from working (*Palimpsest*). The placing, spacing, and scaling of objects and images in the gallery cued visitors' viewing—from afar or nearby, frontally, obliquely, or from above.

Threshold hall: The hall thickened the transition from the outside world to the four distinct gallery atmospheres, and highlighted the contrasting spatialities and content at opposing ends. Its darkness brought entering visitors to stillness; a pause necessary for eyes, ears, and other senses to adjust. Within this unlit space, I provided three benches for resting; these afforded places apart in which to process and make sense of what had been sensed.

Intern[ed]: I leveraged the long gallery's expansiveness as an analogue to the western US's vast landscapes. A discontinuous 'text-ile' enclosure suggested the porous fence-line of the camouflage-camps. This enclosed area housed camp scale-models in varying states of (un)becoming, plus tools and traces from the paper brick/barrack scale-model production. Projected video of on-site actions contrasted in scale to medium and tiny screens revealing video-documentation of an off-site performance.

Palimpsest: In contrast to the seeming emptiness of the long gallery, I filled the tall gallery, creating a claustrophobic atmosphere. A series of floating obstacles—suspended chambers of *notes blanches*, a screen, column, and light-box—obligated visitors' circumambulation to mentally assemble fragmented forms of evidence. Visitors needed to pry their way into the bed-sized chambers to make sense through other senses.

States of Exception: I used the thin wall separating the alcove and white gallery to support two distinct protagonists' views of a performed erasure—the interior elevation as architect's view and the exterior as witness' view. Visitors moved between the white gallery as analogue for the performance work site in which hyper-visible labour and its associated equipment were exposed and the alcove, with its bench, analogous to the comfortable place from which the audience observed the (dis)appearing labour in the original performance.

Razing Manzanar II: In this smallest and darkest gallery, I installed a table on which an erasure is/was/will be performed—the projected footage of one past erasure and the physical traces of another. A patch of projected light, approximately the size of a drawing, was the only illumination in the space. It beckoned visitors towards the table and the scratching sound it emitted. Chairs at both ends of the table marked places of absent labourers.

Moving between Protagonists' Perspectives

In order to make sense of the building, modification, and demolition of the camouflage-camps and the CIV, plus the labour (in)activity occurring there, first necessitated my own and then the visitors moving between vantage points. These vantage points were those of distinct protagonists who represented, drew, photographed, and scribed their own renditions of the camps.

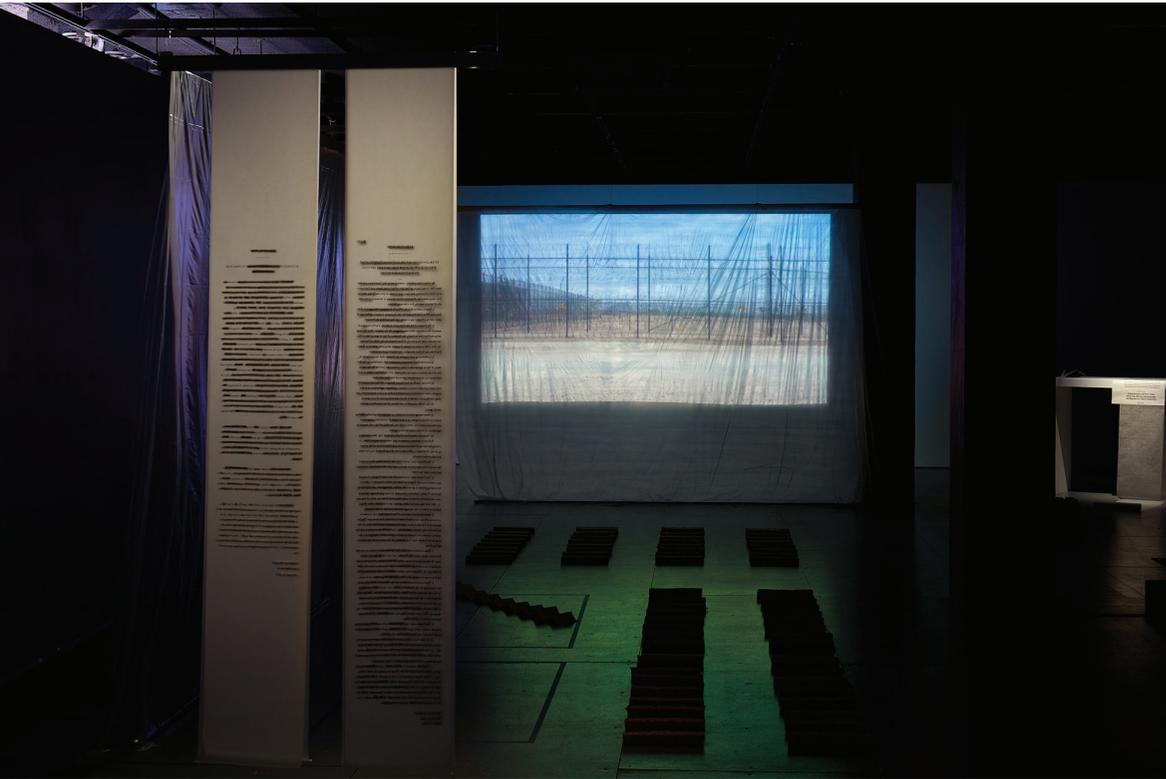
- Government agents who called forth these US and French camps. They spoke through executive order texts, master plan drawings, and aerial, oblique, and surveillance camera photography.
- Architects and builders of the camps. They communicated through orthographic projection drawings, annotations, and specifications.
- Witnesses surrounding the camps. US citizens in the 1940s and French humanitarian aid workers and journalists in the 1960s recounted what they saw and heard from nearby in reports and snapshots.
- The interned themselves who journaled their embodied experiences from ground level.

Each protagonist and their perspective informed the dispositive and documentation of the original performance-installations. These were then made present again in *Performing Spatial Labour* through spatial and choreographic strategies (viewing and moving hovering/around/outside/inside) and atmospheric qualities of sound (repetitive/insidious/punctuating/haunting) and darkness (pin-pointed and glowing light). In the four galleries, the visitor performed the labour of connecting the dots, moving through and embodying each protagonist's vantage point, including that of the fifth protagonist—the artist-researcher.

For example, the video *Razing Manzanar II* contained each of these protagonists, modes of representation, and their entangled relations. *Razing Manzanar II*'s installation spatialised these relations anew. The visitor-witness aggregated the evidence seen in perspective; the architect's orthographic drawing (plan) was seen on the table from above; the intern[ed]—invisible in the room, silhouetted in the video—laboured to erase the drawing of the camp. The government's view dominated the scene, surveilling the original act as if from a low flying plane. Through these perspectives in the video and their re-spatialised relations in the installation, visitors navigated between vantage points.



RAZING MANZANAR II



Choreographing Forensic Labour

The placing, spacing, and design of installation components set up choreographic cues and clues. They solicited visitors' movement across, around, inside, and over objects and spaces. Objects' scales and placements either beckoned visitors to approach or demanded that they step back for an overview.

In *Intern[ed]*, for instance, a large projection held visitors at the edge, as if stopped at the fence. A text-ile in-the-making then interpellated them, to cross to the opposite corner of the 'camp'. Once there, a new path revealed itself, suggesting movement from viewing the tiny 'surveillance' video playing on a propped-up iPhone to the aerial view appearing on a ground-level monitor.

INTERN[ED]



Gallery visitors performed the labour, yet this was neither the labour of drawing nor erasing, building nor unbuilding models, neither scribing nor whiting-out texts seen in the presented evidence. Rather, this labour was navigating an immersive milieu and constructing relations between fragments—detective work. These fragments included: spatial elements such as text-iles and models; photographic images and video representations in various scales and platforms; and non-visually sensed information, such as luminous and sonic atmospheres.

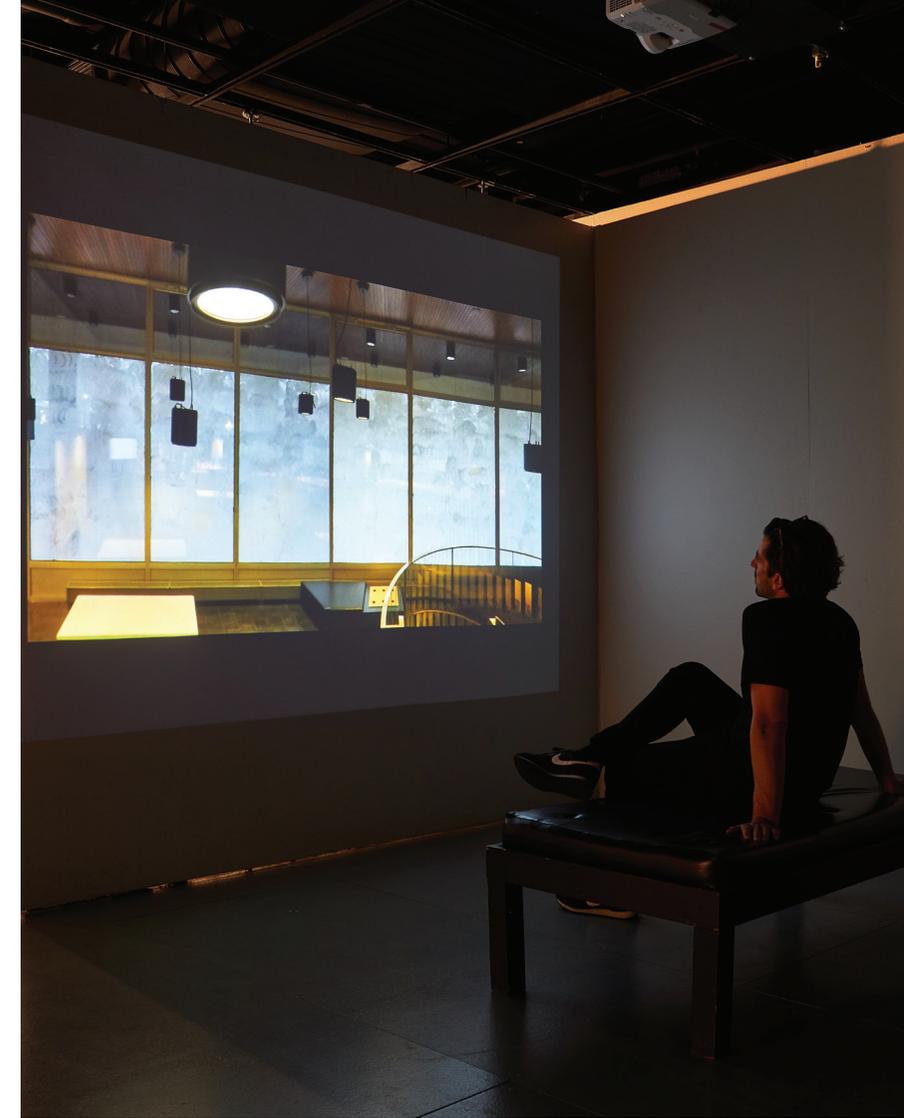


Photos: Left page and Right page, upper right: Rémi Chauvin; Right page, upper left and below: Peter Angus Robinson.



Atmospheric Sensing: Light

Whilst darkness, and the contemplative state it cultivates, was a general rule of the exhibition, I brightly lit a few elements to prompt alertness. This included highlighting evidence of *States of Exception's* hyper-visible labour: the witness view of the camp pattern erasure on the building facade, the 'embodied labourer's' (body-camera) view accessible via QR code, and the tools themselves.



STATES OF EXCEPTION



Within *Intern[ed]*, only a few elements were brightly lit, stating 'Watch out!': an executive order coming-into-being and the whited-out text-iles of the discontinuous enclosure.

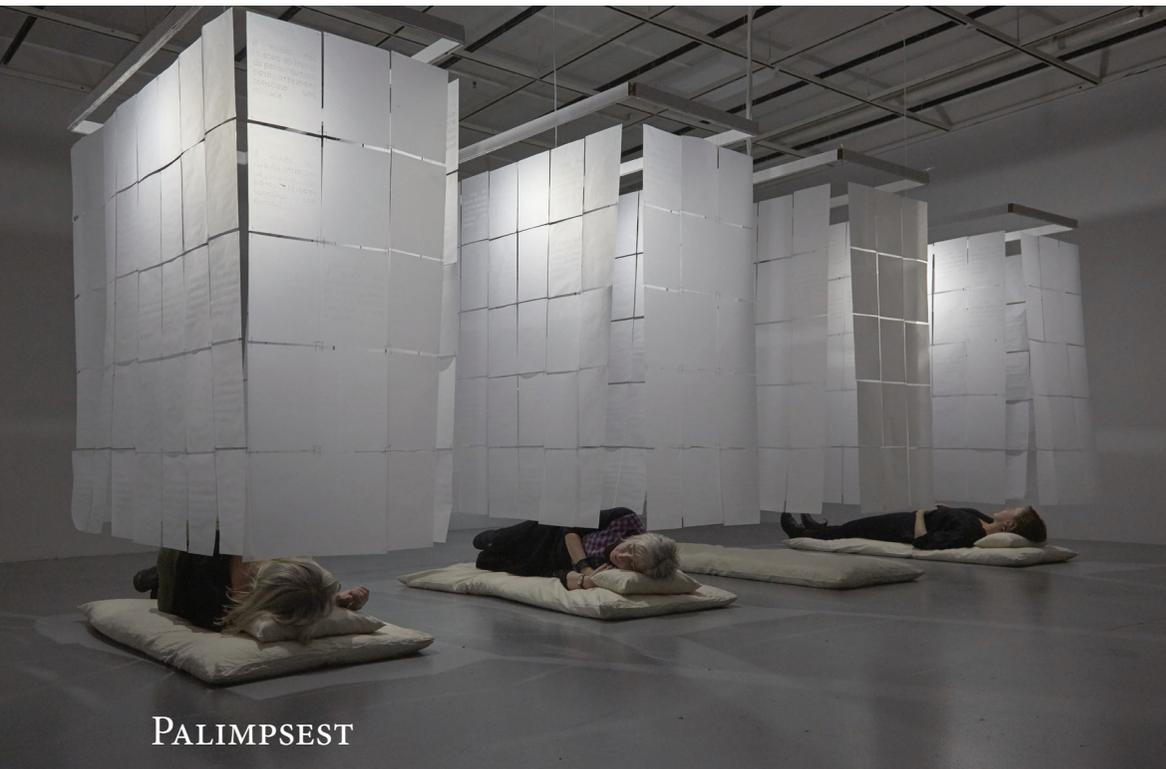
In contrast, in *Palimpsest*, carbon-transferred wall texts authored by witnesses who had entered the CIV hid in a barely detectable glow.

Atmospheric Sensing: Sonic

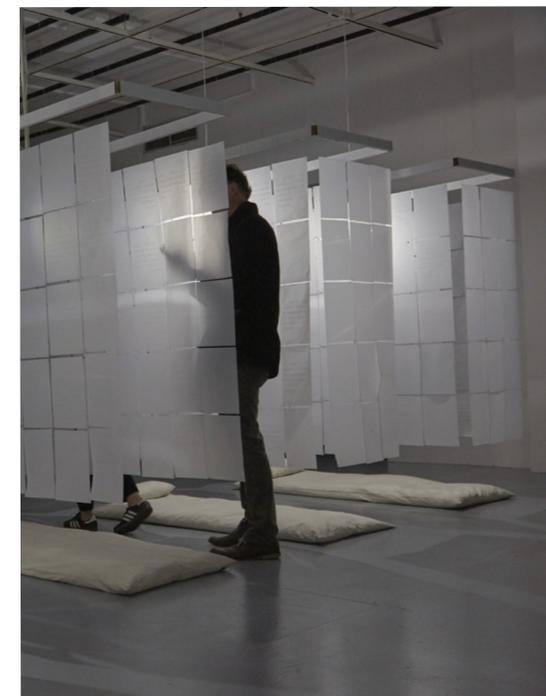
Sonic elements of the exhibition transported environmental qualities of the internment camp sites and actions performed there to the 'non-site' of the installation (Smithson). These rhythmic sounds made present the labours of absent humans and made palpable the recurrence of the camp as a condition.

The windy soundscape of the US camouflage-camps was felt through a pervasive low rumble (*Intern[ed]*). This vibration was occasionally punctuated by percussive sounds of making and unmaking models: wood elements hitting pavement and paper bricks scraping against concrete slabs seen in the situated videos. Wandering the exhibition, the rhythmic sounds of building and unbuilding impressed upon visitors' minds and bodies.

At the head of floor-level mattresses in *Palimpsest*, three pillows murmured. The layered voices beckoned one down to the ground. This cued a visitor to investigate further; a labour of sifting through murky words to find gems of meaning. Once reclined on a mattress, where a visitor discovered the scent of straw, their mobile task came to a stand-still, adopting the embodied position of the too-idle Algerian internee-labourer.



PALIMPSEST



Photos: above: Rémi Chauvin; below: Peter Angus Robinson.



(In)Visiblising Labour

Throughout the exhibition, video documentation revealed (spatially and temporally) remote labours by which my camp renditions oscillated between visibility and invisibility. However, the live labour involved in the exhibition's (un)becoming was absent. Only that of the gallery visitor was present.

And at the same time, the very human, imperfect labours that constituted *Performing Spatial Labour* and the camps they evoked were evident in the sheer material quantities of the installation: layers upon layers of corrugated board forming the floating light box, the hundreds of paper brick/barrack scale-models and their moulds, hundreds of *notes blanches* with thousands of irregular perforations and thousands of clips holding them together. These details were not hidden, but hovered at the 'threshold of detectability' (Weizman) inviting gallery visitors to perform detective work with their fingertips, ears, noses, and bodies.

PALIMPSEST

Making sense as a body in space



walking, standing, leaning, straining, resting, reclining, looking, focusing, listening, smelling, touching, holding, and feeling vibrations.



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Notes from the Field

Work | Strike | Dance: The Paris Opera Ballet and the 2019 Pensions Dispute

By Martin Young



Fig. 1: Paris Opera dancers perform in front of the Palais Garnier against the French government's plan to overhaul the country's retirement system, in Paris, on December 24, 2019. (Photo by Ludovic Marin/AFP via Getty Images).

The day before Christmas Eve 2019, 27 of the Paris Opera's ballet dancers, alongside a large contingent of the orchestra, staged a 15 minute excerpt of *Swan Lake* on the front steps of the Palais Garnier. This performance was part of a wave of strike action by French workers against major proposed pension reforms which had, since the start of December, already seen the closure of schools, rail networks, and attractions like the Eiffel Tower, and drawn hundreds of thousands of people into taking part in protests in the streets. As reports of the labour dispute, which would become the longest running strike in France's history, spread around the world, footage of the *Swan Lake* performance gained a disproportionate prominence, circulating virally as one of the