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### Dancing human rights

We have seen that ever since Isadora Duncan entered the stage of political dance, various instances of sic-sensuous have been performed on the stage of the argument by bodies contracting into themselves and releasing to other bodies, moving and being moved. Those bodies affirm their equality to other bodies – whether the dancing bodies they intervene against, or bodies inhabiting other worlds that deem them unequal. From Martha Graham’s audiences who are uninvited spectators to the gumboot dancers in South Africa and the flash mob dancers of One Billion Rising, manifold bodies keep performing their equality and dissent against voices which marginalise them. This concluding chapter contracts into the crux of legal and political theory from which the book arises. This book has shown how dance can intervene in legal and political structures that marginalise human beings. Consequently this chapter moves to argue that dance can protest injustice while always remaining grounded in the local setting from which it arose, and yet transcend it. The chapter consequently rearticulates the argument of the book within the context of the language and problematics of human rights. The chapter works through a dual argument. First, it argues that dance can be utilised to protest human rights violations. Second, the chapter presents a reading of human rights through sic-sensuous, an inscribed dialogue between two moving bodies creating aesthetic and political rupture. This conception sees subjects able to live in two worlds at the same time: one in which they cannot claim their human rights and one in which they affirm their ability to claim those rights. I argue that dance enables the conceptualisation of human rights in movement.

The reader–spectator is summoned to observe two instances of tension between contraction and release: within the world of dabke dancers in

Palestine and within the body of Arkadi Zaides, an Israeli choreographer who performs protest against human rights violations in his work *Archive*.

### **Human rights in a performed sic-sensuous**

The theoretical backdrop against which I work in this chapter is the concept of the paradox of human rights. The interpretation of human rights as paradoxical, briefly defined, is derived from the recognition that human rights appeal to the universal, global or transcendent; they are said to belong to all people no matter who or where they are. On the other hand, humans realise their rights only in particular places with particular instruments and particular protections (Stern and Straus 2014). Specifically, this interpretation of human rights as paradoxical enable us to turn the spotlight upon those who are unable to claim human rights – those human beings for whom this discrepancy between global legitimacy and local mechanisms for rights claims is more than a jurisprudential and political conundrum but rather a challenging everyday reality. Hannah Arendt, who, in a celebrated and often-quoted paragraph, wrote about the right to rights, sheds light upon this paradox. Her reading of rights focused on the stateless, for whom local mechanisms of claiming human rights did not exist.

The calamity of the rightless is not that they are deprived of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law and freedom of opinion – formulas that were designed to solve problems within given communities – but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever. Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them; not only are they oppressed but that nobody even wants to oppress them. (Arendt 1976: 296)

Arendt's paragraph has been problematised and interpreted widely. Many theorists have reread it in the context of our present-day legal-political structures and their resulting problematics, or have been inspired by it to draw up their own analysis of human rights, for example Agamben (1998), Ariela Azoulay (2015), Etienne Balibar (2007), Seyla Benhabib, especially in her *Another Cosmopolitanism* (with responses from Jeremy Waldron, Bonnie Honig and Will Kymlicka) (2006), Ayten Gündoğdu (2015) and James D. Ingram, who specifically looks at connections between Arendt and Rancière (2008).

In 'Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?' Rancière notes an example of the enactment of human rights in a space and time yet to

be established; in a world yet to be built. Rancière uses as an example Olympe de Gouge, who as a woman was not an equal citizen, but who stated that if women were entitled to go to the scaffold they were also entitled to go to the Assembly (Rancière 2010). Women were equal 'as men' under the guillotine, thus de Gouge mobilised this equality in death to the whole of equality, including political equality. Rancière's example is an embodied one, juxtaposing the right to life and death under the guillotine in a particular human body; that argument allows us to move towards further moments of performing sic-sensuous in an embodied way, through dance.

Beyond the logical, jurisprudential and ontological gap between the universality of the legitimating mechanisms of human rights and the ability to claim them in particular settings resides the commitment to equality. If that commitment to equality is taken seriously it demands further investigation into mechanisms through which subjects can claim human rights despite the tension between the local and the universal. I proceed to release into a different discussion of the paradox of human rights through the concept of sic-sensuous; of two bodies inscribing upon each other and affirming both their equality and difference; bringing into clash two worlds: one in which they may be perceived as marginal and the world of the strong reading of political dance in which two sensuous bodies conversing always affirm their equality.

Dance scholars Naomi Jackson and Toni Shapiro-Phim, editors of a volume engaging dance, human rights and social justice, focus their analysis on the use of dance as a tool for revealing, resisting and rectifying differing forms of abuse and injustice (Shapiro-Phim 2008). They flesh out dance's power to bridge diverse communities as well as heal wounds of individual hurt bodies, two themes explored throughout this book. Reading dance as enabling bottom-up protests against human rights abuses as well as articulating equality where it is not yet recognised brings it into conversation with the theoretical limelight of the paradox of human rights as well as reading dance through the concept of sic-sensuous. I have highlighted throughout this book the concepts of dance as enduring beyond a single utterance (which I interpret as inscription) and dance as transformative for the dancing body and its relationship to its surroundings (which I read as sharing embodied space). The concept of sic-sensuous allows me to release the argument into a different theoretical space, demarcated by the literature of the paradox of human rights.

The term sic-sensuous has been understood throughout the book as carrying a threefold significance. First, as a refusal to follow the rules

of the beautiful or aesthetically acceptable. Second, the term always implies writing on the body by another body. Third, the term looks at moments of slippage of meaning articulated by one moving body and received by a body that is moved. The term *sic-sensuous* allows for the performance of writing of one sensuous body upon another, and for the creation of a shared embodied space in that moment of writing. This shared embodied space is grounded between those two bodies that are able to converse without requiring words. At the same time, the moment of sharing illuminates the difference between those two bodies. The concept of *sic-sensuous* illuminates the grounding of the moving body in the communities in which it partakes and towards which it releases. This interaction between two moving bodies takes place in manifold acts of inscription. Those acts of writing shared between sensed bodies allow the subject to move beyond the boundaries of its own spatiality as well as to transcend the boundaries of communities in which it partakes. This argument gains further significance in instances in which some of those communities essentially marginalise dancing subjects and deem them unequal citizens of those communities.

Reading the concept of *sic-sensuous* in the context of the human rights paradox is significant for three reasons:

Firstly, shifting the limelight towards political spaces constructed by dance allows for the performance of equality of some subjects that may have been deemed unequal in politics articulated in words. The doctrine of human rights requires political and legal frameworks, allowing subjects to claim those rights as equals. Focusing on communities articulated in movement allows for the expansion of the performance of equality.

Secondly, the argument of this book, inspired by the ethos of the human rights doctrine, is grounded in the assumption that all human beings are created equal. They are, however, never perceived as the same. Articulated in moments of shared sensation between bodies that are equal but that may be interpreted as unequal in politics articulated in words, moments of *sic-sensuous* allow for the performance of differences between human bodies. Those differences, performed through dance, may illuminate the inequalities that may deem some bodies unequal. Thus this conceptual focus allows for the unravelling of instances of oppression and discrimination that stand in the way of full enforcement of the human rights doctrine. Those moments may go unnoticed when focusing on verbal language only.

Thirdly, sic-sensuous focuses on acts of inscription that go beyond one singular performance. When subjects are denied spaces to perform their equality they may create alternative spaces through dance. Those spaces are not momentary interventions. They are lasting spaces of resistance towards human rights abuses. This allows for further attentiveness of the reader–spectator towards acts of opposition against the degrading and deprivation of dignity.

I seek to find moments in which dance is utilised from the bottom up, protesting a wrong, namely the marginalisation of individuals who are deemed voiceless, less than human. I draw my case studies from one of the areas which is of key interest to human rights activists and theorists worldwide. This is the struggle of the Palestinian people for sovereignty and recognition as a state under international law. This struggle enables the people of Palestine to make human rights claims within jurisprudential structures that belong to a nation state. This struggle occurs against the backdrop of the Israeli occupation and consequent human rights abuse. The first subjects inscribing their human rights are dabke dancers, performing Palestine's national dance.

### **Dabke: political space for a sovereign state in the making**

In a study of dabke on the West Bank, Mauro Van Aken notes that ritual practices and embodied identities have seldom been studied in Palestinian literature (Aken 2006). Nicholas Rowe, who in his book *Rising Dust* has conducted the most extensive study of dance in Palestine available to date, commences his discussion of dabke by noting that it is the most publicly promoted form of dance in the contemporary West Bank (Rowe 2010).<sup>1</sup> Rowe argues that dabke functioned to maintain solidarity and cohesion in the community. Van Aken notes that in haflas, celebratory evenings, dabke can be learned by imitating others. He adds that musicians, dancers and the audience may swap roles. The dance is essentially participatory and encourages its spectators to become part of its shared space when it is performed. At the same time this characteristic is enabled by creating a shared embodied space which is constituted in a shared system of inscription. The dance constantly moves towards further spatial release.

The history of dabke in Palestine is a history of clashes between the weak and strong readings of political dance. Prior to 1967 dabke was a distinctly rural practice. After 1967 dabke crossed class divides. It became a pan-Palestinian dance expressing on the one hand the ongoing tensions

with Israel and on the other hand relationships with other Arab countries in the region. The rallies of different political factions in the West Bank during the 1970s also became locations for the dancing of dabke. By the late 1970s, major political parties had dabke groups, and dabke featured as a centrepiece of political rallies. It was performed outside the realm of partisan politics; it was performed at nationalistic events designed to emphasise Palestinian identity through the Heritage Centre, and local folklore festivals featuring displays of dabke were held in public gardens throughout the 1970s. These were increasingly subject to censorship by the Israeli military. According to Rowe: 'dabke troupes were denied permission to travel between towns, and individuals attempting to promote dabke became subject to house arrest, detention, interrogation, imprisonment and physical abuse' (Rowe 2010: 119). The power of dabke as a national dance was noted beyond its Palestinian spectatorship. This power was threatening enough to elicit official state intervention from the entity that Palestine seeks emancipation from: the Israeli Occupation. Dabke creates a space in which the Palestinian people are sovereign over themselves, even in conditions in which they cannot be equal before international law. That space is performed independently of the discussion of dabke in spoken words, its affiliation with parties of performance in various political settings. At the same time, the shared space created by dabke does not go unnoticed by the regime, which consistently acts to deny the Palestinian people its sovereignty. The power of dabke is understood very well by the Israeli government, which seeks to tame it and control it. And yet the dance sustains. It is a space for resistance to consistent human rights abuses.

It should be noted that thus far, drawing on Rowe's analysis, the focus has been on the West Bank. In a study of dabke in the Jordan Valley, Mauro Van Aken argues that whereas dabke is perceived in the West Bank as a strong symbol of national identity, in the Jordan Valley it does not constitute an official discourse of dispossessed culture. Rather, he argues, performance of dabke allows for the constitution of a public space allowing for the revelation of relations of identity (Aken 2006). I draw on both readings together to argue that dabke allows for a space for contestation of identities and discourses. At the same time, those contestations and those differences are negotiated within a shared language, that of dabke. Dabke allows for the release of dancing bodies into a shared space when international law denies them that space. It also allows them a space to perform both their equality and their difference; those characteristics that bind them together and those characteristics that make them unique bodies.

The paramount dabke group performing on stage, El Fanoun, was interpreted as ideologically aligned with the socialist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PELP), but, in the words of one of its founders, started to distance itself from the political slogans of Palestinian factions and asked: ‘are we doing dabke for art, or just for posters for a political party? It was not our idea to become a dancing group for any political party’ (Rowe 2010: 136). I read in this statement the clash between the weak reading of political dance, or dance subsumed to political slogans, and the strong reading of political dance, defined here as ‘dabke for art’. Let us contract into the dance itself and see dabke as art representing the Palestinian people within and outside their polity.

Rowe reads dabke as serving as ‘a traumatic reminder of the imagined past, as its conscious revival was inextricably linked to the notion of a violent break with the past’ (Rowe 2010: 117). Van Aken sees dabke as ‘swinging between ideals of reproduction of past identity, assumed as a contemporary cultural symbol, and the local reinvention and exhibition of creativity and cultural challenge’ (Aken 2006: 206). Further, the displaced cultural tradition of dabke is reinterpreted to become a new symbolic resource – ‘an important medium both for defining belonging and difference and in the way of “making place” in displacement’ (Aken 2006: 205). Thus dabke has operated as a public sphere in which ideas of identity and belonging have been negotiated within Palestine. It has enabled the sharing of an embodied space between sensed bodies that are not allowed that space elsewhere; they can, through dabke, mark their equality to each other and to their oppressors. I now contract further into one instance of dabke, performed informally, and bring one dabke group into the limelight of the argument.

### **The expanding line of the dabke dance into a state-in-becoming**

*([www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdrGrRmdvfA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdrGrRmdvfA))*

There are several choreographic characteristics the reader–spectator can note in this clip. First, the dance shifts in its levels of energy. It starts quietly, generates momentum, calms down and reinvigorates itself throughout. The switch between contraction and release occurs through the beat as well as through the movement. The dance is very rhythmical – there is stomping throughout the dance, and from its very beginning and throughout there is audience clapping in the background. The performers and spectators share responsibility in generating the underlying rhythm

for the piece, and this is sustained throughout. The use of rhythm, as noted by Van Aken,

is connected to a labour practice and to a specific rhythm of work; when the dancers/labourers had a leaking roof, the owner of the house would call his neighbours for help and the neighbours would gather on the roof. They would hold hands, form a line and start stamping their feet while walking on the roof in order to adjust the mud. (Aken 2006: 221 n. 5)

The sources of the rhythmic nature of the dance, then, are both referential and practical; they relate to a commonly shared experience from the past, but sustain physically that element of participatory openness, of a line that is meant to grow longer. Its use of body music is similar to that employed in gumbboot dance, discussed in [Chapter 4](#). In both these dances clapping and stomping allow more dancers to join the dance, and hence allow its shared space (and consequently its potential subversion as a space of resistance) to expand.

Spatially, the group performing the dance keeps its formation in space stable. Whether by holding hands or creating other references to each other, the dance moves from what appears to be one body. At the same time, there is one dancer, called the *lawih*, who holds a stick, who sometimes breaks from the group and rejoins it. There is a tension between this choreographic leadership role and the unison movement of the group. The shift between contraction and release hence occurs between the singular body and the group from which it emerges. This spatial characteristic allows the dancers to create a moving body larger than all their individual bodies combined; an entity larger than the separate individuals; a moving collective. Van Aken argues that the aspiration is for the group to create a common body. He writes: 'ideally, the group of dancers should become a common body. That body is interrupted by an increasingly faster rhythm used to emphasised a collective tempo' (Aken 2006: 209). The shifting collective is larger than the sum of its components; the one dancer breaking away and returning shows that very forcefully. This choreographic structure allows for spatial openness; people can join the line naturally without disturbing it and yet there are clear structures to follow. The dance, then, allows both for sharing and for interruption; for participating and for inserting another moving body into an already established formation. Here again we see the tension between equality and individuality; as Arendt had argued, it is the equality of the dancers that allows them to respond to each other; it is their individuality that pushes them to break away from the line.

Van Aken also notes that the dabke line is meant to move in a horizontal line but in practice often stands in a circular formation, led by the lawih (Aken 2006). This choreographic configuration, Van Aken notes, allows for shifts in energy to be organised; dancers can follow the leader and yet join at any point of the dance. He adds that the collective movement is characterised by continuous advancement and retreating, responding to changing rhythms. This is a clear instance of tension between contraction and release. Thus Van Aken reads dabke as a form of controlled tension towards collective dance, a collective body, a common feeling, in which the boundary between dancers and spectators remains constantly fluid. Dance is the method of demarcating space, through the dancing body that becomes inscribed by this dance and spectatorship.

The lawih, the group leader, according to Van Aken, should be able to co-ordinate, to put the dancers into play and let them to dance in a harmonious way; he should be able to generate intimacy and empathy, and at the same time to create order within the performance (Aken 2006). The leader of the group is the demarcating line, a living boundary who is able to draw participants into the dance and at the same time organise them and create a system of inscription they share. The dance grows in numbers, inviting further participants, as those who have been watching join the dance in a long line of shared movement. Even though some methods of inscription are enduring – choreographic features that give the dance its unique character – the dance is essentially participatory; its spatial formation is aimed at growing and including more participants. Spectators are not presumed to be passive spectators but rather bodies that become part of the dance. The moments in which the lawih breaks from the group allow him to change the rhythm and choreography, performing a sic-sensuous. This is an intervention of acts of writing creating a shared embodied space between two sensed bodies while allowing meaning to move from one body to another and to be negotiated in this process.

Van Aken describes the hierarchy as a lawih and a leading group that are meant to bring into the dance more participants, although roles may change and different people may occasionally comprise the leading group: ‘in this collective frame, the body is the actor and the marker in micro-space; a complex variation of movements follows the steps proposed by the lawih that all the row should follow in an ordered and common way’ (Aken 2006: 212). The space demarcated by the dabke, then, is organised choreographically so it can always expand, include

more participators and allow for more people to join the conversation in movement.

The reading above, together with Van Aken's analysis and especially Rowe's political history of the dabke, shows that the dance has a distinct cultural history within Palestine and unique choreographic characteristics, its own system of inscription. Van Aken notes that the dabke remains a crucial site for local public expression and contestation by young refugees. At the same time, this clip reveals the sic-sensuous that dabke enables its participants to experience choreographically and politically. The dancers wear the Palestinian flag as part of their costume. This is a sharp and poignant reminder that this dance is not just about enlarging a community of shared bodies which arrange themselves according to the same logic and are inscribed in the same system of inscription, becoming equal in a shared space. This dance, as Van Aken notes, creates a shared space; but it also creates a shared space where that space is not allowed to exist according to international law.

The dabke provides a site that is local – it is grounded in the dancing bodies and in the spectator; but at the same time, due to its performance circumstances, celebrating a national identity that does not enjoy the protection of international law, it is also a global moment of interruption. The Palestinian sovereign state does not yet exist; at the same time it is very clear that the Palestinian people have a national dance that binds them together beyond difference. The dabke provides a language that binds people together against the backdrop of the legal and political realities that make the lives of Palestinian people unbearable. I hence read this as an exemplar of the way dance can be employed within the human rights doctrine.

On 12 July 2015, the anniversary of the Israeli attacks on Gaza, Palestinian activists organised a dabke flash mob in British sites of cultural and financial collaboration with Israel. The organisers said that they were keen to see how dabke dance could be used even more forcefully, critically and beautifully to stop business as usual (Glass 2015). Dabke flows from the bodies of Palestinian dancers to those who support them around the world; protesting together their modern statelessness. Moving from the reading of dance as a method of expressing human rights through sic-sensuous, I release towards the reality that hinders the Palestinian from achieving this legal and political recognition. The concluding part of this chapter will show how dance not only celebrates the ability of human beings to create their worlds when law and politics fail them, but also enables human beings to protest against wrongs done to them or other people within and without the human rights doctrine.

The affirmation of human rights through sic-sensuous releases from the bodies of dabke dancers, detained in checkpoints, to the body of Israeli choreographer Arkadi Zaides.

### **Arkadi Zaides's Archive: protest against human rights violations through dance**

*([www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hZW25c9Ulg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hZW25c9Ulg))*

Israeli choreographer Arkadi Zaides has created a substantial body of work on the Israel–Palestine conflict. *Quiet* (2009) involved Israeli and Arab dancers who shifted between scenes of anger and serenity; *Land Research* (2012) examines the relationship between man and land. However, in this part of the chapter I focus on Zaides's *Archive*, a work from 2014. According to Zaides's website:

B'Tselem is the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. In 2007 the organization initiated a project, in which video cameras are distributed to Palestinians living in high-conflict areas. The project aims to provide an ongoing documentation of human rights violations and to expose the reality of life under occupation to both the Israeli and international public.

In this work Arkadi Zaides deepens his artistic exploration of the ongoing conflict in Israel–Palestine. Work filmed by volunteers of the B'Tselem Camera Project is selected and reviewed. Zaides brings the viewers' attention to the bodies of Israelis, as they have been captured on camera, and to the physical reactions to which they resort in various confrontational situations. The Palestinians remain behind the camera. Nevertheless, their movement, voice and point of view are highly present, determining the spectator's perspective (Zaides 2014).

I focus upon the choreographic language of the work, which I have been calling the strong reading of political dance. The work powerfully and persuasively questions the concept of a spectator and an agent, separated by boundaries between two bodies. The footage used throughout this choreographic work is documented by Palestinians who carry cameras. Their bodies enable the creation of the archival material. Zaides is the Israeli spectator who mimics the movement of settlers and soldiers viewed on screen, sometimes violent, sometimes complacent. His body reacts to the screen, his movement embodies the motion of the Israeli structures as viewed by the Palestinian archivists. At the same time, the spectator, sitting in the auditorium, is spatially located in the embodied position of the Palestinian documenting the abuses shown.

Zaides emulates the motion of a soldier, shifting slowly, lurking; he mimics the motion of settlers throwing stones. Later he proceeds to mimic the actions of settlers chasing away sheep. The movement is repetitive. The spectator is always on the edge of their seat, never aware of what is coming next. That viewpoint, caught in never-ending suspension, belongs to the absent bodies of the Palestinian film-makers. The spectator is released into absent bodies.

Zaides's embodied language becomes one with his objects, the bodies he is emulating and transforming himself into. His body is released into the bodies that sustain the Occupation. Simultaneously in moments of rest and lack of movement, Zaides assumes the spatial position of the invisible archivist, the camera-based Palestinian. He is, through his embodied motion, negating the boundary between spectator and agent, wrongdoer and victim. He shows that our bodies are moulded by violence constituted by aggressive, volatile structures of power which make us complacent and stop us from asking questions about structures of domination that inhabit our lives. Zaides shows that lack of resistance is in itself partaking in human rights violations and enabling the sustaining structures of violence.

Reviews have celebrated this work by Zaides:

Zaides is not saying anything about Israel's actions towards the Palestinians other than what the Israelis themselves are saying with their own bodies. The archival film that is the starting point of *Archive* is rough footage of transgressions by Israeli settlers and soldiers seen through the lens of cameras given to Palestinian citizens by the Israeli Human Rights Organisation B'Tselem for the express purpose of documenting them. Zaides is in turn looking at the corporal and vocal gestures of the aggressors and exploring the genesis of those same gestures – stone throwing, sheep scattering, olive branch destruction, verbal and physical intimidation, among others – in his own body. The result is visceral, poignant and disturbing to the point you wish it would stop. (Minns 2015)

Another review states: 'Zaides' energy is disturbingly neutral as he repeats this exercise. One does not get the sense that is he telling the audience how to interpret the material; rather, he lets the physical and vocal gestures speak for themselves, demanding that we position ourselves in relation to the images before us' (Simard 2015). Commenting on the end of the clip shown, in which Zaides emulates the vocalicity of the soldiers, another reviewer writes: 'Archive is at its most powerful near the end, when Zaides replicates the vocalisations of the men in the videos into a microphone, looping them, building a soundtrack that is increasingly

oppressive and violent. It's hard to bear even for a few minutes. Imagine for hours, for weeks, for years ...' (Anonymous 2015; uncredited, available online). The piece is successful because it is unsettling. It allows spectators not only to see the world from occupied Palestine; it also allows the spectators to assume the embodied position of Palestinians.

We revisit here Isadora Duncan's moment of sic-sensuous in which she contested that which is beautiful and created a shared space of dialogue in that moment of rebellion. Zaides, too, works through challenging the conception of dance as creating an aesthetically pleasing experience; it is through the presentation of the ugly day-to-day lives of his absent Palestinian subjects that he inscribes his unique language of movement and creates a shared embodied space.

Zaides opens up a shared embodied space by enabling spectators to experience the transience between the body of the aggressor and the experience of the spectator of violence. For a short while, through the unique choreographic technique underlying this piece, the spectators who watch the piece share an embodied space with the Palestinians documenting human rights abuse. They become engraved in structures and languages of violence.

Archive transgresses the boundaries between aggressors and victims that allow structures of domination and violence to sustain themselves. The work shows that we all can be aggressors. At the same time it brings us closer in conversation with those who are subjected to violence and oppression, day in, day out. The work allows the spectators to feel that they are all victims of human rights violations and that those abuses benefit no one. It creates a moment of shared embodied space that enables the presentation of permeable boundaries between the self and other. I revisit Hannah Arendt's argument concerning the duality of presentation of difference and equality. It is the underlying human equality that allows the performance of difference. Archive also shows that the absent Palestinian documenters are equal to those spectators who assume their spatial position. The performance of sic-sensuous through this work, the presentation of those choreographic features that are not aesthetically pleasing, is politically powerful in its creation of a shared embodied space between two subjects who cannot come into dialogue in the world outside the theatre. They are separated by walls and checkpoints, structures of separation that do not allow sensed bodies to converse with each other. In this absence of conversation the realisation of the body stalled at the checkpoint is not being articulated to the body installing that checkpoint. The strong reading of political dance, the creation of an embodied shared space

that transcends words, allows for that realisation of equality. Archive, in the most powerful way, allows the spectator to be inscribed with the languages that create the world of the people of Palestine. Zaides allows the Palestinians who have documented the footage to inscribe their human rights on the bodies of their spectators when other political structures inhibit this process from taking place.

The work received considerable attention from various organisations, and Zaides won an award from the Emile Zola Human Rights Cathedral. Moreover, the work was discussed beyond the world of dance audiences. In June 2015, shortly after the election of the majority Likud government in Israel, which signalled a further move to the right, newly elected Minister of Culture Miri Regev announced that she was going to remove the logo of Israel's Ministry of Culture from any merchandise promoting this choreographic work. This followed complaints from right-wing protesters. Regev had referred in the past to the work as 'a disgrace to the country' (Glick 2015). Once again the reader-spectator is reminded of Isadora Duncan's moment of offence in Boston in 1922. Sic-sensuous releases far from the formal space of the theatre in which it takes place. The resistance that Zaides shows, consequently, is far from being theoretical; it penetrated the political structures that it aimed at attacking. This is the quintessential moment of a clash between weak and strong readings of political dance. State structures become permeated through embodied dissent experienced by spectators of this dance performance. The Palestinians who have provided the documentation for the archives of the piece have indeed interrupted the Israeli government. That moment of interruption occurred through the shared embodied space they inhabited with the Israeli spectators that were unsettled by watching this piece. Revisiting Martha Graham's famous quotation, we see that the body not only says what words cannot, it challenges and questions the boundaries posed by words. Consequently, reading human rights as enacted through dance is universal in its emphasis on the ability to unsettle; to interrupt; to insert different languages into symbolic webs of meaning. The body is able to interrupt universally; in this case it is the absent body that interrupts and creates sensation. This reading of human rights through dance is always local, grounded in a unique embodied dialogue between the spectator's body filling the void in this choreographic work and Zaides's repetition of archived movement onstage. Checkpoints and walls may cause some bodies to be absent from demarcated political spaces; but dance can transcend those boundaries and make those bodies very present and able to claim their own human rights.

### Conclusions: a danced conception of human rights

Bodies contracting into themselves and releasing into shared communities can move boundaries that are not just choreographic. Those bodies can transcend legal-political boundaries that other political webs of signification sustain. Dabke dance released from the bodies of its dancers, in the West Bank and Jordan Valley, into a shared embodied space; that space in turn was released further into a flash mob supporting the Palestinian struggle for sovereignty. At the same time, those bodies, stalled at checkpoints and put behind walls, are released into the bodies of the spectators of Arkadi Zaides's *Archive*. Those moments of release confirmed that all sensuous bodies sharing a space are equal, and yet distinct; they require a robust legal-political framework that protects them from abuse and degradation. They require human rights.

In both these cases dance allows for the assertion of the ability to use the body as a powerful mechanism of inscription, affirming the equality of the body inscribing upon the body. The use of dance and the focus on spectatorship in both case studies, in very different ways, allows for discussion of human rights and their abuses without consolidating the categories of victims. Both readings move to an interpretation of human rights through sic-sensuous and rights claims being made by the subjects themselves. In the case of dabke, the bodies of dancers and spectators contributed to its perception as a national dance for a country striving for sovereignty that would allow its subjects to make human rights claims. In the case of *Archive*, dance created a unique choreographic setting that allowed the audience to share embodied space with the Palestinians who documented human rights abuses.

The strong reading of political dance shifts our focus towards the use of choreographic elements to create a shared space between various participants in both those instances of dance. That shared space transcends the lack of shared spaces constituted by formal political and legal mechanisms (which in turn hinder the possibility for human rights claims to be made by Palestinians). Dance creates a world in which Palestinian subjects are affirmed as equal to Israelis; in which the bodies of both sides command equal respect and are treated as equally dignified.

The dancers dancing their human rights in this chapter make their human rights claims through motion. This inscription pushes for a reinterpretation of the ontology and epistemology of the argument. The readings of both the dances discussed present the possibility of building a world through movement. The world is never stable, never confined to

a specific space; it is constantly re-enacted by the interlocutors in the embodied conversation. The ontological vulnerability of human rights as being part of two worlds in one becomes part of the epistemology of human rights subjects, constantly enacting that new world in which they are equal subjects through their bodies. Indeed, for some subjects of the human rights doctrine the current political world offers few solutions for their legal vulnerability. Through dance they mobilise ways of knowing and show that they are never vulnerable; no one needs to act on their behalf. I argue that dance allows for an interpretation of human rights in movement, in a world that is constantly becoming.

In this chapter I have argued that dance can be mobilised to transcend obstacles that the human rights doctrine faces in our contemporary world. The doctrine of human rights still requires local mechanisms for rights claims to be made, though they always appeal to the universal. My analysis is always focused on the most local unit of claiming human rights, the human body. At the same time, the use of dance transcends that unit and is able to articulate messages intertwined in the ethos of human rights as a recognition of inherent dignity and inalienable rights. There is no positing of one group of people as victims and they are actively and powerfully reconfiguring their shared lives and shaping the way they would like their rights to be claimed. This reading allows us to bring the discussion of human rights back to the human body and away from transcendental conceptions of the human, disengaged from the local experiences of those who shape and claim human rights. The concept of *sic-sensuous* as always inscribing from the sensed body means that the subject always claims their rights from a definite space, their own body, and in their own language.

Consequently, we release towards a new conceptualisation of human rights through dance. Dance, we have seen, allows for further participation in debates around human rights in methods that transcend some of the obstacles towards further implementation of the doctrine. It allows for the local moment of claiming human rights – or violation of human rights – to be communicated beyond power structures that oppose the doctrine. This reading gives both the affirmation of human rights and resistance towards their violation a new kind of language. The body is able to transcend structures of domination that hinder it from feeling compassion towards the body of the Other. The moving body relates to the moved body, whether or not political-legal structures are in place to enable this relationship and sustain this relationality. Those moments of shared empathy enable the recognition *through the body* of the underlying assumption of the human rights doctrine: *that all human beings are*

*equal in dignity*. This affirmation allows the reader–spectator to progress towards the last act in this argument: its conclusions.

**Note**

- 1 Rowe is married to a Palestinian dancer and his study draws on his experiences teaching dance in Palestine as well as in-depth interviews with dance practitioners in Palestine.