Subversive Repetition

Choreographies of Israeli Domination and Jewish Diaspora

By Li Lorian

1. Introduction: Reading with the Body

> *Motionless he sat, his spectacled eyes fixed upon the printed page. Yet not altogether motionless, for he had a habit (acquired at school in the Jewish quarter of the Galician town from which he came) of rocking his shiny bald pate backwards and forwards and humming to himself as he read. There he studied catalogs and tomes, crooning and rocking, as Jewish boys are taught to do when reading the Talmud. The rabbis believe that, just as a child is rocked to sleep in its cradle, so are the pious ideas of the holy text better instilled by this rhythmical and hypnotizing movement of head and body. In fact, as if he had been in a trance, Jacob Mendel saw and heard nothing while thus occupied*.
>
> Buchmendel, Stefan Zweig

To read like Jacob Mendel means reading with the body, being involved in the text, no mediation between body and mind. The reader, engaging in the act of reading, is a doer who is one in movement and consciousness. Mendel's character stands as a contradictory certificate to Susan Leigh Foster's testimony that “[W]e used to pretend the body was uninvolved, that it remained mute and still while the mind thought” (Foster 1995: 3). The *We* Foster is talking about points at a tradition of Western epistemology that “divided the world into oppositional categories such as body/mind, nature/culture, private/public, spirituality/corporeality, and experience/knowledge” (Albright 1997: 35). The heritage of these binaries is a disembodied self that conceives the body as Other, and other bodies – predominantly women, as well as people of color, people with disabilities, homosexuals and queers – as lacking selfhood. Following Elizabeth Grosz, who named this philosophical tradition "profound somatophobia", dancer and scholar Ann Cooper Albright traces its source as “the enduring legacy of Platonic idealism, which relegated bodies, particularly female bodies, to the realm of unformed matter” which needed to be “controlled by the mind and ruled over by reason” (Albright 1997: 35). Descartes's rational develops this dualistic philosophy of Plato to not only distinguish “mind from body and consciousness from the natural world", but also to consider "the self as an exclusive function of the mind, pulling subjectivity completely away from any aspect of bodily existence” (Albright 1997: 35).

As we can see, Cartesian thought fabricated and more significantly naturalized a dualistic paradigm which, in turn, manifested hierarchies between the opposite poles of the binaries it determined. Albright continues to tell us that “the repressive implications of this tradition are felt most strongly by those individuals whom the society associates

with bodily being" (Albright 1997: 36). Feminist theorist Judith Butler calls our attention to the cultural associations which link mind with masculinity and body with femininity and asserts that "any uncritical reproduction of the mind/body distinction ought to be rethought for the implicit gender hierarchy that the distinction has conventionally produced, maintained, and rationalized" (Butler 1990: 12). For it is this disparity that has displaced women's perception of self and deemed it inconsistent and incoherent. In her profound writings on the social construction of gender and theory of performativity Butler disrupts former conceptions of 'the body' as blank and pre-discursive, and asks: "[H]ow do we reconceive the body no longer as a passive medium or instrument awaiting the enlivening capacity of a distinctly immaterial will?" (Butler 1990: 8). Looking at the conceptualization of gendered bodies in critical as well as feminist theory, she notes that "[T]his 'body' often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as 'external' to that body" (Butler 1990: 129). The provocative interruption in the fundamental understanding of the 'I' leads her to conclude that "there need not be a 'doer behind the deed', but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (Butler 1990: 142).

The theoretical thread above suggests a form of knowledge lived inside and through the body, a scholarship that does not underestimate corporeal experience. If erstwhile we imagined that "thought, once conceived, transferred itself effortlessly onto the page via a body whose natural role as instrument facilitated the pen" (Foster 1995: 3), we now know to involve the body in the production of meaning. The "scholarship of the body", as Foster calls it, might "expose and contest such dichotomies as theory vs. practice or thought vs. action, distinctions that form part of the epistemic foundation of canonical scholarship" (Foster 1995: 12). While the Cartesian tradition pretended 'the body' to exist "in a semiotic vacuum, outside of language and meaning" (Albright 1997: 34), the art form of choreography places the body at the center of its grammar. Always referential, the body is in position to articulate, manifest and conceptualize ideas, images and meaning. Following this trail of thought, it will be therefore crucial for this paper to comprehend the choreographic as "not only a critical discursive force, but always already explicitly social, historical and political" (Joy 2014: 24). Thereupon, in this paper I would like to examine the capacity of the body to engage in signification in the framework of two different social and political contexts – the Israeli in domination and the Jew in Diaspora.

2. The Israeli Occupation, a Gestural Lexicon

The piece *Archive* by the choreographer and dancer Arkadi Zaides depicts the Israeli body in the occupied Palestinian territories through its physical and vocal gestures. In this solo piece, Zaides creates a gestural lexicon by projecting videos on stage, excerpts from the archives of the B'Tselem human rights organization, which distributes cameras to Palestinians in order for them to document the daily assaults they witness and suffer in the West Bank. While Palestinians civilians are behind the camera and out of frame, we see in the videos the bodies of Israeli settlers, policemen and soldiers engaging in a "day-to-day, low-impact violence, not sensational enough to be shown on television, but repeated often enough to creep into the body and to constitute a sort of common set of movements" (Pouillaude 2016: 19). Throughout the performance, Zaides practices a mimetic methodology of watching and learning the movements of those filmed, thus collecting and establishing a kinesthetic index of the Israeli occupation. By extracting the movements from the documentary footage, Zaides reduces Israeli identity to gestures and physical expressions of violence, which point to the theatricality of claiming and even justifying control over other people. The vehicle of the colonial force is demonstrated through its routine corporeal practice, indicating the evident inscription of militarisms on the participating bodies, and demonstrating how violence is normalized within the collective body.

Arkadi starts the performance with the text: "Good evening / thank you for coming / My name is Arkadi Zaides / I am a choreographer / I'm Israeli / In the last fifteen years I've been living in Tel Aviv / The West Bank is twenty kilometers away from Tel Aviv" (*Archive* 2015: 00:00:08) and shortly describes the function of the clips we are about to watch. On screen we are given details about the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories - B'tselem - and its Camera Project. The footage Zaides uses portrays only Israelis; this is a solely Israeli archive which is right to not distinguish between soldiers, policemen and Jewish settlers whilst all of them are equal players of the aggression of the Israeli state.[1] Palestinian civilians are abstracted behind the scene, embodied by the eye of the camera.[2] We witness a

1 More on the soldier-citizen dual identity of Zionist manhood see for example Sharim, Yehuda (2016). "Choreographing Masculinity in Contemporary Israeli Culture". *Choreographies of 21st Century Wars*. Ed. Gay Morris and Jens Richard Giersdorf. New York: Oxford University Press.

2 "B'tselem Camera Project […] provides video cameras and training to Palestinians living in the West Bank, helping them become citizen journalists". https://www.btselem.org/video/about-btselem-video. Date of access 16 Aug. 2019.

rebellion against the dominant power of the gaze – if usually Israelis are the ones who shoot, in this archive Palestinians 'shoot' Israelis. the complete absence of Palestinian bodies makes it impossible to mark them as Other. Thus, Israelis watching are forced to perform a deep introspection of their (our) internalization of the occupation, leaving out the daily projection we are conveniently invited to execute on our 'enemies'. Without the we/them, friend/enemy, and state/terrorist binaries, we are compelled to look at the bodies and minds we have come to be.

From the very beginning of the piece we understand that the basic action of the dancer - his choreographic assignment so to say - is to observe, copy and repeat the movements he watches on screen. Here I would like to broaden Judith Butler's prism of "identity as a *practice"* (Butler 1990: 145) beyond theory of gender, and attempt to observe possibilities of subversion for the body engaged in choreography.

Butler asserts that "the structure of impersonating reveals one of the key fabricating mechanisms through which the social construction of gender takes place" (Butler 1990: 137). She understands the practice of imitation not as a relationship between copy and original, but as a copy that replicates what *pretends* to be original, and it thus "*implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself*" (Butler 1990: 137). Bodies of naturalized gender are "an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (Butler 1990: 136). Not far off, Israeli aggression is legitimized by the mainstream discourses of "security above all", "state of emergency" and "society under constant threat". With these imitations, Zaides does not create a parody and in this sense is not the drag or cross-dresser who "dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity" (Butler 1990: 138). Nevertheless, the quotidian practice Zaides uses points at the artificial potential of the reality whose violence we tend to take as a given. Butler further fictionalizes gender, writing: "the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (Butler 1990: 140). Let us follow suit and imagine a situation where the Israeli occupation ends. Not with a peace treaty and not as a result of some meeting of crafty politicians on European or American soil far away from the conflict. It ends right here/there in the Middle East because Israelis stop dancing it. In my opinion, this is the truly subversive proposition Zaides articulates in this piece. The simple and yet so factual "possibility of a failure to repeat" (Butler 1990: 141).

Nevertheless, what makes *Archive* something other than a mere repetition of the norms we have become accustomed to; other than a display of the unfortunate somatic archive we have inherited? How could a subversive potential lie within a body that repeats and imitates an oppressive corporeality? According to Butler, to comprehend identity as an act which operates through the repetition of norms is to understand repetition as a signifying practice. As she writes:

> The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; "agency", then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. (Butler 1990: 145)

Butler hence opens a narrow window for subversion in the variations between acts of imitation. These work on the singular body but always carry public signification, as each body moves within a field of social signs. Importantly, agency is not to be found outside any existing social frame but only within the very identity-construction it might oppose. In a promise of an activist, Butler announces: "There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very "taking up" is enabled by the tool lying there" (Butler 1990: 145). The realm of performance allows a condensed time and space for social routines and indeed *Archive* captures the mechanism of mimetic acts: it exhibits a body engaged in citation and imitation while reframing and re-contextualizing it to create new meanings.

The references of Zaides's bodily citations are clear: videos of assaults done by Israelis, each displayed with its precise meta-data of date, place, name of camera operator and summary of the incident we see on screen. His movements stay in a political and social context and have little to do with abstraction. Even in the moments where the body introduces a choreographic sentence detached from the screen, we are always able to trace back the movements to their origin or have the landscape as a reminder for the setting this corporeality. Throughout the performance, learning indeed becomes a shorter process; but even then, it is not so much for finding individuality in the movement as it is for telling us something about the mimetic nature of the occupation and how it affects the collective body. Thus, the kinesthetic vocabulary starts to speak and articulate bodily statements. While the videos in *Archive* are perceived as documents of reality, the body of the dancer is bound to include variations.

His technique and ability to study choreographic speeches might tell us something new about the reality he is citing, and maybe even create variations and achieve agency to perform the subversion Butler describes. Andre Lepecki asserts that “the particular political subject that transforms spaces of circulation into spaces of freedom has a specific name: the dancer” (Lepecki 2013: 20). Zaides insists on stopping, rehearsing, de-constructing and reconstructing movements, thus “claiming kinetic knowledge” (Lepecki 2013: 20) over the situation. In the last part of the performance one of the videos depicts a young drunk settler during a Purim holiday festival in Hebron. The piece delves into actions of increasing vocal and verbal loops, leading up to the climax where all the violent phrases – both vocal and physical – turn into a psychotic, almost messianic trance. With no video on screen but using a looper to create the beats and sounds, Zaides dances into what seems to be an ecstatic Purim party, the inevitable explosion of the aggressive collective voice and accumulation of the somatic archive. The image is clear and Zaides does not let it linger for long. In a single moment he comes out of the trance and stops the looper. Party's over.

The image articulated on stage is of a dance taking over a dancer “overwhelmed by voices and haunted by gestures” (Pouillaude 2016: 14). But the choreographic apparatus established throughout the performance suggests further meaning – the dancer has gathered enough corporeal knowledge to control and virtuously display the consequences of this archive. Writing about *Archive*, theater scholar Ruthie Abeliovich reasons:

> The two modes of presence in this performance – the video archive and the live embodied gestures – thus convey a profound tension between controlling structures and ways of resisting them. The performance transforms this particular choreography of violence into a set of movements that proliferate beyond the political conditions in which they occurred. (Abeliovich 2016: 7)

Otherwise, in Butler's terms: “The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation [of gender], *to displace* the very [gender] norms that enable the repetition itself” (Butler 1990: 148).

To conclude, in my opinion, the piece is not merely a mirror of the reality of the Israeli occupation and its consequences on our society. That would be too simplistic. The technique of the dancer reveals the internal grammar of this reality, and proliferates it to tell us that learning a new language is indeed possible.

3. The Jewish Body, a Sign of Difference

But what would be the principle alphabet of this new language? Following the trance, Zaides returns to the video archive. In the last five minutes of the performance, which are in no way a summary or conclusion but rather a kind off visual epilogue or imagery footnote, we see footage on screen, again from Hebron, of “Settlers' children blinding camera with mirrors” (*Archive* 2015: 01:00:49). The image seems abstract, with light flashing and glimmering through the frame. Cut; then another footage shot across a fence-shielded window, of a soldier seen from below, looking at the camera with a disturbed gaze. “Soldier throws a stone at Raed” (*Archive* 2015: 01:01:18) the information at the side of the screen reveals, but we never actually see the stone as the performance ends and the screen turns black. The last images we observe are of lights and mirrors, the soldier's troubled gaze, and Zaides standing and facing us, the audience. It is implied that the violence repeats itself and continues out of frame, outside the theater-space, and we conjecture that the footage archive of B'tselem consists of many more hours of video documentation.

The meaning of the Hebrew word *b'tselem* is literally “in the image of”, and is to be found in Genesis: “And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them” (1:27). In the descriptive creation of man lies the ethical commandment to value human life as created in the likeness of God, another game of mirrors. Ruthie Abeliovich points out that the word *b'tselem* “derives from the linguistic root ZLM (צלמ), which also refers to the act of photographing” (Abeliovich 2016: 3). In a dance of gazes, the camera-eye points at an Israeli soldier; a mirror then reverts the light to the camera, and finally Zaides directs the gaze of the soldier at the audience. The circulation of gazes leaves us with an open question: have we lost our *tselem enosh* (humanity)? In a sense, this movement follows Jenn Joy's imagination of “the choreographic as one possibility of sensual address – a dialogic opening in which art is not only looked at but also looks back” with the hope of “igniting a tremulous hesitation in the ways that we experience and respond” (Joy 2014: 1). The choreographic as an ethical inquiry which concludes in sensual vibrations representing the ways we register reality.

If *Archive* draws its somatic vocabulary from the actuality of the military and political domination of the Israeli occupation, in the following chapter I would like to

shift the attention to rituals outside of this hegemony. In their influential essay "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity", the anthropologist Jonathan Boyarin and historian Daniel Boyarin examine a non-hegemonic subject away from, and even opposing, the embodiment of Jewish identity in a nation-state. In echo with Butler's "there need not to be a doer behind the deed", Boyarin and Boyarin write: "[W]e not only do these things because we are this thing, but we are this thing because we do these things" (1993: 705). For if Zionism envisioned Jewishness in a state, Diaspora relies on ethnic, religious and cultural genealogical performances. To follow this line of thought I would like to shift the sign of the body away from Israeli to Jewish, from hegemonic to Diasporic, in attempt to touch another choreographic sphere.

In Butler terms, heterosexual hegemony is not only understood as that which is in itself considered normal, but moreover as that whose boundaries are policed by various judgments and punishments included in the crossing of these boundaries (1990: 131). Thus, Butler understands the body as a surface "systematically signified by taboos and anticipated transgression" (Butler 1990: 131) and, in a provocative move, suggests to consequently think of "the boundaries of the body as the limits of the social *hegemonic*" (1990: 131). The homophobic imagery which evolved around a disease such as AIDS, for example, displays "the dangers that permeable bodily boundaries present to the social order as such" (Butler 1990: 132). Against the Diasporic Jewish body, Israeli bodies were portrayed from early Zionist imagination as condensed, solid and firm. Jews in Diaspora were depicted as weak, delicate and womanly, too close to the stereotypes of European anti-Semitic literature.[3] In Diaspora, Jews were situated outside the political, cultural *and physical* hegemony, while subject to a perpetual and particular form of racism.

3.1 Mimesis and Antisemitism

In her paper "Mimesis as Cultural Survival", professor of sociology Vikki Bell explains Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer who claim that the anti-Semite, deprived of expressive mimesis, develops a form of mimicry based on projection, imitating the

3 See for example: Eliberg-Schwartz, Howard, ed. (1992). *People of the Body*: *Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*. New York: State University of New York Press; and Presner, Todd Samuel (2007). *Muscular Judaism: the Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration*. New York: Routledge.

image of 'the Jew' he so much rejects. These twentieth-century thinkers develop an idea of mimesis as natural behavior which the capitalist society tries to control and suppress. Following Jean-Paul Sartre, Bell argues that the mimetic activity of the anti-Semite is “based on fear, not of the Jews, but of the anti-Semite's own situation” (Bell 1999: 144), being a product of deep frustration which - back to Adorno and Horkheimer - emerges from the gap between the prospects of liberty appreciated in a capitalist civilization and the actual materialization of these prospects in everyday life. Even if projection is an idea present in all forms of human perception, for the anti-Semite, “just as with the paranoiac […] there is no limit to the ego's projections, no information that causes the ego to reflect upon itself” (Bell 1999: 145). For Sartre, the authentic Jew in an anti-Semitic society is “forced to be overly self-reflective” (Bell 1999: 145) and constantly “observe himself through the eyes of others” (Bell 1999: 146). For him, what forms a Jewish community is the Jewish situation of being 'thrown' into a society that takes them for Jews. Accordingly, the inauthentic Jew, being ”the one who attempts to 'pass'” (Bell 1999: 146), is acting in bad faith, while the authentic Jew is conscious of the risks and responsibilities of living in racist surroundings; one of these responsibilities being the obligation of “continuing a tradition and keeping open the possibility of being Jewish” (Bell 1999: 146). Finally, for Emmanuel Levinas, the commandment of continuance after Auschwitz is the commitment to defend the state of Israel (Bell 1999: 146).

3.2 Diaspora, an Embodied Practice

It appears to me, however, highly unsatisfying to reconcile with the claim that what constitutes a Jewish community is a “perception of Jews from without” (Bell 1999: 147) and to find a solution in such a *situation* of ethno-political hegemony as the Jewish state.[4] In sharp contrast, Boyarin and Boyarin write that “Zionism – that is, Jewish state hegemony, except insofar as it represented an emergency and temporary rescue operation – seems to us the subversion of Jewish culture and not its culmination” (1993: 712). They understand Jewishness as a sign of difference, and in the context of Diaspora, genealogical repetition of that difference concludes a special performativity.

4 In July 2018 the Israeli parliament passed a Basic Law which specifies the nature of the State of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, a motion widely criticized as being anti-democratic.

In their view, to entangle the exclusivism of Judaism with land will have, and *de facto* has, awful consequences.

In their essay, Boyarin and Boyarin start the lineage of their argument from reading the letters of St. Paul as a project of "universalizing the Torah, breaking through the 'particularism' of the Jewish religion" (1993: 694). The practice of baptism, representing a new birth, is "substituting an allegorical genealogy for a literal one" where the "differences that mark off one body from another as Jew or Greek […] male or female, slave or free are effaced, for in the Spirit such marks do not exist" (1993: 695). Thereafter, the way in which group identity was constructed and perceived before Christ changed:

> [T]he physical connection of common descent from Abraham and the embodied practices with which that genealogy is marked off as difference are rejected in favor of a connection between people based on individual re-creation and entry de novo into a community of common belief. (1993: 695)

Preaching for kinship in spirit as a new and "better" mark of identity grounded the hierarchical dualism of spirit and flesh "embedded in the Platonic value system Europe has largely inherited from Paul" (1993: 702). The apostle's aim for sameness caused an allegorization of the domain of difference as belonging to the Jew, whose actual embodied practices were undervalued. More dangerously, this symbolization "deprives those who have historically grounded identities in those material signifiers of the power to speak for themselves and remain different" (1993: 697).

Boyarin and Boyarin reason that Christian disembodied practices yielded Western idealism and universalism, key elements in the discourse of imperialist domination and exploitation over those who refused to conform (1993: 705-8). Judaism does not value assimilation; therefore, even the most violent practices towards Gentiles did not produce the horrors of European Christianity in dominion (1993: 706). The thinkers conclude that Judaism and Christianity "generate two diametrically opposed and mirror-image of racism – and also two dialectical possibilities of antiracism" (1993: 707). Connecting particularism with power, the Boyarins warn us, will only "yield tribal warfare or fascism" (1993: 706).

In the context of Diaspora, mimetic genealogy proposes a frame of embodied practices which reject the model of national self-determination. Denial of sovereignty pushes toward the formation of identities outside the discursive frame of autochthony or territorial self-determination, emphasizing embodied citational practices as a means

of cultural survival. In Diasporic conditions, in order to maintain a difference, the 'thing' that we are is crucially dependent on the things that we do. The Boyarins conceptualize D*iasporized identity*, a cultural identity constantly remade, as a disaggregated selfhood whose story is of "mixing" with others, and as such it is never fully consistent or coherent – "partially Jewish, partially Greek bodies" (1993: 721). For the disaggregated bodies to exist within positive terms of Diaspora which "is not the forced product of war and distraction" (1993: 722), it would be necessary to find expressions, rituals and gestures that signify difference.[5] It would also be crucial to comprehend difference in its positivity and appreciate the difference of others as a result. Interestingly enough, Boyarin and Boyarin write:

> Within the conditions of Diaspora, many Jews discovered that their well- being was absolutely dependent on principles of respect for difference, indeed that, as the radical slogan goes, "no one is free until all are free." Absolute devotion to the maintenance of Jewish culture and the historical memory was not inconsistent with devotion to radical causes of human liberation. (1993: 720)

Accordingly, a few notable Jewish groups in Diaspora – like Jewish anarchist movements from the beginning of the 20th century or the socialist General Jewish Labor Bund – propose a synthesis between retaining cultural specificity in the context of human solidarity. Both ends of this synthesis require a special kind of commitment to ongoing but evolving practices. In terms of choreography, Andre Lepecki suggests *devotion* as a key notion for understanding the political task of the dancer "to relocate the imperative as no longer being an order coming from above" but as 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" (Lepecki 2013: 25). Here we might want to return to Buchmendel, the Jew portrayed as ridiculous by Stefan Zweig, but whose complete, and very much embodied, immersion in the texts we can nevertheless envy.

5 Most significant would be the practice of circumcision, but I would actually like not to dwell in this direction, as it is effects only Jewish men. For more see: Boyarin, Daniel (1994). *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

4. Toward a Political Shuckling

Is Jacob Mendel rocking in order to enter a state of absorption, or are the movements a subconscious expression of his deep concentration?[6] Either way, swaying is described as the inscription of the cultural Jewish background on his body, deeply internalized.

There are different interpretations for the origin of the movement of swaying and rocking during Jewish prayer, known in Yiddish as *shukeln*.[7] Some theories suggest practical reasons for it as a means to keep one warm and awake during study, or as a solution for the times when, due to lack in book copies, a few people would read together, each glimpsing at the text in turns. A more spiritual interpretation refers to shuckling as the flickering of the soul like a flame of a candle, or as frantic movements made by a drowning person, regarding praying as an attempt of the believer to rescue him or herself from dangerous waters. The shuckling is a measure of increasing the k*avanah* (intention) of the person praying and also constitutes the very sign of spiritual intensity. Yet, these are not ecstatic movements meant to drive the praying person into trance,[8] but more or less moderate gestures *signaling* toward *prayer as an act of both text and movement* done in great emphasis.

It is noted that King David cried: "All my bones shall say 'Who is like You, O Lord?'" (Psalms 35:10), thus considering prayer as physical labor. As a secular Jewish person, I am interested in asking whether the swinging, rocking, oscillating and swaying could intensify into a choreography of devotion "*not* to the author of the plan or the ruler, but an impersonal devotion to the plan itself" (Lepecki 2013: 25) – a political shuckling not directed toward any God but rather proliferated vibrations of variations in repetition. The movement of swaying interests me in two main aspects of its association to repetition – one, as an inherently repetitive movement: you cannot really sway once; second, as a movement that passes through generations even though it is not recorded in any biblical or halakhic[9] law. I do not claim that shuckling is

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6 I would like to thank Ira Avneri and Yair Lifwchitz for their insightful input gathered during distinct oral conversations I had with each.

7 See for example: https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/physical-movement-in-jewish-prayer/, https://www.ou.org/torah/halacha/dalet-amot-of-halacha/swaying-during-prayer/ and http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14146-swaying-the-body. Date of access 2 Oct. 2019.

8 Therefore not to be confused with the Christian Shakers movement or other shaking-rituals which aim at getting into an ecstatic mode of worship.

9 Halakha is the collective body of Jewish religious laws gathered from the written and oral Torah.

exclusively, or even primarily, a Diasporic custom; people might have swayed in the kingdom of Judea and presently sway in hegemonic Israel. Nevertheless, a space for prayer is instigated in movement: the person praying and rocking does not need a place of worship but it is in movement that she or he *marks a space for worship*. It would be interesting then to understand this *choreography of prayer-act*, even though it does not comprehend itself as a choreography at all, as gestures that perform the Diasporic capacity of displacement of "loyalty from place to memory of place" (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993: 719).

As repetitive movements, shuckling is a quantity turning into quality. None of its units is significant in and as itself and so no set of movements form a coherent sentence. It actually shakes off any stiff sign of the body and directs it to the experience of different intensities – rocking a baby in its cradle could intensify into rock 'n' roll punk, transpose as a sexual act, resemble masturbation, transform into a body of a poor Jewish outcast as Jacob Mendel reading his catalogs. All suggest a tremulous beyond the control apparatus of *Archive*, beyond the masculine, solid, conscious Israeli body. The quantity-quality mechanism makes the body tremble in a range of energy levels.

Isn't this the revolutionary force of minor literature which Deleuze and Guattari write about? The deterritorialization of expression over meaning, making language "vibrate with a new intensity" (1986: 19) beyond its symbolic or signifying units. Children and Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari tell us - are "well skilled in the exercise of repeating a word […] in order to make it vibrate around itself" (1986: 21), diverting from what could have once been its meaning. Opposite to the symbolic usage of language, repetition deterritorializes the sense of language into a nonsense sound "pushing deterritorialization to such an extreme that nothing remains but intensities" (1986: 19). In the constant flight from meaning

> the thing no longer forms anything but a sequence of intensive states, a ladder or a circuit for intensities that one can make race around in one sense or another, from high to low, or from low to high. The image is this very race itself; it has become becoming – (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 22)

a metamorphosis, a transformation, a constant movement; not of a speaking subject or subject of a statement, but a joint movement of a "circuit of states that forms a mutual becoming, in the heart of a necessarily multiple or collective assemblage" (1986: 22). The revolutionary potential of minor literature is the highly contagious vibration in the form of an affective, political, constant altering.

Dance scholar Petra Sabisch explains Deleuze's notion of difference which lies “in its positivity, that is, as a dynamic process which is irreducibly interlocked with repetition” (Sabisch 2011: 126). Thus, repetition cannot be demonstrated through the relation of the same and identical, but as that which becomes comprehensible through difference. Hence, repetition “relates to the different insofar as it actualizes it as its own variant” (2011: 126) while producing a dynamic sign “that bears on its own becoming-sign […] a differentiation in sense [which] can still account for the signifying activity” (2011: 127). Difference is not considered an interruption of identity but rather that which through repetition “can make sense by composing differentials of the sensible” (2011: 128).

I would like to suggest that the swaying, in its closed-circuit repetitive loop of movement and halt, makes the sign of the body vibrate in its differences and re-signify its notions of self. Sabisch conceptualizes articulation as a means with two ends, a simultaneous move between segmentation and connection. For Sabisch, the capacity of articulation is not “choreography's concern as an 'aboutness' about something else that is more abstract than itself, for which it nevertheless stands” (2011: 99) but runs “as a practice that is constitutive of qualitative transformations in sense” (2011: 116). Sabisch thus moves away from Saussure's structuralist representational sign system in order “to level out the presupposed hierarchy of signification over sensation” and concludes that “the concept of articulation restores a notion of sense as that which *can make a sensible difference*” (2011: 120). To my understanding, this means that choreographed bodies relate to dynamic signs outside the framework of performances and manage to articulate new meanings with the work of repetition in sense of difference, in the region of sensual differences.

The choreography of rocking operates as an ongoing *becoming*, never really harboring but passing through fragmented signs of bodily identities – ethnic, gendered, sexual – patched together and departed again. It needs to deterritorialize its self toward a political Diasporic schuckling. In order for the body to shake as such, it must devote itself to the intensity of the vibrations beyond subjectification and way beyond external sovereignty. Finally, the body becomes an *apparatus of articulation* for variety of senses.

5. Summary

The process of writing this paper was accompanied by a studio-based research crystallized in the performance *Only if I Have Nothing to Cite, I Dance.*[10] At one point of the performance, I say “I'm tense, I feel the entire term-paper on my body” and start to mark the different parts of the essay (introduction, the various chapters, summary, bibliography, footnotes…) on different parts of my body. Then I make a small choreography of the body-paper and articulate my joints accordingly. In another segment, I “read” the paper from my body, using my hand as a reading-sensor device.

Forehead: following a line of theory diverting from Cartesian thought, I firstly established how the body participates in scholarly thought, and moreover how it functions as a discursive regime for manifesting and articulating ideas. *Neck and shoulders*: writing with and about the performance *Archive* by Arkadi Zaides, I have managed to show how the quotidian practice of the dancer in this piece both mirrors the oppressiveness of the violence of the Israeli occupation and manifests a strong political statement. *Skeleton*: The chapter utilizes Judith Butler's performance-theory and the particular role of mimetic acts in order to break down how the bodies engaged in the imitation of norms could carry a subversive potential. *Pelvis*: the next chapter shifted the sign of the body from the Israeli hegemonic to the Diasporic Jew, understood by Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin as external to political hegemony. I have traced the sign of the Jewish body in Diaspora as marking differences, and concluded that there is a need for embodied practices to maintain that very difference. *Crotch*: this chapter attempted to understand the movement of shuckling, the rocking during Jewish prayer, as an embodiment of Diaspora in its positive sense – of which repetition in both movement and descent, favors variations and does not consider them as an interruption or threat to identity.

Knees: Considering the awful historical circumstances of the Holocaust and the life-threatening anti-Semitism nowadays, the need for Jews and other Others to seek safety still prevails. I am aware of the danger of romanticizing Diaspora, yet it is exactly because of the fear of these forms of racism that I concur with the urgency Boyarin and Boyarin find in articulating “a Jewish political subject 'other' than that of

10 Premiered in Jerusalem on 30 October 2019 as part of the Gathering, the International Performance Conference 0:8

Zionism, which in fundamental ways merely reproduced the exclusivist syndromes of European nationalism" (1993: 701) and believe that it is crucial – theoretically, politically and *intimately* – to forge with a thread of thought that will assist our bodies to work in a framework more peculiar than that of the nation-state. Boyarin and Boyarin suggest that "a Jewish subject-position founded on generational connections and its attendant anamnestic responsibilities and pleasures affords the possibility of a flexible and nonhermetic critical Jewish identity" (1993: 701) and finish their essay with a statement of the Neturei Karta[11] in appendix. The American-Jewish scholars citing a statement of an ultra-orthodox Jewish community pose an interesting challenge for Jewish-Israeli secular people as myself, wishing to operate outside the Zionist political framework. What embodied practices could we hope to assemble? What movements will denote our position of rejected domination? How to practice a *becoming*-minor? And last, what choreography would express a Diaspora from within?

What starts with a story ends with a story:

One day, on my way to Issawyia, while the bus passes through the ultra-orthodox neighborhood Me'a Shearim, I spotted outside of the bus window a young girl with a prayer book in her hand. She faced a dirty Jerusalemite stone-wall, on her left an all-in-1-NIS store, on her right a rusty door of some residential-building and she was swaying from side to side. She was praying. That night, in the Palestinian neighborhood Issawyia, East-Jerusalem, Israeli police threw teargas and fear like they do almost every night in the past four months. The presence of Israeli activists helps only too little to calm this aggression down.

Jerusalem, Summer 2019

11 Naturei Karta is a Jewish ultra-orthodox religious group, formed in mandatory Palestine in 1938. The group opposes Zionism and calls for the dismantling of the State of Israel.

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