Choreopolice and Choreopolitics

or, the task of the dancer

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at least not yet

In a posthumously published fragment, written in August 1950 as a preliminary draft for what would have been the first chapter of her unfinished *Introduction into Politics*, Hannah Arendt makes the following observation: "[...] we have arrived in a situation where we do not know—at least not yet—how to move politically."[1]

We know that for Arendt the notion of a true (or rescued) politics has always been bound, deeply, even ontologically, to the notion of freedom. As she writes in several of her essays, "Der Sinn von Politik ist Freiheit"—a sentence translated into English as: "The meaning of politics is freedom" (2005:108).[2] However, "Sinn" (sense) is not quite "Bedeutung" (meaning). Indeed, "sense" in its old English usage carries with it a double meaning that conveys more exactly

1. "Sie zeigen an, dass wir in eine Situation geraten sind, in der wir uns gerade politisch nicht oder noch nicht zu bewegen verstehen" (Arendt 1993:13). In the 2005 collection of Arendt essays edited by Jerome Kohn, this sentence is translated by John E. Woods as: "They indicate that we have stumbled into a situation in which we do not know, or do not yet know, how to function in just such political terms" (2005:96). Even though I appreciate the "stumble," the translation of "zu bewegen" (to move) as "to function" is not only odd, but it deeply forecloses the kinetic dimension in Arendt's formulations. Throughout this essay, all translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

2. Another articulation of this equivalency can be found later in the same essay: "*politics and freedom are identical*, and wherever this kind of freedom does not exist, there is no political space in the true sense" (2005:166; emphasis added).

Figure 1. "TURF FEINZ RIP RichD Dancing in the Rain Oakland Street," 2009. Performer: No Noize. From the video by Yoram Savion. (Courtesy of Yoram Savion and YAK FILMS)

the dynamics underlying Arendt's thought, since "sense" simultaneously refers to signification *and* direction.[3] Thus, politics in Arendt can be redefined as *a general orientation towards freedom*. Consequently, Arendt's sentence can be re-rendered as: the meaning of politics, which is also its aim or direction, is freedom.

With this in mind, Arendt's diagnostic that "we do not know—at least not *yet*—how to move politically" can be also re-written, without losing any accuracy, as: "we do not know—at least not *yet*—how to move freely." And this is why we can say that Arendt's sentence becomes the diagnostic of a double loss, kinetic and semantic, emerging from one and the same event: the loss of knowing how to move politically results in, as much as produces, the loss of being able to find sense, meaning, and orientation, in moving freely.

Of course we could dismiss Arendt's sentence as a mere expression of a philosopher's disenchantment and pessimism with an era moving from the biopolitics of the concentration camps to the thanatopolitics[4] of the Cold War, with its specter of total annihilation of human life brought by the invention and proliferation of the atomic bomb.

Perhaps.

And yet, performatively, Arendt's fragment persists, resonates, unsettles, stirs. Its afterlife expresses and beckons a challenge and a provocation that are both political and kinetic—in one word, choreopolitical—a challenge we must answer. I derive performative power in Arendt's sentence from that hopeful "not yet." "Not yet" opens up the possibility that it might be otherwise, it affirms that some day we *may know* how to move politically. Read in this way, Arendt's sentence becomes a challenge: "*If we do not yet know how to move politically, then we had better find out how to do it*." And the sooner the better. A couple of lines down in the same typewritten fragment, Arendt tells us why it is *urgent* that we learn how to move politically. The reason is because what is at stake is not just learning how to choreograph and perform a protest, or how to organize legislative processes and procedures. Of course, these are not to be neglected in the business of politics, but Arendt is concerned with something else—a more fundamental, and much more precarious kind of movement. For her, what is at stake is nothing less than that most extreme danger: if we do not learn how to move politically, "the risk is that *the political* vanishes completely from the world."[5]

We can now understand that the adjectival "political" at risk of vanishing is nothing other than *freedom*. And we have to remember that, for Arendt, neither freedom nor the political are a given; they are not anthropologically, historically, or genetically given to the human. In other words, this "political," this entity or thing Arendt calls freedom, is nowhere inscribed as that which defines, or centers, or founds humanity. The adjectival "political" defined as the movement of freedom is a difficult, ever-evolving commitment. It is less predicated on a subject than on a *movement* (*bewegung*), defined by intersubjective *action*, that, moreover must be learned, rehearsed, nurtured, and above all experimented with, practiced, and experienced. Again and

3. This is the way Spanish, Portuguese, and French editions of the same passage have translated "Sinn": not as "significado" (meaning) but as "sentido" (Portuguese and Spanish) and not as "signification" but as "sens" (French).

4. On the transition from "biopolitics" to "thanatopolitics" see Roberto Esposito (2012).

5. "Die Gefahr ist, dass das Politische überhaupt aus der Welt verschwindet" (Arendt 1993:13).

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again, and again and again, and in every repetition, through every repetition, renewed. And what is the practice that needs to be practiced in order to ensure that the political does not vanish from the world? Precisely that thing called freedom. The vanishing of the political thing from the world is the vanishing of the experience and practice of movement as freedom.

In what follows, I bind together the *political* (as the opposite of the business of politics, politicians, and policy makers), *movement* (sometimes danced, sometimes not), and *freedom* (as that about which we must gain *kinetic* knowledge) to propose the concepts of choreopolitics and choreopolice. I use these concepts to read three works: Tania Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper #5* (2008); Yak Films's *Dancing in the Rain in Oakland Street* (2009); and Sarah Michelson's *Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer* (2012). Each of these three very different artworks (the first a performance art piece; the second a hip hop street dance/video; and the third a choreography) reveals that the dancer's task is particularly pressing in our current moment, when the overwhelming and omnipresent implementation of "control" (Deleuze 1995) has redefined the entire social-political field in regards to the question of moving freely, and of imagining and enacting a politics of movement as a *choreopolitics of freedom*.

nothing is left alone for long

To address freedom as both orientation and meaning of the political, to see it constitutively tied to the figure of the dancer, is pressing right now for two main reasons. The first reason is derived from the necessity to consider what could be the conditions of emergence for the *enactment of freedom* in today's "control societies"—in which, as suggested by Gilles Deleuze (1995:169–80), the danger of antipolitical affects and antipolitical relations are permanently being inscribed and re-inscribed within subjectivity itself, and reified as the new, consensual norm. As opposed to disciplinary societies—in which the sources of hegemonic impositions are specifically located and locatable (guards, teachers, priests, doctors) and mechanisms of confinement prevail (schools, prisons, asylums, military barracks)—control societies "no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication." In a "control-based system, nothing is left alone for long" (1995:174, 175). Deleuze wrote this uncanny premonition in 1990. He foresaw our current predicament: the proliferation of surveillance cameras in all major cities across the globe, and the transformation of cell phones and personal computers linked through the internet to location tracking systems that continuously follow our movements. This condition, where no one is left alone for long, reveals how an apparent "freedom of movement" is under strict control thanks to constant surveillance. However, it is also important to understand how control not only tracks, but also—and this is Deleuze's point— preconditions freedom from within by subtly providing pathways for circulation that are introjected as the only ones imaginable, the only ones deemed appropriate.

Following from Arendt and Deleuze, I propose that the danger of banishing the *political* from the world is predicated on a double move: (1) the implementation of a global spectacle of movement that moves nothing other than whatever diminishes, blocks, or diverts actual political movement; and (2) the confusion of politics with the issuing of executive orders and/or the issuing of legislation and/or policies.[6] This is why I believe Arendt's sentences ring particularly true and alarming even half a century after their writing: "[...] we have arrived in a situation where we do not know—at least not *yet*—*how to move politically*. [...] The danger is that the *political* vanishes from the world." Less a warning than a call to action.

6. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney distinguish policy from planning thusly: "By policy we mean not a particular policy, as in company policy or public policy, but rather policy as something in *contradistinction* to planning. By policy we mean a resistance to the commons from above, arrayed in the exclusive and exclusionary uniform/ity of *imposed consensus*, that both denies and at the very same time *seeks to destroy the ongoing plans*, the fugitive initiations, the black operations of the multitude" (2010). In some ways policy is choreopolicing, while planning is choreopolitical.

Figure 2. An Occupy Wall Street march protesting police brutality. New York, NY, 24 March 2012. (Photo by Nathan Schneider)

The second reason to approach the question of freedom by considering the task of the dancer derives from the fact that, historically and disciplinarily, the concept and the practice of choreography implements, needs, produces, and reproduces what William Forsythe has called an "art of command" (in Franko 2007:17). Such understanding of choreography obviously implies that, as with any system of command, choreography also implements, needs, produces, and reproduces whole systems of obedience. Now, it is important to remember that for Arendt, to command and to obey are essentially non- or antipolitical relations. As she writes in one of the fragments comprising *Introduction into Politics*: "To speak in the form of commanding and to hear in the form of obeying" cannot be "considered actual speech and hearing" (2005:118). One may emit commands; one may hear and obey these commands. But such an exchange cannot be considered either the political function of speech or the political function of hearing. Political speech and political hearing must always remain an open movement, not of commands and their implementation (as in policies), but a movement of the political itself—crisscrossing the multitude, converging divergences, aimed at freedom.

choreopolice

The first drafts of this essay took the shape of lectures delivered at conferences in Lisbon (2011), Stockholm (2011 and 2012), and Florianópolis (2012). This was a period when many of us witnessed (directly or through the media), or actively participated in, ever-increasing social and political protest movements in cities across the globe—Cairo and Lisbon; Athens and New York; Algiers and London; Madrid and Bahrain; Barcelona and Oakland; and many, many more. In the media representations of these protests, demonstrations, and occupations, as well as in the bodily experience of participating in some of them, a constant caught my attention: a highly skilled, and mostly invariable, choreographed police presence.

More or less persistently, more or less violently, the police appear wherever political protest is set in motion, to break down initiative and to determine "proper" pathways for protesters. Facing a demonstration, the police function first of all as a movement controller. They impose blockades, contain or channel demonstrators, disperse crowds, and sometimes even literally lift up and drag bodies around. Choreographically as well as conceptually, the police can thus be defined as that which, through its physical presence and skills, determines the space of circulation for protesters, and ensures that "everyone is in a permissible place" (Deleuze 1995:183).

The obvious choreographic mastery found in police deployment prompts the question: What are the relations between political demonstrations as expressions of freedom, and police counter-moves as implementations of obedience? In other words: What are the relations between choreopolitics and choreopolicing? On our way to freedom, on our way to the kinetics of the political, our first step will be toward the concept of choreopolicing.

In June 2008, at Tate Modern in London, Cuban artist Tania Bruguera presented a performance piece in the Turbine Hall, in the context of the exhibition *The Living Currency*. Titled

Figure 3. Day 8 of the Occupy Wall Street protests. New York, NY, 24 September 2011. (Photo by Andrew Hinderaker)

Tatlin's Whisper #5, Bruguera's performance is an extraordinary investigation of the choreographic dynamics between police and public in a control society.

Tatlin's Whisper #5 is simple in its score. Two actual anti-riot mounted police officers perform their crowd-control skills on the audience circulating through the Tate's spacious Turbine Hall. On their horses, the policemen go around the space breaking up groups, moving people from one place to another, corralling a few in a corner, or ordering an individual to go somewhere else right away. In an interview filmed by the Tate, Bruguera narrates what takes place: "We have two policemen on horses coming toward you telling you what to do, where to move, where to stand, if you have to stand or if you have to go somewhere [...] like they do in their everyday job" (Tate 2008). In Bruguera's description, as well as in a short documentary film on the work produced by Tate Modern, what struck me most is how police commands are essentially choreographic. Just as a choreographer in the studio asks a dancer to go to a place, to stay there for a few minutes, or to move about in specific ways, the police do exactly the same. What I find both interesting and disturbing, is that the police always succeed.

In *Tatlin's Whisper #5* the voices of the mounted police are mostly polite, yet insistent, imperative, and unflinching. In a video documentation of the event, shown as part of the archive on dance and visual arts of the exhibition *Move: Choreographing You* at the Hayward Gallery in 2010, we can see a clearly annoyed spectator, a disabled man on his battery-powered wheelchair, resisting orders to move somewhere else. One of the mounted police approaches him and asks: "Can you move that way, please?" Having no cooperation from the man, the officer insists, ever more assertively. He gestures more forcefully, pointing to where the man must go: "Can you move that way?" "Move that way." "Move that way." "Move that way." Nine times the command is repeated, and each time the policeman and his horse slowly yet surely come a bit closer to the man on his electric cart. Finally, the man gives up and goes to where the policeman commands (Tate Modern 2008).

Despite Bruguera's claims that there is "no representation" in this event (Tate 2008), it is more accurate to say that there is not not-representation. Indeed, the frame of the museum offers a buffer zone between actual and forceful implementation of control by the mounted police and possible audience resistance. What is interesting is how within representation, the police are able to pierce through what would be an example of "misfired" performatives, to remain capable of issuing commands that are, after all, obeyed.

The issuing of commands and imperatives, which J.L. Austin sees as one of the clearest examples of performative speech acts, would supposedly "misfire" in this context—since despite the right agents (real policemen), the context remains "theatrical" in the sense that everyone knows that in the museum, and despite Bruguera's hopes for "no representation," these police utterances would somehow belong to something called "art." However, there is an efficiency in the police commands that complicates this dynamic; one wonders if illocutionary and perlocutionary forces are indeed misfiring in *Tatlin's Whisper #5*.

Figure 4. Tania Bruguera's Tatlin's Whisper #5. *Tate Modern, London, January 2008. (Photo by Sheila Burnett; courtesy of Tate Modern)*

Tatlin's Whisper #5 belongs to the series of performances and actions that Bruguera started in the early 2000s, a series she calls *Arte de Conducta*, usually translated into English as "Behavior Art."[7] The pieces in this series explore the ways in which behavior, or conduct, oscillates between habitus and conformity, rebellion and freedom. In the Tate interview about *Tatlin's Whisper #5*, Bruguera declares that in this particular work, she was interested in "a little piece of experience with power" (Tate 2008). She reminds us that the mounted anti-riot police is a "historically recurrent image of power" throughout the 20th century, and says she is interested in activating this image, through performance, using actual mounted police, in order to assess how the context of the museum may or may not affect the reaction of the public.

Among the possible audience reactions to this "little experience with power" it is conceivable that someone among the audience might also have wanted to experiment with another "historically recurrent" image: the image of public revolt against mounted anti-riot police. It is conceivable that someone might have wanted to use the safe context of art, the safety of the museum, of the Tate Modern, of representation, to experiment with enacting rebellion or protest against the mounted police. It is conceivable that someone might have wanted to play with the police. The fact that this did not happen at all, that instead, despite the nervous smiles one sees in the documentary footage of *Tatlin's Whisper #5*, everyone eventually did follow the police commands—did obey—must be considered an important aspect of Bruguera's work. Commenting on the generalized conformity, Bruguera says: "The fact that [people] have the same reaction that they'd have in real life when they see the police controlling them, for me this is really important" (Tate 2008). But the fact is that in "real life" people have many different reactions to mounted police, including acts of violence, resistance, and attack. Perhaps it may be that what the work truly reveals is not the art of controlling behavior by the police, but the already controlled behavior of the public—that introjection of control Deleuze diagnosed.

Claire Bishop describes Bruguera's *Arte de Conducta* as "an art that engages with reality, particularly at the interface of usefulness and illegality—since ethics and the law are, for Bruguera, domains that need continually to be tested" (2012:247). *Tatlin's Whisper #5* tests those limits by revealing the intimate relation between choreographic commands, police work, and the passage from a discipline paradigm to a control paradigm. The work, approached as an experiment in social choreography, reveals how the question of freedom, even in so-called "open democracies," remains one not merely of policing, but above all, of self-policing. Which means that, on our way to freedom, we must first of all tackle that which blocks, directs, diverts, and (pre)conditions our movements, even in the most "experimental" of environments, such as a museum

7. For a discussion of the series see Bishop (2012) and Lepecki (2011).

of contemporary art. This blocking force was given a name and body by Bruguera, and that name is the same given to it by political philosopher Jacques Rancière: the police. What *Tatlin's Whisper #5* reveals is that the police is not confined to the bodies and tasks of police officers and their horses, but it is a *generalized function of power*, an abstract machine holding in place the social order, actually defining the social order as nothing other than a policed thing. In other words, the police is a function of power which is the very opposite of the political. This is exactly Rancière's definition of the police.

in conformity, moving along

We owe the formation of two different, yet complementary, theoretical and critical concepts of "police" to Michel Foucault and Jacques Rancière. When asked in 1977 to answer the question "What is a Judge?" Foucault gave what he called "*une réponse méchante*" (a naughty answer): "a Judge is a servant, actually, he is *subservient*, to the police" (1977).

Totally reversing Montesquieu's republican rationalism according to which, in the physiology of the modern body politic, the Judge functions as "the mouth of the law," Foucault names what he considers to be one of the great political inventions of the 18th century, an invention absolutely fundamental (if not onto-historically grounding) to the smooth functioning of contemporary control societies: the police. And what is the police's function, according to Foucault? What does it do? "Its function is not of applying the law, but of obtaining a normal behavior; conformity. This is what the police have done" (Foucault 1977).[8]

This is what the police have done, and keep doing: to form conformity, to ensure conformity thanks to the reification and implementation of a generalized behavioral conformation. The police aim at realizing conformity based on a preformed image of what it deems to be not only the norm, but "the normal." And, if this is indeed the case, then the function of the police can be detached from its specific actors, whether street cops or mounted anti-riot police, and gain critical-theoretical expansion. This expansion (from police-as-agent to a generalized police-function) is what Rancière performs with his concept of "police."

A kinetic theory of police: this is what makes Rancière's antinomy politics/police so useful to dance and performance practices. Let's retain from Rancière's approach the way his definition of the function of the police is akin to Foucault's notion of "conformity" while it also differs, conceptually and performatively, from the little theatre of police interpellation described by Louis Althusser in his famous 1970 essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (in Althusser [1970] 2012).

As Rancière writes in "Ten Theses on Politics":

> The police is not the law which interpellates individuals (as in Louis Althusser's "Hey you there!") [...] Its slogan is: "Move along! There's nothing to see here!" The police is that which says that here, on this street, there's nothing to see and so nothing to do but *to move along*. *It asserts that the space for circulating is nothing but the space of circulation.* (2010:37, emphases added)

The police then needs not be embodied in the cop. As a political-theoretical concept the police is that which is pregiven in the circulatory organization of the polis as what predetermines pathways, establishes routes for circulation, and fits both into one single mode of being. In that sense it does not hail. Instead, it choreographs. And by doing so the police guarantees that as long as everyone moves and circulates in accord with a general conformity of being-in-circulation, this movement will produce nothing other than a mere spectacle of its own consensual mobility. In this sense, Rancière's notion of police is already a notion of choreopolice:

8. "Son fonction n'est pas de faire appliquer la loi que *d'obtenir un comportement normal*; *conforme*. Ce ça que la police a fait."

its main interest is movement, but its aim is to promote a movement that, while moving, veers away from freedom.

The purpose of choreopolicing, then, is to de-mobilize political action by means of implementing a certain kind of movement that prevents any formation and expression of the political. Choreopoliced movement can thus be defined as any movement incapable of breaking the endless reproduction of an imposed circulation of consensual subjectivity, where to be is to fit a prechoreographed pattern of circulation, corporeality, and belonging. As Rancière explains:

> The essence of the police lies in a partition of the sensible that is characterized by the absence of void and of supplement: society here is made up of groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places. *In this matching of functions, places and ways of being, there is no place for any void.* (2010:36, emphases added)

It is through such dynamics that, even without a cop in sight, a daily choreography of conformity emerges, even within so-called free or open societies. Because, even in those societies, the possibility of imagining a movement towards freedom is foreclosed from the start by a kind of impoverishment of choreographic imagination; movements can only take place in spaces preassigned for "proper" circulation. Choreography is introjected as a policed dance of quotidian consensus.

Police choreography, police dynamics, police kinetics. We can now say, expanding Rancière's thought, that *choreopolicing* imposes a forced ontological fitting between pregiven movements, bodies in conformity, and pre-assigned places for circulation. In contradistinction, we can say that choreopolitics requires a redistribution and reinvention of bodies, affects, and senses through which one may learn how to move politically, how to invent, activate, seek, or experiment with a movement whose only sense (meaning and direction) is the experimental exercise of freedom. As Rancière clarifies: "Politics, by contrast to the police, consists in transforming this space of moving along, of circulation, into the space for the *appearance* of a *subject*" (37, emphases added).

I would like to qualify this subject, appearing away from preassigned modes and spaces of circulation, as the political subject. Its appearance results from its excessiveness and unforeseen mode of reclaiming spaces for mobility. I venture that the particular political subject that transforms spaces of circulation into spaces of freedom has a specific name: the dancer.

It is the dancer who, in the most policed, controlled spaces (say even in the tightest of choreographic scores), has the potential to activate the appearing not necessarily of a subject, but of the highly mobile *political thing*. The choreopolitical task of the dancer simultaneously answers Hannah Arendt's call for claiming kinetic knowledge on how to move towards freedom, but also demonstrates, perhaps against Arendt, that somehow, somewhere, someone always finds a way to move politically.

choreopolitics

One year after Tania Bruguera presented *Tatlin's Whisper #5* at the Tate Modern, a video made by Yak Films, an ensemble based in Oakland, CA, went viral on the internet with a style of hip hop called TURF. The video, directed and edited by Yoram Savion, features the dance crew Turf Feinz and shows four young men (No Noize, Man, BJ, and Dreal) dancing in the rain at the corner of MacArthur Boulevard and 90th Avenue, in Oakland (Yak Films 2009).

From the opening shot, we are in a Rancièrian scenario of policed circulation. In the rain, standing at the corner as cars pass by, the contemporary *polis* is presented as basically being constituted by two major distributions of movement: the road, where cars circulate according to rules and regulations; and the sidewalk where pedestrians, and particularly black youth, are supposed to above all move along and are not supposed to loiter, dance, or "do nothing."

Figure 5. "TURF FEINZ RIP RichD Dancing in the Rain Oakland Street," 2009. Performers, from left: No Noize and Man. From the video by Yoram Savion. (Courtesy of Yoram Savion and YAK FILMS)

As the first few seconds of the film unfold, an Oakland PD car stops right next to two of the dancers, No Noize and Man. Patrol car and dancers hold still for a few moments. Then finally the patrol car slowly turns the corner and disappears from the frame. The two young men wait a few moments, and then No Noize starts to dance. It is important to note that the camera, shooting from far away, works here as a documentary device: there is no staging of the cars' movements, and the dancers are at the corner without any city permit. The film, despite being documentary in its essence, is heavily edited in postproduction. In this film of TURF dancing, editing becomes an extension of the choreography. It is part of TURF's aesthetics to treat the dancing body as also a kind of image. Many moves, gestures, and steps in TURF are choreographed so that the dancer performs as if he is being fast-forwarded, or slow-motioned, sometimes even being "spliced" in his motions, as a dancer abruptly switches from one move to the next. There is a kind of dissensual amalgamation of physiology and the digital image in TURF dance.

The first chords of the soundtrack are heard, then the police car is gone. A syncopated beat on the soundtrack begins as the dancing starts. No Noize's first moves are a mix of symbolic and abstract arm and hand gestures. His footwork is as light as it is baroque, as fluid as broken-down. After pirouetting, popping, spinning, locking, sliding on the wet sidewalk, No Noize moves decidedly into the traffic lane, and he takes an elegant pose: right leg stretched, left leg bent, head bowed, right arm stretched up diagonally towards the sky, left hand on left knee. Half deferential nobleman, half bullfighter dodging a direct charge, he sets himself right in the middle of the road, and as he sustains his pose and stays put, he forces a car to divert from its path to go around him. Returning to the sidewalk, No Noize starts a brief *pas-de-deux* with Man. No Noize then stops dancing. It is as if he has passed to Man the movement he initiated. During his turn to dance, Man also steps out of the proper space of pedestrian circulation and invades the road, dancing in the rain, messing with the traffic lane. The dance goes on. Man enchains a series of virtuosic glides and slides, sometimes collapsing in virtuosic splits only to spring back up again to a standing position. He returns to the sidewalk. He stops dancing as across the street in the opposite corner, BJ picks up the motion. It is as if movement has been

transmitted from one street corner to the next, from one dancer to the other. Throughout the whole video, each time one dancer stops, another picks up the movement. Movement becomes an invisible force being tossed around, moving from body to body, a kind of affective transmission, animating one dancer at a time. One movement, multiple singular modes of expressing it. And because this circulation takes place against the proper predisposition of the city's regulations for "moving along," because it goes against the no-loitering and curfew-for-minors laws targeting so many African American and Latino neighborhoods, because it erupts literally against the police presence in the neighborhood, because it is a circulation in dissensus, we must call this particular movement: *political*. It is political because it is doubly against the police: as an institution and as an introjected function of power predicated on conformity. We see, at the corner of MacArthur Boulevard and 90th Avenue, in this dancing in the rain against traffic and against all sorts of policing, the emergence, transmission, and activation of a choreopolitical movement.[9]

It is crucial here to dislodge from the outset the identification of this dance and this video from any notions related to "spontaneity." The gathering, the choreographic sequence, the filming, and the postproduction work of editing, sound dubbing, and adding special effects; but also the persistence, the daring, and the technique of the dancers all suggest not so much spontaneity but rather a planning, or the preexistence of a (soft) choreography. Choreographic planning is crucial because, as I mentioned earlier, the political is not a given to the subject, it is not even a given of the human species. Rather, it is a social and personal force and a promise that must be built with others, must be set into relation, and must be dared, collectively, into existence. Once in existence, it has to be learned, sustained, and experimented with. Again and again. Lest it disappear from the world.

It follows that if the political is not a given, if it needs to be (re)discovered and (re)produced, then the political is always a kind of experimentation. It comes into the world through the experience of experimenting. This is why the political needs a kind of pre-established plan, or a *program*—which Deleuze and Guattari define as "the motor of experimentation" (1987:151). Thus planning, programming, and experimentation (always corporeal, always social, as Deleuze and Guattari insist) become synonyms of choreography, which can now be defined as the necessary *minimal condition of sociality* so that (1) the political may appear in the world; (2) the political may move across agents, short-circuiting policed systems of obedience and command; and (3) the political may surface, persist, and be performed thanks to (choreographic) planning.

What TURF reveals, and particularly the dance of No Noize, Man, BJ, and Dreal, is that a certain nonauthoritarian/authoritative, and perhaps even nonauthorial notion of choreography, is the occasioning for a *political thing* to come into the world *as movement* and circulate through subjects. This link of choreography and the practice of freedom is counterintuitive thanks to the persistent misunderstanding that aligns choreography with imperatives and commands. In her extraordinary book *I Want To Be Ready*, Danielle Goldman convincingly argues for "improvisation as a practice of freedom" (2010). But Goldman is careful not to align improvisation with "natural" notions of spontaneity, instead linking improvisation to the critical invention and transmission of corporeal techniques, structures, and body knowledges that perform resistance (as in her study of contact improvisation and "techniques of nonviolent protest").

Adding to Goldman's insights, I am proposing that danced techniques of freedom suggest choreography as technology for inventing movements of freedom. Choreography as a planned, dissensual, and nonpoliced disposition of motions and bodies becomes the condition of possibility for the political to emerge. Following Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's notion of "plan"

9. In 2010, Turf Feinz crew and Yak Films created a direct interpellation of police brutality, in this case, as a video and danced memorial on the first anniversary of the killing of Oscar Grant by a BART police officer in the early hours of 1 January 2009 (Yak Films 2010).

(which they oppose to policy, which they define as "a corrective [...] operation from above designed to make the multitude productive for capital" [2010]), I propose the notion of the choreopolitical as the formation of collective plans emerging at the edges between open creativity, daring initiative, and a persistent—even stubborn—iteration of the desire to live away from policed conformity.

insistence, persistence, devotion

I conclude by invoking a recent work in which the task of the dancer demonstrates the capacity for political rupturing not by dismantling choreography, but by insisting on remaining within choreography, by persisting to endure the actualization of its plan. I am referring to Sarah Michelson's recent work for the Whitney Biennial, *Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer* (2012). With this work, we return to Arendt's political theory of freedom.

Figure 6. Sarah Michelson's Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer. *Performers, from left: James Tyson, Maggie Cloud, Eleanor Hullihan, and Nicole Mannarino. The Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art. New York, March 2012. (Photo by Paula Court)*

What happens in *Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer*? The whole fourth floor of New York's Whitney Museum (a rectangular space of about 35 by 10 meters) is occupied by an hour-and-a-half long choreography, danced by Nicole Mannarino, the main protagonist (a protagonist without being a character), Eleanor Hullihan, Moriah Evans, Maggie Cloud, and James Tyson. The piece starts with Michelson sitting among the audience, and reading a text by Richard Maxwell, where mundane issues mingle with transcendental questions on God and existence. After she finishes reading, Michelson goes up to the technical booth for the remainder of the show, and Mannarino walks alone and backwards in the space to the sound of a metronome's beat of about 152 bpm lasting the whole duration of the work. Mannarino opens her arms, goes up on *demi-pointe*, and starts to revolve in circles. She will do this for the entire piece.

Methodically, precisely, continuously, and persistently, Mannarino's stepping backwards in tercets defines sometimes wider, sometimes narrower circles, as she slowly traverses the open white space of the museum gallery. Dancing backwards on a floor that has imprinted on it the architectural plan of the museum, Mannarino persists in her minimalist action—one minute, three minutes, ten minutes, twenty minutes, half an hour, the whole piece (with only a few, very brief and very far apart pauses). Eventually, the other dancers join in, but it is Mannarino who never stops her backwards dancing.

As time passes, the audience may experience some, or all, of the following reactions, similar to my own, when I saw the piece in May 2012: first, one may become mesmerized by the incredibly beautiful singular figure of Mannarino, dressed in a quasi–International Klein Blue (IKB) full-bodied costume, revolving across the white space, arms wide open, as the sunset light comes through the gigantic west window of the museum, washing the space in a golden hue. Then, after some minutes of watching the dancer's repetitive action, one's focus may start

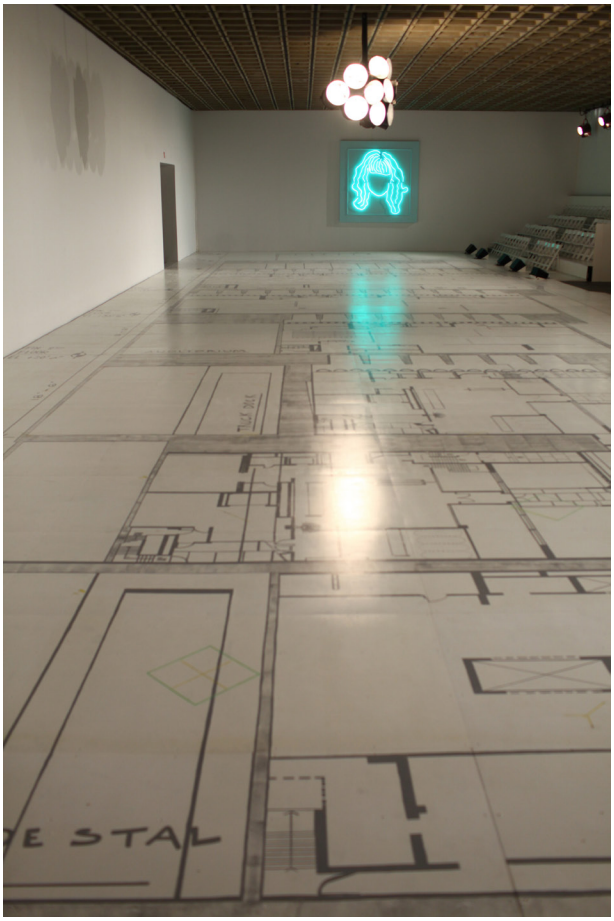

Figure 7. The floor imprinted with the architectural plan of the museum for Sarah Michelson's Devotion Study #1 — The American Dancer. *The Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art. New York, March 2012. (Photo by Paula Court)*

drifting towards how the dry, relentless beat creates a slight sense of urgency, and the little hops in Mannarino's rigorous and repetitive backward steps operate as so many little cuts in the image of that motion, impeding the formation of a sense of flow, introducing in it a syncopation of endless breaks.

By the 10th or maybe the 15th minute of the same action, it dawns on us that Mannarino's open arms, less than invoking metaphorically an image of flight, induce quite strongly the sensation of extreme physical discomfort — isn't that position, sustained for more than five minutes, one of the infamous "stress positions" used by so many regimes (democratic or dictatorial) to inflict pain on all sorts of political prisoners? And isn't Mannarino holding that position for far longer than 15, far longer than 25, far longer than 67 minutes...? And finally, perhaps by the 25th or maybe 30th minute into the piece, doesn't the mix of wonder produced by choreographic precision, clear aesthetic vision, and the dancer's total commitment to her actions take one directly to choreography's political unconscious, its deep relation to obedience and command? Along with these questions, another: Why should one ever perform such an act, clearly of pure expenditure and clearly painful (even if not expressed as painful)? After half an hour of dancing backwards, the increasingly visible effects of an impersonal force reimaging the figure of the dancer makes us seriously consider the antipolitical aspects of choreography (as mentioned above, command and obedience are essentially antipolitical for Arendt). I am referring to the effects of Mannarino's sweat, drenching her costume completely, turning the quasi-International Klein Blue into a perfect IKB.

Reviewing *Devotion Study #1 — The American Dancer*, Brian Seibert wrote: "But these dancers do suffer. The choreography is punishing, physically and mentally. Ms. Mannarino, her stylish jump-suit sweat-darkened by the halfway point, endures heroically" (2012). Through sweat, through the shared sensation of the pain of the other, through the mesmerizing precision of the circular patterns being danced backward, through the slightly urgent beat of the soundtrack, through enduring and suffering, the whole question of choreographic imperatives becomes impossible to dodge. But, it is also immediately dissolved, transformed, radically subverted thanks to one word. The word-event that titles the piece, and thus offers us a meaning and a direction for the dancer's task within that particularly demanding choreography: "devotion."

Figure 8. Sarah Michelson's Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer. *Performers, from left: Eleanor Hullihan and Nicole Mannarino. The Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art. New York, March 2012. (Photo by Paula Court)*

I propose that "devotion" as the task of the dancer is not a theological diagnosis, not a martyrology, but a political affirmation. Perhaps even the necessary political affirmation. It is through this word—devotion—that the question of moving politically is radically reframed from within choreography. What devotion does, alongside its performance, is to relocate the imperative as no longer being an order coming from above, a command the dancer must blindly obey and follow, apolitically. With the performance of devotion, the choreographic reveals itself to be that which produces an agent, that which produces an affect, and that which reminds us that the political, in order to come into the world, requires commitment, engagement, persistence, insistence, and daring. Here once again we can think of Arendt's political philosophy, particularly her notion of the miraculous coming into the world of the highly improbable, and how this coming into the world has little to do with the spontaneous. Instead it requires planning, preparation, technique, a collective, and the affect of devotion—as long as it is devotion *not* to the author of the plan, or the ruler, but an impersonal devotion to the plan itself. As Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves writes, commenting on Arendt's theory of action: "the result of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is neither an author nor a producer, but *rather an actor and a sufferer*" (d'Entrèves 1993:87; emphasis added). But before it acquires beatific or martyrological tones, this "sufferer" should be immediately qualified: the political action of the actor-sufferer is equivalent to the dancer's task. The actor-sufferer names not a subject who wishes a spectacle of pain for pain's sake, but names the coming into the world of a particular event: that of initiating and then sustaining, enduring, and fully going through the actualization of a collective plan. The semantic field of "to suffer" comprises to endure, to undergo, to have the quality of submitting patiently; to allow oneself to be treated in a certain way; to consent to be or to do something persistently.

Why would one give one's consent to suffer if not to experience and express the most improbable event—the body's capacity to endure in the most difficult of tasks so that the

"unexpected can be expected" and, like the dancer, be "able to perform what is infinitely improbable" (Arendt 1998:175)? This is how one learns how to move the political thing. This is the freedom one finds by fully devoting oneself to one's own actions within a collective construction, or a choreographic plan. In the field of dance, and particularly in the field of devotion introduced by choreography as discipline, the will to reintroduce once again the concrete, literal, physical principle of agency into the abstract notion of a choreopolitical plan is already to start experimenting on *how to move politically*. We can thus see the dancer's devotion not as a masochistic submission, nor as an antipolitical surrender to a choreographer's or author's imperative voice, but rather as that particular affect Deleuze, in *The Logic of Sense*, says is performed by "the actor and the dancer" and that he calls "counter-actualization," or *freedom*: "free, because he has seized the event itself, and because he does not allow it to actualize as event, without operating on it first, as actor, the counter-actualization" (1969:179).

To seize the event and to transform it through this seizing; to plan and then to restart the plan into endless, unforeseeable yet-to-comes—in the dancer's activation of freedom within the choreographic plan of composition, the political comes into the world as an enduring movement of obstinate joy.

coda

The three very different examples of movements within and around choreopolicing reveal the same single thing: the performativity of Arendt's "not yet," when she states we "do not know—at least *not yet*—how to move politically." Arendt's "not yet" is not to be read teleologically, as if one day we would know the right, or proper, answer or way to move politically. Rather, moving politically is predicated on the need to be constantly reminded, daily, that whatever this moving accomplishes and brings into to the world at any given moment will be always provisional and incomplete. Thus the necessity to start again, to insist, no matter what, on the urgent challenge posed by that endless *not yet*. Not yet, not yet. Again and again. Anything else would be conformity.

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