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Choreography as a Medium of Protest

Susanne Foellmer

Abstract: This article focuses on the idea of choreography as a possible medium of protest. Dealing with the media theory of Niklas Luhmann in the framework of social communication, and adopting Randy Martin's idea of an interrelation of (danced) movement and politics, the focus lies in the moments of migration of gestures from everyday life into art and then into the realm of politics. By analyzing the example of the Istanbul *Duran Adam* and the performance of choreographer Ehud Darash in Tel Aviv, the key question is in which moments and what kind of formats choreography serves as a medium of protest by blurring the boundaries between everyday life, art, and politics.

Keywords: Mediality, choreography, politics

A man stands alone on a square. Unmoving, his gaze fixed on a building. Beside him is his rucksack, which he has put down as if he is waiting for something that sometimes takes a while. Passers-by look briefly round or do not even notice that something is going on here. But is anything actually going on? This seems unclear, even for the police, who appear on the scene after a while, because there is something suspicious to them about a man standing on the spot, not moving, apparently not doing anything. The police – all male – look at the unmoving man, touch him, look in his rucksack, and don't quite know what they should do now. Eventually, they move away again empty-handed. The man remains standing, unmoving, looking in one direction.

The situation described is probably easily recognizable as performer Erdem Gündüz's *Duran Adam* (Standing Man) on Istanbul's Taksim Square (June 2013). The reason for this act of standing, during which he looked towards the Atatürk Cultural Center, was the preceding political protests, occupations, and demonstrations surrounding the

threatened Gezi Park, which was to be destroyed to make way for a shopping center. The police responded heavy-handedly and a ban on public gatherings was announced, including any kind of movement as part of a demonstration. Gündüz's reaction was to organize the act of standing on the square. Because it was not forbidden for an individual to do this, it undermined police regulations. Those whose job it was to enforce these regulations did not know how to deal appropriately with an act that was so fundamentally ordinary.

This raises the particular question of from when, or in which moment, a movement – in this case an everyday gesture, namely standing and waiting – becomes political. Several clues may be drawn from this act. Firstly, there is the length of the action, which exceeds that of a usual waiting situation – and yet, how long can a person wait while still functioning within the social framework of everyday gestures? How long is needed to convert an ordinary event in a public space into an unusual one? The question of temporality is therefore connected to that of space, and in this instance particularly the alternative use of public space as signified by the length of time for which it is used. Erdem Gündüz is, as already mentioned, a performer and choreographer, trained among other things in the methods of contemporary dance movement.¹ Here, I would suggest that artistic practice is migrating into temporary forms of political protest. Gündüz's act could therefore be described as artistic, perhaps through the idea of the slowing or the stilling of movement, or in the use of public space as a place of portrayal, as site-specific performance, if you will. The aspects of physical action and its production and performance in an urban place consequently denote and realize three overlapping spheres: the artistic, the public everyday life, and the political. How and when these fields stray into the boundaries of the others is the subject of the following discussion.

Acts of Slowing Down

As a performer and choreographer, Gündüz principally makes use of established methods of contemporary dance, one being the process of deceleration, which for Gündüz ends in maintaining an almost motionless position in the location. André Lepecki sees not only the act of standing (apparently) still but also the mode of deceleration as a practice of contemporary dance which is bound up with critique of representation. Using the example of choreographer Jérôme Bel, Lepecki formulates a “slower ontology”, which is externally expressed through the stilling of movement

(Lepecki 2006, 45, 57). A “deflation of movement” does not, however, represent a denial of dance as movement, placing this instead within the internal structure of the body itself, as in the piece *Jérôme Bel* (1995): “[Bel] deploys stillness and slowness to propose how movement is not only a question of kinetics, but also one of intensities, of generating an intensive field of microp perceptions.” (Lepecki 2001, 57)

Even earlier, Lepecki emphasizes the very idea of standing still as an interruption of the perpetual river of time, a suspension of temporal flow, as he demonstrates, for instance, with reference to Jérôme Bel’s *The Last Performance* (1998) (Lepecki 2001, 44 ff.). Together with anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis, Lepecki expresses these “still acts” as “[s]tanding still against the busy background of historical agitation”, as remaining motionless in the face of an (aesthetic) modernity which has aligned itself with progress (Lepecki 2001, 44).

To return to Gündüz, he converts a similar aesthetic slowing and stopping, also oriented towards postmodern movement practices of standing still,² into a moment of still-standing-there as *Duran Adam*, in spite of police restrictions and the ban on demonstrating: a political application of artistic methods which is an early nod to Lepecki’s paraphrase of Seremetakis’ theses (Ertem 2014).³ Protest is made possible precisely because there is no longer a demonstration on the march, or in motion: this is an act of standing still against an anti-democratic regime, so to speak.

I would now like to look once again, and more closely, at the question of the moment of transition: firstly the transition of an everyday act – standing and waiting – into an artistic act, and finally into an alternative, legal form of resistance. The decisive question here seems to me to be when and how exactly artistic practice – or, more precisely, choreography – becomes a medium of protest; or, following Niklas Luhmann, when does the act of the artist Erdem Gündüz become a medium which communicates protest? First, it is important to clarify the theoretical outlines of the medial and/as art within the conceptual field of communication. In addition to this, the medial movement of transfer between everyday gestures, art, and the political will be considered once again in greater detail through the application of another example from choreography.

Art as Medium

For the following discussion, I will briefly put aside the notion of the autonomy of art and the subsequent possibility of never fully comprehensible aesthetic surpluses, and take a closer look at Niklas Luhmann’s thoughts on the mediality and also the

communicability of art. First, however, a few words on Luhmann's theoretical concept. From the perspective of systems theory, sociologist Niklas Luhmann outlines a different view of social phenomena and the epistemological implications inherent in them, which he juxtaposes with ontological or essentialist theories: "Indicate the system from which you want to observe the world, draw a distinction, and distinguish yourself from what you observe while acknowledging the autological implication that the same holds when you observe yourself (rather than the external world)" (Luhmann 2000, 51).

The operations described do not consistently take place on the level of subjective decisions, but are always connected to the self-referentiality of the system concerned and its internal objects: "'For itself' means independent of the cut of observation by others" (Luhmann 1995, 32-33). This inclusive nature of systems' constitutions is important, and is elucidated by Luhmann using the term autopoiesis. It may be, then, that systems (linguistic, for instance, but also ecological) do not only exist in the pure mode of repetition, but are in fact always constituted in a recursive way: "It is not enough [...] to repeat what has been said [...] once it dies away. Something else, something new must follow, for the informational component of communication presupposes surprise and gets lost in repetition" (Luhmann 2000, 49-50).

The described self-referentiality is always preceded first of all by a differentiation operation between, respectively, that which belongs to the system and that which surrounds it ("environment"):

Systems are oriented by their environment not just occasionally and adaptively, but structurally and they cannot exist without an environment. They constitute and maintain themselves by creating and maintaining a difference from their environment, and they use their boundaries to regulate this difference (Luhmann 1995, 16-17).

In this, communication is a key element in the differentiation and constitution of, for instance, social systems (Luhmann 1995, 19-20). This, along with the characteristic of self-referentiality, characterizes systems on the one hand as restricted and strictly differentiated from others (Luhmann 1995, 37, 39); and yet systems, through their very distinctiveness, are able to connect to other systems and environments and also to 'shape' them:

The concept of a self-referentially closed system does not contradict the system's *openness to the environment*. Instead, in the self-referential mode of operation, closure is a form of broadening possible environmental contacts; closure increases [...] the complexity of the environment that is possible for the system (Luhmann 1995, 37).

With this, Luhmann is also subverting the idea of the classical dichotomy of 'inside' and 'outside' (Luhmann 1995, 37).

Within the theoretical field of systems theory, Luhmann then expresses the possibility of situating art as a system of communication – although he definitely agrees to the autonomy of art and its occasional withdrawal from hermeneutic systems as a polysemy (Luhmann 2000, 40). It is of primary importance for the link developing here that art, as an alternative to language, can communicate just like these “structural coupling[s] of systems of consciousness and social systems” (Luhmann 1992, 67-68). Indeed, modern art (by which he means the avant-garde concepts of 1960s visual art) does in a way subvert and toy with the expectations held by the viewers (Luhmann 1986, 13). This however presupposes “socially constituted expectations”:

for instance, that writing must be legible, and music recognizable as such, that is, distinguishable from noises, or even more simply: that that which we encounter in concert halls, literary texts, museums, etc., is art. Without the establishment of such expectations [...] art would no longer be able to reproduce itself; it would leak into the everyday and trickle away (Luhmann 1986, 11).

What is particularly enlightening here is, among other things, the distinction between art and the everyday which becomes so blurred in the example of *Duran Adam*. Before we go into this, let us return once more to Luhmann's concept of media.

Luhmann defines media as an ensemble of multiple elements bound together by “loose coupling[s]” and which display an “easy separability” (Luhmann 1986, 7) – as, for instance, in the verbal system of letters, words, language. Art as a medium, Luhmann says, is based first of all on “primary media” such as sound and visibility, and then forms a “second level medium”, in which music, for example, is only recognizable as such when it complies with particular principles of composition and is also distinguishable from

mere everyday sounds (Luhmann 1986, 8). Luhmann eventually describes art's (various) expressive methods as "form" and, regarding music, states, "[w]hile sound is usually heard as a difference from quiet and therefore noticed, music presupposes this attention and forces it to observe a second difference: that of medium and form" (Luhmann 1986, 9). Through the loose connections of a wide and complex range of elements, "zones of possibility" in and for art come into being (Luhmann 1986, 9).

According to Luhmann, form is not linked to a separation of form and content. Instead, form, through the aforementioned first operation, that of differentiation, becomes recognizable as a certain constitution, as a state of being like-this-and-no-other-way which demarcates one form from another; but also as what he calls a "figure" [Gestalt], meaning a "unity": [T]he concept of form [...] extends and places on the 'other side' of form the realm of what used to be considered chance and thereby subsumes under the concept of form any difference that marks a unity" (Luhmann 2000, 27).

In his conception of a relationship between medium and form, Luhmann is not, of course, talking about theatre, dance, or performance art; the performing arts in particular, if this model were applied, would appear extremely complex one would conclude, as they are formed of primary media, and their respective forms (such as the dramatic text) that are essentially loosely coupled media of the third level, so to speak. This is not to say that theatre is a conglomerate of various other 'first' arts. In fact, theatre seems to reinforce Luhmann's idea of art as a medium: after all, it creates a complex entity of the most diverse medial forms of expression, which, for certain on-stage moments, combine with varying degrees of regularity, but can then separate once again just as quickly. To illustrate this, one need only think of a 'classical' example like opera, in which music, acting and occasionally dance and further elements come together. In this context, Luhmann's concept of a temporality of systems also becomes understandable. The temporality is essentially inherent in them, in the form of a genuine "restlessness" and instability which make possible the necessary change within the systems (Luhmann 1995, 50, 41-42).

Luhmann, meanwhile, also has one eye on the historical development of the arts and states that art creates its own media. He sees these of course in relation to social reality, which he portrays as a continuous process. The arts of the medieval period still displayed "rigid forms, oriented towards stereotypes", but the art of the 19th century showed "tendencies to embrace social facts' great capability of dissolution and recombination" (Luhmann 1986, 10-11).

If, then, society is constituted through communication, it follows that (political) protest situations represent one of its media of communication. And if, following Luhmann once again, art is to be understood as a system of communication that, through loosely coupled media, takes on diverging, temporally marked forms of display – like *Duran Adam* as a coupling of (public) space, the body, and (im)mobility – then I would suggest that loose couplings can also be envisaged between daily life, art, and political protest. In Luhmann’s terms, this would for instance mean that systems, on the one hand, are strictly distinct from one another; on the other hand, however, transfers between these different fields can happen comparatively easily, because, in certain situations, their margins are relatively open and loose, and can at any time connect to other system constellations. This happens especially, I think, in situations in which the marginal conditions are shifted or unclear: what, for instance, is *Duran Adam* doing in the eyes of the advancing and indecisive police? Is he simply standing there? Is he waiting for something? Might this possibly be a piece of art? Or even a political protest? If yes, however, what form could this have taken within the Turkish police’s sphere of control?

Regarding art, Luhmann expresses the questioning of one’s own perception of art as “What do I see? Am I seeing correctly what I see?” (Luhmann 2000, 40). To return once again to the aforementioned separation of the everyday and the artistic, described by Luhmann, we may well agree with Luhmann that the dividing line between the two apparently cannot be drawn too strictly – and not just in postmodern art. This seems to raise the question of why Luhmann, who after all defines the loose connections between systems *through* their distinctions, maintains this differentiation between art and the everyday at all. Modernist art provides an early demonstration in Marcel Duchamps’s readymades – of which the *Fountain* (1917) is a famous example – of an object experiencing uncoupling and re-coupling through spatial relocation and decontextualization: out of the realm of the everyday, and into the sphere of so-called High Culture in an art gallery. Elsewhere, Luhmann emphasizes the ‘exchange potential’ of profane, everyday objects in an artistic setting, exemplified in Duchamps’s famous example as a breaking away from art’s conventional criteria; he restricts himself, however, as generally, primarily to the field of the visual arts. Duchamps, according to Luhmann, was directly playing with the idea of the difference between the everyday and the artistic and connecting the questionable possibility of a distinction to this, thereby actually using “*the form of a work of art*” (Luhmann 2000, 34).

If we return to Luhmann's differentiation between music and sounds, mentioned earlier, we can notice that John Cage's famous experimental piece *4'33* (1952), for instance, is entirely about calling this distinction into question and, in the intended absence of (composed) music, experiencing the sounds and noises of the concert hall as a composition of the moment – here, we could ask once again how strictly Luhmann is defining his concept of a composition, considering that he, as outlined above, almost speaks of music as an art form which can be distinctly differentiated from everyday sounds. Luhmann also notes that “non-art” is always a component of art, as the “material can also be applied differently” (Luhmann 1992, 71). However, he stands by his notion that art always begins in its communicative function, while juxtaposing, as a core concept, a certain artistic voluntarism of display with a fundamental openness to reception in the viewer (Luhmann 1992, 70).

Now, how can Luhmann's ideas on the mediality – and therefore genuine sociability – of art be applied to the example of *Duran Adam*? The moment of standing still on the square is, first of all, not a genuine artistic act in itself, rather an everyday activity which can indeed last some time, as said earlier: waiting for a bus, a (delayed) meeting, or similar. The context, however, relocates the everyday into a different system: that of art and politics. The standing element, which, in Luhmann's terms would be understood as a primary medium, has now been coupled, although not necessarily straight away within a composition or similar format that would confine it to an artistic framework. The starting point is a conscious decision on Gündüz's part: to stand right here on this spot and not to move, with eyes fixed on the Atatürk Cultural Center. In doing this, Gündüz opens up two systems at the same time: firstly, the artistic. As a performer, he chooses the act of standing, which represents a historical allusion to the methods of New York's Judson Church protagonists in its drawing of the everyday into art. In political terms, Gündüz's act is a silent protest against the Istanbul police's ban on demonstrations. The act of standing also becomes a joining point for diverging systems which, here, are communicating with each other.

Erdem Gündüz, as already mentioned, is a performer and choreographer. As such, he has chosen a political step: the gesture of standing. The question now is whether the act of standing in itself already constitutes the medium which connects to the systems described. Is it not also an artistic “form”, as Luhmann would put it – a second level medium – which, as choreography, like composition in music, creates the connection

between the everyday, the artistic, and the political, and enables exchange between the three, now indistinguishable for the irritated policemen?

In the end, Luhmann states that the aspect of form becomes fungible within boundaries, and that this would be visible in the medium:

The work of art draws on sensuously perceptible media for its own self-explication, no matter what is subsequently presented as an internal play of forms. [...] The concept of form suggests that two requirements must be fulfilled and inscribed into perception: the form must have a boundary, and there must be an 'unmarked' space excluded by this boundary (Luhmann 2000, 45).

In this case, the unmarked is not to be understood as the other, the asymbolic. Instead, an asymmetry comes into being in the moment in which the decision is taken to make a distinction in a particular direction (Luhmann 2000, 42), perhaps the direction to see something "as art" (Luhmann 2000, 39). In the case of Erdem Gündüz' act of standing, it could be said that the systems have failed. After all, the police do not know how they should deal with this situation: they simply are not able to reach a decision and, to a certain extent, fall prey to a system failure.

To what extent may choreography here, and the choreographic decision to stand on the square, be characterized as a system-transcending (in this case) medium of art and protest? To approach this question, I would like to consider a second example.

Constructing Resilience

Between 2011 and 2012, the Israeli German-based choreographer Ehud Darash carried out a series of interventions in public spaces. He started in Tel Aviv, where, working with a succession of dancers, he immersed himself in the subject currently focusing the population's political protest, namely social justice and affordable housing; one year later, he continued his work within the context of Occupy Wall Street.⁴ If demonstrations or protests are generally characterized either by striving for progress or the opposite, a tactic of blocking or occupying (as demonstrated by the tents put up on Tel Aviv's expensive Rothschild Boulevard), then Darash and his allies initiated a literal example of the latter: in the midst of the protesting crowds, singing and shouting slogans, on street corners, or even between the tents of political activists, five or six dancers on each

occasion performed very small movements. Starting from a standing position, similar to the later *Duran Adam*, they would gradually slump down into themselves, until their bodies' strength gave out and they fell to the ground. In this, the usual protest act of standing-for-something turned into its opposite.

It is of course very much possible to be critical of this, and ask whether an artistic act of this type was merely pretentious in the face of the social engagement of those who were demanding better living conditions in such numbers on the streets. The question is whether an action like this actually creates political awareness or rather remains in the sphere of a purely artistic project, which is using the described counter-public as a place of experimentation. At this point, however, I would like to concentrate on the functioning of the choreographical as a possible medium of protest: not so much in the sense of a (difficult to determine) effect aesthetic, but rather with a view to structural organization and transfers of (system) elements which fluctuate between the everyday, the artistic, and the political. Luhmann states, “[a]s soon as boundaries are defined sharply, elements must be attributed either to the system or the environment” (Luhmann 1995, 28). As already shown through *Duran Adam*, elements like this can be temporarily uncoupled and cause difficulties in the differentiation and placing of and in systems.

Articulated with André Lepecki, there already seems to be a connection between the slowing down strategies of contemporary avant-garde dance and a politically-charged choreographic riposte to the ideology of standing straight – a connection which Lepecki describes as genuinely “ontopolitical” (Lepecki 2006, 88).⁵ In this regard, Darash’s act, whether intentional or not, is already political because it initiates a counter-movement on the stage of the aforementioned protests. More important at this point, however, is the question of where exactly the systems of the everyday, the artistic, and the political converge and become connected, and I would suggest that this takes place in the choreography itself, which becomes a medium of protest for Erdem Gündüz, and for Darash at least creates the potential for this. Once again, movements are being taken from the realm of the everyday – in this case a stylized form of sinking down or falling – and transformed first of all into an artistic, choreographic act which – against the background of political events – may develop into a protest movement.

Following Andrew Hewitt, Gabriele Klein reformulates the idea of “social choreography”: choreography, according to Klein, should be understood as “a performative structuring of body practices in time and space, as an analytical category

that allows reflection of the social, as well as exposing the relationships between the aesthetic and the political” (Klein 2013, 198). Ehud Darash’s concept is primarily artistic, and consciously integrates elements of contemporary dance, such as slowness. These acts may however, to refer to Luhmann once again, be regarded as socio-political interventions in the context of the described events – or even be discarded as inappropriate artistic self-indulgence. Are there any indicators here that could enable an appropriate ‘registration’?

At the beginning of his book, Randy Martin, discussing the connection between dance and politics, emphasizes the moment of mobilization as a decisive binding factor of dance and/as political movement:

[T]hrough mobilization, bodies traverse a given terrain that by traversing, they constitute. [...] Mobilization foregrounds th[e] process of how bodies are made, how they are assembled, and how demands for space produce a space of identifiable demands through a practical activity (Martin 1998, 4).

Here, then, Martin opts for a performative manifestation of space as mobilization, and not only mere movement. Rather: “If movement can be plotted on a grid of space and time, mobilization is what generates the grid”, to use Martin’s words (Martin 1998, 4). In Luhmann’s terms, mobilization would be an element which primarily enabled movement (as a medium). Dance, to return to Martin, then becomes the “embodied practice” which gathers bodies for a particular, literal time-space (Martin 1998, 4) and is, in this regard, truly to be considered within social dynamics: “[D]ance is treated as the reflexive mobilization of the body – that is, as a social process that foregrounds the very means through which bodies gather” (Martin 1998, 5), and this in specific historical constellations (Martin 1998, 24).

Dance-movement could be classified, according to Luhmann, as a first level medium to which choreography, as a second, connects; or, as Martin puts it: “dance emerges through the mobilization of participation in relation to a choreographic idea” (Martin 1998, 4). Both space and time are then, according to Martin as quoted above, not simply given, but must be developed: *re-placed* in movement, they are created through this very act and become observable. This raises the question, however, of whether the Luhmannian model – which, when applied to music for instance, sees sound as the first

and composition as the second medium – can simply be carried over without further work. In Martin's view, after all, choreography is not simply an instrument or artistic format which brings the dance-movement together. In order to comprehend this, Martin's truly political understanding of dance must first be outlined.

For him, movement and mobilization serve as key concepts which couple dance (as "embodied practice") and politics (Martin 1998, 5). Consequently, the origins of the political would lie in the very moment of setting-something-in-motion and would be closely linked to this. However, according to this idea, any mobilization at all could be viewed as a political act. Martin does clarify his ideas, and places his theorem of mobilization within a triangle of dance, choreography, and participation. The concept of participation contributes particularly to understanding the connection between movement and politics. Referring to the notion of dance as a performing art, Martin reformulates the idea of participation as a fundamentally social structure which arises between the audience and the performers in the performance setting. He attaches this, among other things, to the moment of the end of a performance, which is ultimately set by the audience's decision as to whether the dance (as an artistic event) is now over:

Was that the dance? By initiating this common reflective activity on what has just transpired, the audience imposes a direct physical imperative on the dancers, an authority that until now was reserved for the choreographer. [...] the audience decides that the dance is complete [and] [w]hat the choreographer began – getting dancers to move with something in mind – the audience here continues (Martin 1998, 33).

Regardless of the question of whether choreography is actually merely to be seen as a set of preformed compositional ideas, it is fundamental for the link unfolding here that the audience undertakes a (Luhmannian, when seen like this) distinction and grants the event the status of (artistic) dance(dancing). Consequently, the audience is an indispensable component and, what is more, participates in the event as a social process: "the very participation of performers and audience [...] made the event possible." (Martin 1998, 36)⁶ Via Erika Fischer-Lichte's idea that co-presence is a necessary constitutional condition,⁷ Martin grants the audience an active position not only in the sense of a physical and atmospheric presence, but rather as a temporary

authority which takes on authorship of the ending and therefore draws the distinction between dance and no-longer-dance.

This constellation is not, however – and this is important for the topic being discussed here – to be viewed as a stable entity of socio-artistic activity. Instead, this is a matter of thoroughly unstable levels which constantly need to be re-actualized or could slip out of their categorization:

The audience has no identity as audience prior to and apart from the performative agency that has occasioned it. As such, the audience is intrinsically “unstable” [...] [t]he uncertainty, the indeterminacy of performance, is momentarily actualized by the audience and therefore itself disrupted (Martin 1998, 38).

When considered, once again, through Luhmann’s medium theory, the aforementioned medial first and second levels – movement/dance and choreography – can now be expanded via Randy Martin with the fundamental component of the audience. Decisions in and about media would consequently not be superordinate or superpersonal categories, but would always be bound up with operations of distinct processes, which could be completely fluid – an artistic (choreographic) act can arise from an everyday one, and then be transformed again into a political one. As a result, choreography alone would not be the medium that determined the respective everyday, artistic, or political perspective, but rather the particular loose references within the dance-choreography-participation triangle described by Martin, which could cause every mobilization to slide into one or another sphere.

That which Martin describes as the audience also plays a crucial role in the examples considered here, particularly in the moments of uncertainty experienced by the police when faced with Erdem Gündüz’ performance, notably in the demarcation and classification of events – which Luhmann, as mentioned previously, explains in the form of “boundaries”⁸. This marks people taking part in the situation as the “audience”: the police, who stand there partly insecurely and do not, so to speak, grasp the power offered to them – and yet unwittingly take part in the action in that they are unable to take the measure of Gündüz in the normal way, but simply stand around him rather helplessly, shrugging their shoulders, cautious and uncertain. The otherwise regular conduct of the police is suspended through Gündüz’s behavior, which is so unclear to

them, and as a result they become, rather unwillingly, participants in his protest. They don't wish to interrupt it because it is not clear to them whether anything illegal is taking place: they leave him as he is. Here, mobilization literally creates demobilization: the impossibility of removing Gündüz, and the impossibility of doing nothing – the normal police process becomes virtually pointless.

In Martin's terms, we could talk in this case about an unstable, unsettled audience, which is unable to take on authorship of the end of the performance because, to return to Luhmann once again, it is not clear what kind of system they are actually facing here: everyday waiting, performance art in a public space, or political protest? The Luhmannian condition of an autonomous observation and differentiation is not available: the police have been temporarily relocated to an impossible place, which excludes their usual trademark of decisive action.⁹ This very moment of uncertainty which the performance of *Duran Adam* releases and which, in this situation, undermines the state's power to act, once again allows an action fed by artistic practice to become a political one, because it destabilizes otherwise established boundaries between systems – even that between dance and choreography. If choreography were a second level medium (in Luhmann's terms) that (to return to Martin) is only actualized through the coming together of performers and the audience, the question remains of whether choreography is the medium of protest if it is not recognized as such. And of dance also there remains merely the Martinian formulation of "embodied practice" (Martin 1998, 5), as the momentum of a "mobilization of participation in relation to a choreographic idea" (Martin 1998, 4) becomes ambiguous.

Participation – in this case the observation of and decision regarding an act which breaks ranks with the everyday – is, then, an important condition for the translation of a (choreographic) movement into a political one. From the various pieces of footage which exist of Ehud Darash's performance in Tel Aviv, it is apparent that hardly anyone notices the actors moving against the stream, or that they, as in the Gündüz example, become irritated (or later even join in the act¹⁰); and therefore that this does not even qualify as a particular/additional act of protest. However, the act cannot be completely dismissed as pretentious or apolitical. The element of space, briefly mentioned above, still plays a crucial role.

Reoccupying Spaces

In their acts, both Erdem Gündüz and Ehud Darash occupy a public place – the city – for a certain period in a new or different manner from that in which it is usually used. They achieve this through the long time spent standing, and the slow-motion sinking of the body. These tactics are partly reminiscent of grass roots movements, such as sit-ins or the like, although these are mostly carried out by larger, more compact groups and clearly diverge from everyday behavior straight away, as people do not usually sit down in the middle of a busy road. Gündüz’s behavior, by contrast, is not immediately unusual, but instead becomes notable through the length of his wait and the gaze fixed on the Atatürk Cultural Center; the longer his position lasts – and this seems to be a feature of the act – the more he resembles a living version (although admittedly a rather relaxed version) of one of the many statues of heroic figures to be found in cities like Istanbul. The tactical movements of the group around Darash however are much more strikingly different, although hardly anyone really seems to notice this.

Michel de Certeau differentiates between strategies and tactics. He defines the former as power options and institutions which normally have their own “place” at their disposal and under their control – he gives “military strategy” as a significant example (De Certeau 1988, 35-36). Tactics, however, are based on a lack of possession:

The space of tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. [...] It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected (De Certeau 1998, 37).

It is consequently possible to take possession of otherwise hegemony-occupied spaces very briefly and to reorganize them – flash mobs could be an example of this. Comparing the performances by Gündüz and Darash, we could draw the tentative conclusion that the moment of surprise emphasized by de Certeau is greater in *Duran Adam*: in spite of extensive state controls and bans it succeeds in using the act to find a gap, a loophole, and uses this to re-occupy the state-controlled space temporarily and to suspend, for a time, the power to act of the organs of the state. Darash and his dancers, however, apparently do not cause a stir in Tel Aviv, perhaps less strictly policed than Istanbul in

this protest situation, and this is on the edge of a form of demonstration in which alternative, creative formats are frequently used to express discontent.

In this regard, is Darash's act to be perceived as less political, and more artistic? Once more, the mode of political activity must be considered. Oliver Marchart, against a background of theoretical concepts of the political as developed by Hannah Arendt, speaks of political acting as dancing: "Political acting, for Arendt, is structurally the same as dancing." In this, he is alluding to the sensual aspects of political acting, a behavior that never pursues exclusively utilitarian aims and that Arendt identifies in the student protests of 1968 (Marchart 2013, 45, 41 ff.). This idea of the "dancing protest", also discussed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, ends in a kind of playful antagonism that takes place in community: "To dance politically [...] means dancing together" (Marchart 2013, 45).

One of several examples Marchart uses is the Israeli group Public Movement, which also involved an initially artistically constructed concept translating into politically effective resistance on the margins of the 2011 social protests in Jaffa, Tel Aviv. Using a kind of guerilla tactic, Public Movement blocked crossings in Tel Aviv with simple circular dances. Because the dances and songs were very well-known and widespread in Israel, the single group members soon expanded into larger gatherings, in which many passers-by, in dancing, momentarily blocked an area of public space and therefore protested together (Marchart 2013, 55-56). It may be worth noting a particular element of Darash's performance: that the act was not originally conceived to prompt others to join in.¹¹ Darash's concept thus seems, considering the aforementioned moment of counter-movement on the edge of the demonstration, not 'oppositional enough' to provoke (political) awareness and or the accompanying literal act of turning round. However, considering the principle behind Darash's performance, we could describe it as a tactic which temporarily changes the space, and which offers sinking and surrendering as an alternative to the idea of antagonism, which seems to play such an important role in political acting.

According to de Certeau, the mode of time and in this instance particularly tempo play a role in moments of tactical appropriations:

Tactics are procedures that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time – to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favorable situation, to the rapidity of the

movements that change the organization of a space, to the relations among successive moments in an action, to the possible intersections of duration and heterogeneous rhythms, etc (De Certeau 1988, 38).

Both Darash and Gündüz, by contrast, rely on deceleration, rather than on suddenness or acceleration of political interventions. They do, however, make use both of the momentum of rhythmic counter-movement and the overlapping of different movement spaces, as well as the moment de Certeau describes as favorable: the moment of indecision between everyday behavior, art, and protest. It is such a moment Gündüz 'stands through', and the political and creative uproar in Tel Aviv through which Darash, in this situation, offers and experiments with different, artistic forms of protest. Through this, both create public awareness: Gündüz in the political register, supported not least through social media,¹² and Darash rather in the context of artistic formats like the Berlin Tanz im August (Dance in August) festival, where, in 2011, he described his performance in a public presentation.¹³

In the preceding discussion and examples I have tried to show the extent to which choreographic and dance movements become (unstable) media for the alternative use of public space, a process particularly characterized by playful tactics and by rendering unclear the boundaries between everyday, artistic, and political behavior. Described by Martin as mobilizations, they communicate social protest in a playful way, or at least reflect, as with Darash's public act, habitualized forms of resistance, otherwise expressed through standing tall and striding forwards.

In this, choreographic movements become first of all an embodied medium of political protest, or related reflective behaviors: acts visible to the public which are organized in a physical, spatial, time-conscious way may be understood as a protest that, in particular, momentarily uses locations of power for alternative purposes and reformulates them. The political potential of each act therefore becomes evident when the boundaries of dance and choreography as (embodied and structure-giving) media become uncertain: Luhmann and Martin show that systematically indistinct situations, or those which cannot be differentiated in everyday, artistic or political terms have the potential for irritation and for possible reformulations of established social behavior. As a result, in their moments of uncertainty, dance and choreography become communicative media articulating protest. As in the case of *Duran Adam*, politically

significant places can, for a certain length of time, be literally rewritten and re-choreographed at the same time. Artistic practices can, then, become agents in the true sense of the word: performative, biopolitical mediators of protest that can, at least temporarily, subvert established boundaries of political behavior and systems.

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NOTES

¹Cf. <http://www.erdemgunduz.org/>, accessed 13.4.2016.

² See e.g. Steve Paxton's concept of the *Small Dance* (Paxton/Zimmer 1977, 11).

³ At the end of his explanations Lepecki contours the "still act as movement of resistance." (Lepecki 2001, 47).

⁴ Cf. Sabine Weier: "Blogger als Performer. Unsere Erfahrungen bei Ehud Darashs 'Constructing Resilience', entry from 15.8.2012 at: <http://tanzimaugust-blog.de/blogger-als-performer/> (accessed 13.4.2016).

⁵ He takes the crawling actions of artist William Pope L. as example, that Lepecki calls "[s]tumbling dance". In this, Pope L. moves strictly horizontally through the street canyons of New York, thus making a "choreopolitical statement": "Pope L.'s crawls propose a kinetic critique of verticality, of verticality's association with phallic erectility and its intimate association with the 'brutality of political power, of the means of constraint: policy, army, bureaucracy'" (Lepecki 2006, 93; he is quoting Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, 1991).

⁶ Here, Martin opts for integrating these fundamental constellations into the analysis of dance, which must therefore take into account not only the examination of dance as the on-stage representation of movement, but also the specific set up of it. From this perspective, dance can moreover serve as a model for locating the political and recognizing social connections. Ibid., S. 38, 46. Due to considerations of space, I cannot go into Martin's connected problematized relationship between "agency" and "history" here.

⁷ Fischer-Lichte formulates this with theatre studies expert Max Herrmann. Erika Fischer-Lichte: *The Transformative Power of Performance. A new aesthetics* (2004), New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 38.

⁸ In this, these boundaries have “the double function of separating and connecting system and environment. This double function can be clarified by means of the distinction between element and relation, a clarification that at the same time returns us to the thematic of complexity. As soon as boundaries are defined sharply, elements must attribute either to the system or the environment. Yet relations between system and environment can exist. Thus a boundary separates elements, but not necessarily relations. It separates events, but lets causal effects pass through.” Luhmann: *Social Systems*, 1995, p. 28-29.

⁹ On an alternative medial level, mobilization and participation in the sense of an activated audience are otherwise achieved in an almost ‘classical’ way: after it has spread and been mobilized via social media, ever more people join Gündüz’s standing protest and join in with it. Andy Carvin: “The ‘Standing Man’ Of Turkey: Act Of Quiet Protest Goes Viral”, on: NPR News, 18.6.2013, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/06/18/193183899/the-standing-man-of-turkey-act-of-quiet-protest-goes-viral> (accessed 13.4.2016)

¹⁰ Cf. footnote 9.

¹¹ Neither does this apply to performance artist William Pope L., who Lepecki uses as an example – this is about a critique of the (urban western) ideology of the vertical as an arrangement of hierarchical systems. Cf. footnote 5.

¹² Cf. footnote 9.

¹³ I saw the showing on 24.8.2011 as part of Tanz im August in the studio of Berlin’s Podewil.