

Article

Rethinking Conceptual Parameters of Choreography (in Social Spaces)—Actualization of Intensities in Discursive Fields

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Abstract: This article aims to take part in the ongoing discussion on the social and political potentialities as well as the conceptual premises of choreography and to contribute to the discussion about world relations in the choreographed movement. The much-used definition of Western choreography is “organized movement in space and time”. Although this definition always applies, it does not specify the world relations and worldmaking capacities of the choreographed movement. The main focus of this article is an ontological rethinking of the basic concepts of choreography: movement, space, time and organization, with the addition of kinaesthetic fields, kinaesthetic and spatial intelligence, virtual and actual realms, striated and smooth spaces (Deleuze and Guattari) and different conceptions of time. By analyzing these concepts, the aim is to provide a view of ontologically elementary units in choreography (such as a change in space, the difference over time and space, and passage to shared actuality), with a wider understanding of the inherent social relationality in choreographed movement. After discussing these topics, a few social choreography events and protests are described to represent different choreographic aims and organizational modes arising from each specific situation. The article concludes by proposing that choreography could be seen as organizing movement in space and time but also as a choreographic actualization of intensities in different discursive fields.

Keywords: movement; choreography; social choreography; time; space; intensities; smooth space; striated space; discursive fields; kinaesthetic intelligence; kineasthetic fields; actualization



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The conceptual definitions of choreography have evolved in many directions since French cleric Thoinot Arbeau made written notes of Renaissance social dances in *Orchésographie* (1589) and Lefeuillet introduced the term choreography (1699), in the sense of a written notation for dance (Greek khoreia + graphein). Fast forward to the 1950s, (post)modern choreographer Merce Cunningham wanted to separate the art of dance and choreography from the dramatic, mimetic and representational ties of ballet and early modern dance. For Cunningham, choreographed dance is movement in space and time—a definition that has since prevailed, with countless variations, as a blueprint for contemporary dance and choreography. Moreover, the redefinitions of choreography in the 2000s first separated the bond between dance and choreography, and then added to choreography’s time and space the more-than-human-bodies dimension and the relationship to the environment. As William Forsythe sees it: “Choreography is not necessarily bound to dance, nor is dance bound to choreography. [] At its most basic, choreography is about engendering, ordering, and composing movement; about organizing bodies in space, or organizing bodies with other bodies in an environment that is organized.” (Lucket 2010, p. 105). These definitions are profound in the sense that they always apply. Choreographed movement can only happen in a specific space–time environment.

However, the abstraction of dance and choreography into *organized movement in time and space* does not specifically take into account the historicity, contextuality, motivations, situations, discursivity, systemic relations, or political and social connotations—in other words, the world relations and worldmaking capacities of such action. Thus, the 2010s and

2020s, as an era of transdisciplinary and expanded art practices as well as post-humanist, decolonial and feminist trends in thinking, were characterized by an attempt to rediscover in practice and theory the context-bound world relations of movement and choreography. Choreography has sought, four hundred years after the *Orchésographie*, new forms of “social dances”, new dimensions of what could be social or political in choreography. It has found new ways to directly interact with people in communities and public spaces and to organize and facilitate situations for participation, whether in the motivation of community building, trauma healing, environmental protection, social protesting or political action. Conversely, socially or politically motivated collective events, performative actions, protests and demonstrations have increasingly been analyzed and theorized from the perspective of social choreography. (e.g., [Martin 1998](#); [Foster 2003](#); [Klien and Valk 2008](#); [Cvejic and Vujanovic 2012](#); [Lepecki 2013](#); [Klein 2013a, 2013b](#); [Marchart 2013](#); [Siegmond 2016](#); [Foellmer 2016](#); [Lotina 2017](#); [Hatuka 2018](#); [McNab 2018](#)). Among these contributions, choreography’s political potential has been analyzed, for example, from the perspective of Chantal Mouffe’s theory of material discourses ([Lotina 2017](#)) and Niklas Luhman’s systems theory ([Foellmer 2016](#)), and in Tali [Hatuka’s](#) (2018) research, she described the typical use of space in different modes of demonstrations and protests.

This essay aims to take part in the ongoing discussion on the social and political potentialities as well as the conceptual premises of choreography and to contribute to the discussion about world relations in the choreographed movement. It does so by exploring the key concepts and ideas of Western contemporary choreography: *movement, space, time* and *organization*. By further examining these concepts, it will reflect on how the interconnected, interdependent, and dynamically actualizing world is reflected in the conceptualizations of choreography, as well as how the social aspect, as it is always particular, contextual and historical, is incorporated into these conceptualizations. This conceptual elaboration does not seek to be a method or tool for analyzing practical events but provides a broader view of the premises of choreography in social spaces.

The position from where I write and approach these questions is a Northern European one, with the histories of Western dance art, choreography, performance philosophy, artistic research, and artistic curation.

1. Conceptualizations and the Emergence of Phenomena

My discussion follows the views of [Deleuze and Guattari \(1994\)](#): that concepts are not stable entities and do not only denote something outside itself; rather, especially philosophical concepts, they are self-referential in the sense that they gather together a multiplicity of components and actualize something that is forced to be actualized ([Deleuze and Guattari 1994](#)). What is forced to be actualized are the intensities, forces and problems that the events of the world induce. Concepts are responses to the problems produced by the multiplicity of an event. In that sense, they are not ahistorical or stable but are transformed and mutated and live only when they are put into work, or when, as Elisabeth Grosz writes, they are “[] made to do something—develop an argument, inspire an artwork, generate discussion and analysis, produce effects” ([Grosz 2003](#), p. 79). In addition, as a response to the problems generated by an event, they are seen not as propositional solutions to the problems but function more like an actualization of the problem in the sense of performance: “Concepts are the performance of the problem rather than the enactment of their solution” ([Grosz 2003](#), p. 80).

Similarly, the events of the world are not “concept-free”. Concepts, or rather their componential multiplicity, are folded in the actualization of an event. It follows that no event, action, movement or choreography happens in a neutral no-place where they are not affected and conditioned by a historically formed pre-knowledge, a field of significances related to each other, or a field of felt and embodied intensities and forces that together affect the emergence of movement and its modes of organization as choreography. In a way, this conceptual and discursive *multiplicity performs itself in the embodied actions*. And vice versa, the bodily actuality affects the creation and formation of the virtual multiplicity.

Keeping this in mind, it is only natural but also necessary that the basic conceptualizations concerning movement, choreography and its world relations are constantly transformed, mutated, revisited, pondered and investigated.

Overall, this essay is mainly based on process-philosophical and post-humanist views, in which the world is not understood ontologically as a set of static and discrete entities or identities but as constituting of *dynamically actualizing occasions*, where the “virtual realm” (as a field of multiplicity, relationality and intensities) continuously interacts and prehends with the physical world. In this sense, matter and meaning are seen as inseparable; the emergence of phenomena is an actualization of the “intra-acting” physical and the virtual worlds.¹ In this context, choreographed movement appears as an investigation and embodied evidence of the constant encountering, interplay and prehension of the virtual and actual—an interplay that is channeled and formed into an attuned articulation in a situation, as a composed choreographic event. Here, (human) bodies are not seen as objects in space with inherent boundaries and properties but as “material-discursive phenomena” capable of communicating and performing their situation in complex ways.² In this sense, choreographed movement is always a contextual and situated event, embodied participation in the fields larger than oneself; it is a mode of revealing and worldmaking, establishing or renewing, representing or enacting as performance, if only seen and interpreted as such.

In the next sections, the basic choreographic concepts—movement, space, time, and organization—are dealt with from ontological and theoretical views. In addition, the phenomenological concepts of kinaesthetic fields, kinaesthetic, and spatial intelligence are presented as part of the emergence of choreography. The aim is to open each concept for further choreographic thinking, for potential choreographic creation in social spaces, and to widen the view to the inherent multiplicity of the world relations of social choreographic events. At the end of the essay, a few examples of social choreographic events, protests and demonstrations are briefly described and discussed. These examples represent different choreographic aims and organizational modes arising from each specific situation.

2. Movement (*kinēsis*)

- As a Passage to Shared Actuality

“In these protest cultures, the word “movement” should not be seen only metaphorically, but also, thanks to its corporeal, scenic, and choreographic actions, literally, which has yet to be adequately addressed in theories of social movement”. (Klein 2013a)

Movement, as a kinetic imperative, is the emblematic feature of modern times. Finances, data, trades, production, labor, everything must circulate without interruption and obey the obligation to keep going at all costs. Movement is also the focus point and area of investigation in dance and choreography. In addition, movement, or rather its capacity to be choreographically organized, has also become the focus point of many treatises on social choreographies, political demonstrations and events.

In the article “Bodies of Protest. Social Choreographies and the Materiality of Social Figurations” (Klein 2013a), Gabriele Klein approaches social choreography from a sociological and dance-studies perspective. For her, social choreography “[] combines the concept of choreography from contemporary dance, which basically denotes organising bodies in space and time [] with the sociological concept of social figuration. [] From this perspective, social choreography refers to the specifically spatial and time-based figurations of organising bodies, materialities, and objects, relating to each other in an interactive and inter-corporal manner”.³

This definition shows very well the multitude of any choreographed situation in social spaces, as it sees them happening amidst always already-existing movement, taking part in it, reorganizing, altering, and bringing forth new social “interdependence networks” of bodies and materialities. However, despite its centrality, the concept of movement is rarely explicitly investigated or focused on in conceptualizations of (social) choreography. As in the previous quote, the analysis often focuses on the choreography’s capacity to *organize* movement and relations but not explicitly on the concept of movement in terms of how

to understand movement, what happens in movement, what movement does, or what is *movement*?

An exception to this is Randy Martin's conceptualization of the relationship between dance and politics with the term mobilization. In *Critical Moves. Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (1998) Martin sees that since bodies are always already in motion, social change begins with movement as *mobilization* rather than as a cognitive, passive formulation of an idea, followed by the realization of that idea. For Martin, mobilization precedes what is already given (political, economic, conceptual, aesthetic). It is more like a *capacity for movement*, instrumental in creating and preserving "the space where new formations germinate".⁴ Since bodies are already in motion, moved by the forces and contexts that draw from beyond the given, movement can be that which bridges the various splits between body and mind, subject and object, process and structure, and can hence take part in understandings and changes in social and political life (Colmsee 2015/2016, p. 11). As Gerald Siegmund sees it, "Since mobilization is not movement per se, but the "capacity for movement", it needs to operate on a different level than movement. It becomes a vector of energy that stimulates bodies and their movements to take a certain direction. As such, mobilization is the potential for action that, in principle, may take any direction. It is ongoing and hard to contain" (Siegmund 2016, p. 28). Hence, it is creative and potentially political.

To my understanding, Martin sees movement from a double perspective—*mobilization* as a capacity and generative force for movement, and *movement* as an identified actuality in its world relations. This notion comes close to what I seek to elaborate here: movement (*kinēsis*) as a *passage to shared actuality* and a *change in the shared actuality*.

The philosophical problem "What is movement?" has already been profoundly pondered in the writings of Aristotle. Concluding different interpretations of Aristotle's *Physics*, one can define that *movement* or *motion* can be understood in its most profound sense as a *change*, or in other words, a *passage to actuality*. In this passage, the potentiality (for movement) is actualized as potentiality (for movement). Thus, movement can be seen as a process or passage from one state to another, or from one place to another—as a continuous, not a discrete, phenomenon.⁵ Hence, motion, movement and change in space could be seen as interchangeable concepts, and the concepts of potentiality and actuality, could be seen not as distinct entities but as one containing the other.

Once the movement in space emerges, it becomes something perceivable and sensible, a shared actuality. It is not a private impulse or organizational potentiality anymore; it becomes a component of the shared actuality, of the lived world. Thus, in principle, movement manifests itself as a constant potentiality for change in the shared social, political, and cultural discourses and the physical actuality. Similarly, as potentiality and actuality should not be seen as distinct entities but as one containing the other, the field of relationality and significances should be seen as being in constant interaction with the material actualities of the world, hence forming the reality that Karen Barad calls a phenomenon of material-discursive intra-action.⁶

It is important to note that by shared actuality I do not mean similar reality to all. The events of the world appear differently in each person's experience and situation in spite of sharing the lived world contexts. Through movement, we have a personal agency, though we always have a somewhat conditional and conditioned choice and ability to move, but at the same time, we also participate in historical, contextual forces, structures and intensities beyond oneself. In movement, the participation in a larger-than-oneself but privately felt inner life (how does it feel to be alive?) becomes a shared actuality that is not private anymore; it is possibly a collectively and communally challenged and shared reality.

I have now outlined some views on the nature of movement, but the concept of change still needs to be addressed to gain a more precise understanding. In the lived world, changes do not happen in a vacuum but come to be observed only in relation to what was before, in their *relational fields*. To observe a change, we must be able to *perceive information about a difference that occurred over time and in space*—in other words, a difference

in the spatiotemporal field. Cyberneticist and semiotician Gregory Bateson defines the relations between information, difference and change by stating that the elementary unit of information is difference and “difference that occurs across time is what we call “change” (Bateson 1970/1987, p. 458). In choreography, the elementary unit would then be the *perceived knowledge of differences, such as spatial changes, over time.*

Drawing together these conceptualizations, we can now understand the question “What is movement?” in several ways: as an actualized potentiality for movement (as constant becoming); as a change in spacetime; as a passage to shared actuality; or as perceived differences over the spatiotemporal fields. But, because in reality, movement does not appear as a sheer abstraction in neutral space–time, everything explained above should be seen as situated, material–discursive phenomena in its spatial and temporal contexts.

For choreography, what does this elaborated knowledge about movement then bring forth, and what does it do? Rather than being an applicable methodology, it suggests further contemplation in each specific situation of what might be opened as a potentiality and possibility. It also suggests approaching movement not only from the already identified movement forms or ideas of choreographic organization but from the simple units of potential changes in space and perceived spatial differences over time entangled with virtual fields of intensities, forces and significances. In every social situation, there are always already motions going on, motions and movements that could be perceived, analyzed, developed, changed, challenged, and performed differently, according to social, political, and artistic intentions and conditions. Starting the choreographic imagination from the actualization of the concepts of change and difference possibly widens choreographic thinking to the relational networks of humans, objects, materials and systems and enables us to think about the accessibility and relevance of the event in a wide spectrum of movement and potentiality.

3. Approaches to Space and Time in Choreography

A common definition of choreography in dance studies and dance education is that it organizes movement in space and time. Further reflection on the concepts of space and time usually focuses on the development of organizational tools and questions such as how to *use* the given space (spatial grids, structures, flow) and time (tempo, duration, rhythm). However, this methodical approach rarely includes pondering, as a starting point, the significances and characteristics of the corporeal local and temporal being, the dimension of potentiality, the underlying relationality, intensities and forces that cause the movement to become (anything meaningful), nor does it consider time in its historical “ecstatic” dimension, which carries the past and future in the present. In choreography, whether during on-stage performances or social participatory events, it all intertwines with the question of how choreography becomes meaningful and relevant, of what it brings forth, enables, discloses and creates. The sheer methodical use of space and time does not provide much advice on or depth to these questions. To gain a deeper understanding of how choreography operates and what it enables, the fundamental elements of existence, space and time could be looked at more closely.

The typical organizational use of space in (on-stage) choreography is based on the abstract approach to spatiality, the ideas of spatial measurement, and the calculation of the surrounding world. This operation tends to lose the characteristics of interconnected relevance and involvement in the lived world. Our being is temporal and also corporeal and local. We live in a historical place, not a neutral space. The meaningfulness of our corporeal being opens up as a situational, not an abstract, spatiality. When, for example, for Descartes, space is a homogeneous continuum in which objects are located, Heidegger’s conception of space is topological. The space includes privileged places, *topoi*. Corporeal being is situational directionality, the spatiality of activity and involvement and the spatiality of contextual and horizontal gaze, a plane from which abstractions are possible.⁷

Quite near to this view comes the idea of *smooth* and *striated space* presented by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The *striated space* is a

tendency to encounter the world as ordered and organized, metric and calculable (solid, methodical, representation, distinct entities), whereas *the smooth space* describes the spatiality of the relations, variations of intensities, virtual potentialities (chaos, fluid, nomadic, intensive multiplicity, process, heterogeneous connections) (Grosz 2003, p. 81). In actuality, these tendencies are mixed, but the histories of organizational models (social, political, scientific also somewhat artistic models) have prioritized the striated (the calculable) ways to organize our experience of the world.

A core characteristic of measurability and calculability is that the interconnected nature of entities and their involvement in the lived world is veiled. In calculation and counting, the entities are seen as separate, distinct in demarcated space. Referring to Deleuze and Guattari, Henry Somers-Hall writes that “Counting therefore implies a homogenous space within which to situate the entities which are counted. It implies the distinction between the one and the many and hence the notion that organization is something that is separable from the elements to be organized” (Somers-Hall 2018, p. 248). In other words, this kind of organization does not draw its organizational principles from the agency, mode of movement, and relationality of the ones that it is organizing. Instead, it is applying a model that allows certain forms of manipulation and practical and political control to be developed.

In the actual world, the tendencies to encounter the experiences of the world, occur in different mixes of striated and smooth spaces, specific integrations of both chaos and order. As for Martin Heidegger, the local, interconnected and related world is primordial and the enframed, technological encountering of the world is secondary, also for Deleuze and Guattari the smooth space of the nomadic potentiality is primordial. The metric space is, as Somers-Hall see it, “a distortion of a more primordial understanding of the world as a field of pure intensity and process” (Somers-Hall 2018, p. 254). Rather than being a space where distinct objects are located, smooth space is a plane that is determined by the *relations of elements*, heterogeneous connections, lines of force and variations in intensity (Somers-Hall 2018, p. 254).

When choreography organizes movement, it does so in relation to both the imaginative, potential, smooth spaces and the already striated environment, conditioned possibilities and choreographic ideas. Social choreography balances between those spatial tendencies, challenges and changes in how the social and discursive space is used, regulated, and framed, as well as by whom and on which grounds. The choreography’s creative and transformational potentiality emerges from the allowance of the fluid plane of the not-yet organized, the relationality of intensities and forces to be brought to the surface to show new spatial and organizational possibilities. Instead of the already known and established use of space, the smooth plane suggests altered ways of seeing, feeling, imagining and embodying heterogeneous connections and spatial and temporal relations as a choreographic organization. These possibilities should be found in connection to the actual situation, with the intertwinement of the physical and the possible, and with the agencies and modes of movement of the ones who are involved.

3.1. *Kinaesthetic Fields and Intelligence*

As mentioned above, corporeal being is always situational and directional. We run there and walk here, we drive far and see close. Our spatiality is intentional involvement in contextual spaces. An interesting concept, regarding the experience and perception of corporeal spatiality, is the phenomenological concept of *kinaesthetic fields*. Philosopher Jaana Parviainen, drawing from Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein, writes about kinaesthetic fields in relation to social choreographies. The kinaesthetic field is different from just receiving proprioceptive information about one’s body movements. It is both the orientation in the individual system of one’s body movements and the orientation in the total, environmental system of movement. In our everyday experience, the visual fields and kinaesthetic fields are tightly connected, forming a continuous multidimensional system (Parviainen 2010, pp. 311–29). The notion of a kinaesthetic field positions us as involved participants amidst

our environments. The experience and perception of the environment are in constant change according to our spatial and temporal involvement in it. What enables us to orientate, navigate and interact in this environment is largely dependent on our kinaesthetic and spatial abilities, which Howard Gardner called *kinaesthetic* and *spatial intelligence* (Gardner 1983). Bodily kinaesthetic intelligence describes the motor capacity to control one's bodily motions and the capacity to handle objects skillfully, and spatial intelligence is the capacity to perceive the visual world accurately and to act upon these initial perceptions. In relation to choreography, Parviainen sees that creating choreographies concretizes the inherent unity of kinaesthetic and spatial intelligence. "The choreographed movement is localized in the body as kinaesthetic experience as much as choreographies in space" (Parviainen 2010, p. 324).

3.2. Time and Temporality

Similarly to the analysis of space, the philosophical analysis of time discloses different tendencies in relation to time. This area of existential and process philosophy is extremely complex and only a few chosen characteristics are possible to introduce here. Nevertheless, some brief remarks that follow the conceptualization presented above should be included. The common approach to time as a calculable and measurable element veils the more primordial understanding of time as the fundament that gives rise to the sense of being. For Heidegger, time should be understood in its "ecstatic", not chronological, nature. Understanding time as a chronological succession of separate tenses—past, present and future—hides the ecstatic nature of time: the past (as the historical development of significances) and future (as the closed future, the possibility of death) are both always conditioning and affecting the now moment, the present. (Heidegger 1927/2010, pp. 309–16, 334).

For Deleuze and Guattari, time is a multiplicity with no pre-given metric, rather than a chronological concept. It is a manifold defined by a *network of processes* that are interacting with one another.⁸ Concerning the smooth spaces, time appears more like sensed variations and qualities of *duration* (relations of speeds and slownesses), whereas in striated spaces, time appears more as a question of measure (Somers-Hall 2018, p. 254). But, as already stated above, all these binary conceptualizations should not be seen as objective structures but as mixtures of two kinds of tendencies and forces, and as a *productive encounter* where organizational formations of everyday life, as well as the compositional frames of artworks and choreographies, emerge.

The encountering of these two tendencies—two conceptions of space and time—is creative and productive. As Elisabeth Grosz writes in reflection on Deleuze and Guattari, art and artistic approaches give expression to the "infinite chaos of the virtual" through a plane of composition that in turn generates affects, percepts and intensities (Grosz 2003, p. 84; Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 123). While composing, while encountering these different tendencies in spatiality and temporality, a social choreographer needs to especially intensively allow the histories, futures, agencies and modes of movement of the ones who are involved to be visible and take part as an organizational element of the event. Rather than uncritically repeating and applying manipulative models, a creative social choreographer listens to the intensities and forces in virtual relationality in each situation, investigates those historical material discourses that are folded into its existing organizational patterns and world relations, and through kinaesthetic and spatial intuition and intelligence, discovers new possibilities for movement and its choreographic composition.

The notions of movement, space and time, presented in previous sections, do not limit the choreographic reflection and composition to movements of human bodies but open the creative process for expanded assemblages of actors and their "intra-action" in compositional becoming. In other words, compositional becoming could be seen as a process where the multiplicity of forces and relationality performs and actualizes in the composed differences and changes over sensed time and lived space.

4. Choreographed Movements at Work in Social Time–Spaces

To question different tendencies to encounter the world is not only an abstract question of choreographic organization but, at its deepest level, an ethical, political, and social question of the principles of organization, governance, resources, inhabitation and interaction. In recent decades, much of the expanded choreography, especially projects and events that have had social or political aims, have approached choreography with theoretical and practical views that have sought to overcome the lack of world relations in choreography's historical conceptualizations and understand movement in a broad expanded way to overcome the historical dichotomies and binaries.⁹ Referring to the conceptualization presented in this essay, social choreographies of protests and demonstrations draw their motivation from the cognitive, emotional, and physical strife and clash between the existing social and political situation and what possibly could be; then, they take this clash as a creative and productive encountering of forces and intensities and use their kinaesthetic and spatial intelligence to channel these forces to a choreographic event in social spaces.

The notion of kinaesthetic and spatial intelligence is not a specialty of choreographers or dancers, although they cultivate and use them consciously, but a feature that all humans and creatures have to some extent. Social and political events that can be seen functioning choreographically use these capacities and find their organizational forms somewhat spontaneously, non-hierarchically or using existing models of participation and creatively develop their operations on the go. Others may have had long choreographic planning processes that include various organizations, NGOs and political actors to investigate and imagine possibilities for change in the existing order of things and matter. Noteworthy is that when successful, they reveal latent potential between people and in their interactions and encounters with the world, or they disclose hidden forces and intensities in the community's past, such as memories or traumas. By doing this, they create a potential for change in both the virtual and actual, and individual and collective realms.

4.1. Politically Organized Choreographies—Women's Wall

One of the most evocative and large social choreographies throughout the last decades was the human chain protests, with many of them gathering more than a million people in their events. An example of a large-scale protest and social choreography that is organized jointly by different political actors is the Vanitha Mathil, a Women's Wall organized on 1 January 2019 in the Indian state of Kerala, with around three to five million women participating in it. The event was initiated, planned over a long time, and organized by various political actors, including governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations and associations. The Vanitha Mathil involved the formation of a 620-kilometre-long human chain along the national highways to protest against gender discrimination, uphold gender equality, and protest a religious ban that prevented women of menstruating age from entering one of the country's sacred Hindu temples, even after the Supreme Court had ruled in favor of their entry ([India Today Online Webpage 2019](#); Also see [Thiagarajan 2019](#)).

This gathering of women of all ages revealed a hidden potentiality to overcome the historical idea of subjugated, distinct female bodies in demarcated spaces and instead created a shared actuality of connectedness, solidarity, and altered use of patriarchally organized space. By making a change in their everyday individual movement and participating in this collective choreographed event, they were actualizing powerful forces and intensities in larger discursive fields. A simple collective bodily action, although requiring a lot of transportation logistics to be attainable, a choreographed line of bodies, side by side joining hands, was able to form such a powerful event that it set a massive cultural change in motion. An activist, Tanuja, called the Women's Wall a second renaissance: "The women wall wants to say aloud that we are equal. This is second renaissance, a period where the new generation has come forward to discuss issues. The women's wall is a place for women to discuss their issues and create a new world where they are equals" ([India Today Online Webpage 2019](#)). Even though the chain of millions of joined hands lasted for just a

moment in time, the temporality of the whole event, the preparations, the aftermath, and the planes of significances reached much further.

The centuries of religious, political and cultural relationality confronted the new future in the making in the actual presence of the protesting women. The user Pishumon commented on Twitter:

The era of women folding hands and submitting to patriarchy is beginning to end from here. They will throw their fists on the air and demand for their rights. Women's wall is just a beginning, a baby step of the impending cultural revolution.—Pishumon (@PishuMon) 1 January 2019 (Thiagarajan 2019).

4.2. Authored Social Choreographies—Crawlings

Different examples of social choreography are artist-led events. These events are part of the artist's body of work and in this sense initiated differently than collectively facilitated and implemented events. In these works, the politically and socially analytical approach to given spaces, in their striated and smooth aspects and the significances they carry, is applied to factual kinaesthetic fields. With the artist's bodily kinaesthetic intelligence, they try to find choreographies that hold and signify the clashing forces of the social and political situation.

One of the most prominent artists in this regard is an American multidisciplinary artist, Pope L. (1955–2023). Among his long career of works is a series of performances in which he used his body in public spaces to examine the inequality, social and political division, race, and class on the streets of New York City (Pope 2019). He is best known for his series *Crawlings*, which that started in the late 1970s, among which the longest performance was *The Great White Way: 22 Miles, 9 Years, 1 Street* (2001–2009). In this performance, he crawled repeatedly the length of Broadway in a Superman costume with a skateboard on his back in place of a cape.¹⁰ This simple choreographed movement through a heavily striated space activated a multiplicity of virtual relationality, intensities and forces related to the black body and racism, as well as the hegemony of striated, architectural verticality versus horizontal planes of deprived power, among other aspects.

In 2019, Pope L. initiated *Conquest*, a large-scale performative work inspired by the iconic *Crawling* series. *Conquest* was a 140-person mass crawl in which participants who reflected cultural and demographic diversity of New York City crawled a 1.5-mile-long route from West Village Playground to the Washington Square Park's triumphal arch. According to Nicholas Baume, the director and curator of the organizer Public Art Fund, "Crawling together, strangers experienced the struggle and vulnerability of giving up their physical privilege, satirizing their own social and political advantage. As the course of Pope L.'s *Conquest* unfolded, we were all offered an insight into the power and contradictions of collective action" (Pope 2019). In *Conquest*, the simple but powerfully signifying movement of crawling created a shared actuality of struggle and vulnerability (<https://www.popel.nyc/>, accessed on 2 January 2024). While the scenes of struggle and vulnerability unfolded, the choreographed movement was "at work", creating a shared space where the striated social, racial, and economic spaces momentarily collapse into a smooth plane, with long-term temporal effects and intensities. The simple repeated action is not only a repetition of the same movement or a representation of a thematized idea but an action as a passage to shared actuality, which appears as complex and conflicting as the virtual multiplicity and relationality that it activates.

4.3. Assemblages of Actors in Non-Governable, Rhizomatic Organizations

In an era of digital cultures, volatile geopolitical circumstances and ecological crises, social and political protests often appear in non-linear rhizomatic organizational models that loosely assemble different actors in their non-hierarchical networks of events.¹¹ The events caused by social and political injustice, environmental abuse, cultural discrimination and racism, for example, use many forms and mediums, including non-human actors in their rhizomatic manifestations. Rather than being able to be observed as a coherent whole,

an event of defined boundaries, they appear to be in a continuous process of becoming, organized more like a nomadic and smooth spatiality, both in digital and physical spaces and as networks of different durational processes. The actualization of intensities in the discursive and kinaesthetic fields happens simultaneously in digital and physical worlds. In these events it is difficult to define and impossible to control all actors involved in a particular problem or conflict.

For example, the famous Hong Kong protests in 2019–2020 were a series of demonstrations against the Hong Kong government's bill to amend the Extradition of Offenders Act. The tactics and methods of the angry and frustrated protesters varied from mass rallies, human chains, petitions, labor strikes and class boycotts as well as walls filled with artworks and colorful Post-it notes messages advocating freedom and democracy. Also, "fluid tactics," where protesters were moving in a fluid and agile fashion to confound and confuse the police, were adopted. In digital spaces, doxing and cyberbullying were used, as well as violent confrontational tactics, on both sides. The protesters communicated with each other, and the manifestations of the protest occurred and were choreographed both in striated, ordered and organized modes and in durational, rhizomatic modes of temporality, where simultaneous horizontal networks of processes were interacting with one another in digital and physical spaces.¹²

Another famous example of recent social upheaval and protest with a rhizomatic organization is the Masha Amini protests in Iran in 2022–2023, associated with the death of a young woman, Masha Amini, who died in police custody. The protests escalated rapidly in both digital and physical spaces. In online protests, both Iranians and the global audience could see young women daring to post themselves dancing. Also, documented clips of the brutal physical confrontations with the security forces quickly spread globally gaining hundreds of millions of views. The physical protests involved both mass rallies and small and quick gatherings, with drivers blocking streets with their cars to slow down security forces. Some protesters chanted from windows or rooftops. Symbolic protests include dyeing fountains blood-red and women discarding and burning their hijabs or cutting their hair in public.¹³ The explosive clash between the smooth space, the virtual forces and intensities, the underlying "mobilization" and the striated cultural and political spaces created at once an uncontrollable and constantly occurring and actualizing stream of events—a rhizomatic choreography of protests.

Regarding environmental issues, it is even more challenging to understand and define, let alone control, all actors involved in a particular problem or conflict. This makes it tempting to reduce the issue to a technical, economic, or juridical matter and approach the problem from a narrowly striated and manipulative perspective. It is clear, however, that these approaches veil the more profound and entangled understanding of environmental processes and phenomena as "material-discursive intra-actions", which, for Karen Barad, describe the world not as individual separate entities but as entangled parts of phenomena that extend across space and time (Barad 2007, see for example pp. 139, 153). This view highlights and emphasizes the contingency of all matter—contingency that is an effect of intra-activity, "a form of assembly in which subjects and the material world create a rich, dense, and unpredictable process flow" (McNab 2018, p. 70).

An example of the complex entanglement of actors in an industrial project that exploited and endangered the environment was the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project in Canada in 2014. Brynn Catherine McNab describes the contentiousness of this political conflict: "The project is contentious for many reasons: among them, differing definitions of who or what is conceived of as an actant. The issue is framed as political—as inciting, for instance, a "constitutional crisis"—or economic, environmental, or local, by turns" (McNab 2018, p. 71). McNab lists over twenty stakeholders, oil companies, transportation companies, governmental bodies, political organizations, NGOs, and First Nations Indigenous groups. These are only the human actants. Then comes the land itself, the water, and those who cannot defend themselves but are defended mostly by the Indigenous groups. As Tseil-Waututh elder Ta-ah George stated: "The fish can't say no to

those tankers, and when there's a toxic spill it's going to be in the water for 75 to 100 years. The whale pod used be twenty strong. Now there are three. These are the ones who cannot speak" (McNab 2018, p. 71). In addition, there are more complex processes (such as off-gassing, solubility on land, and reactions to organisms and other chemicals) that create their own assemblages, which work in tandem with the larger assembled apparatuses.

The main aim of the manifold resistance was to question the narrow understanding of the actors involved, bringing visibility to the First Nations' past oppression, which affects the present, and the ones who cannot speak for themselves. As McNab writes, "As conflicts over environmental issues become increasingly pervasive and urgent, the expansion of who and what is considered a performer becomes increasingly necessary matter" (McNab 2018, p. 71). What we call the social and what we call the "public" should be redefined, as Jane Bennet writes in *Vibrant Matter* (2010). The non-anthropocentric approach would be that the *public* is constituted by an expanded and expanding company of humans and non-human entities (Bennet 2010, p. 108–9). In this sense, as McNab sees it, "Fostering an ability to recognize the choreographies of resistance that endure outside of jurisdictional lines is increasingly urgent as the political implications of ongoing reciprocities between actants becomes more and more evident" (McNab 2018, p. 73).

5. Concepts in Action—Conclusive Words

Overall, still, one may critically ask what is choreographic about these examples or events, or whether choreography is a suitable concept with which, or context in which, to discuss these. At first sight, it may seem far-fetched to look at all of the above through the lens of choreography. But, I argue, that if we look at social and political potentiality for change, then movement—as a *passage to shared actuality*—with the question of *how* this movement gets to be organized, then choreography is well suited for that discussion. In this essay, *movement* is seen in its elemental unit as a combination of potentiality and actuality, as a continuous *passage to shared actuality* and a *change in space–time*, or just as a *difference* that occurs over time and space. The concept of *passage*, or the event of *passaging*, becoming, and actualizing, is understood as an interaction of virtual and actual realms, of the virtual multiplicity of relationality, intensities and forces and the discursive materiality of the actuality. These are seen as being in constant interaction with each other. The concept of choreography comes into the picture when we start to look at *how* things become actualized and organized, and what ideas, aims and intentions guide and condition the movement to appear as something, as a meaningful compositional form and event. Choreography is seen as both intentionally composed and spontaneously emerging, always situationally and contextually, responding to specific conditions for its emergence—for example, to different spatial and temporal conditions and understandings. The concepts of space and time appear to be far from simple but are instead diverse and multifaceted aspects of existence, and depending on the approach and understanding of them, they affect both the emergence of choreography and the interpretations of existing social choreographies differently. The concept of social is seen as a field of discursive interactions among corporeal, embodied beings in an environment of constant change. The notion of a kinaesthetic field positions us as participants amidst the changing environments, whereas our kinaesthetic and spatial intelligence enables us to orientate, navigate and interact in those fields. In addition, they enable us to choreograph as well as participate in choreographies in social spaces, which could be seen as organizing movement in time and space but also as a choreographic actualization of intensities in different discursive fields.

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Notes

- ¹ With these conceptualizations, I wish to provide a view of choreography that emphasizes ontological inseparability of the virtual and actual realities in choreographic articulations. Despite the risk of oversimplification, I find these concepts useful and communicative in this context. The *dynamically actualizing occasions* refer to Alfred North Whitehead's process-philosophical speculation of reality as creativity and an emergence of actual occasions as processes of prehensions between physical and conceptual feelings (*Process and Reality* 1929/1984) (Whitehead 1984). The interaction of *virtual real* and *actual real* in turn refers to Gilles Deleuze's thinking, first described in the *Difference and Repetition* (1968/2021) (Deleuze 1968/2021) and Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). The sphere of the virtual real (as fields of multiplicity, relationality and intensities) and the actual real, affect and change each other in each process of the actualization of the intensities. The term intra-action in turn comes from Karen Barad (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* 2007) who draws from the quantum physics in explaining the emergence of reality and phenomena as an ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting components. This view is developed into the idea of *material-discursive phenomena* which describes the inseparability of material and meaning, which is how she sees also the ontological status of the human body.
- ² (Barad 2007, p. 153). These process-oriented views challenge the somewhat prevailing Platonic–Cartesian tradition of thought, which distinguishes between the thinking creature and the material entities and defines the ontological difference between nature and spirit. This tradition is unable to deal with the ethically and morally demanding idea of constant reciprocity and the agency of physical and virtual worlds—for example, in terms of environment and ecology or issues of representation. In this tradition, the actual world is not seen in a position of primarily and constantly affecting the potentialities of the virtual world but in a position of only representing, imitating and reflecting the ideas, images and structures of the virtual world, which is seen as the distinct template of reason and thought. This has had its historical causes for the ontology of art, dance and choreography, seen as functioning only metaphorically, imitatively and reflectively and not as bringing forth and opening new meanings or (social) changes in its material compositions.
- ³ (Klein 2013a, pp. 108–9). Klein is referring to Elias's concept of social figuration. The concept of social figuration addresses the interaction of bodies as an “interdependence network” and takes this as a basis for the social.
- ⁴ Siegmund (2016, p. 28) and Colmsee (2015/2016, p. 11) discusses Martin's theory of mobilization. See also Martin (1998, p. 13).
- ⁵ Aristotle (2008). Introduction xxxi–xxxii, books III, V–VIII; Sachs (2005); Cohen (2008).
- ⁶ Barad (2007), see for example 140, 153, 375–382.
- ⁷ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger discusses at length the existential relation to space and spatiality. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1927/2010, see for example 107–109, 349–353.
- ⁸ Daniel W. Smith: “Deleuze formulates a non-chronological concept of time as an *n*-dimensional and non-metrical manifold defined by “a formal network of processes” (3) that are “interacting with one another” (9). As the pure form of change, this manifold is characterized by its infinite variability, or chaos: “Chaos is characterized less by the absence of determinations than by the infinite speed with which they take shape and vanish” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 42). These evanescent determinations are not the “parts” of time but, more properly speaking, its singularities, and time is less a flow than a combinatory of these singular elements. (Smith 2013).
- ⁹ This kind of view is also discussed by, for example, (Gerecke and Levin 2018).
- ¹⁰ André Lepecki writes on extensive analysis of Pope. L.'s crawling performances in the essay *Stumbling Dance: William Pope L's crawls* in the book Lepecki (2006).
- ¹¹ A rhizome is concept used in biology and in post-structuralism to describe a non-linear network. Deleuze and Quattari used it in *A Thousand Plateaus* to refer to non-linear networks and connections between different virtual and actual planes, and multiplicity with no apparent order or coherency.
- ¹² See, for example, Tang (2022).
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahsa_Amini_protests#Protest_techniques (accessed on 3 January 2024), Why is Iran's TikTok generation demanding 'Women, Life, Freedom'? BBC News <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=siCHERPVmw> (accessed on 1 November 2023), Young Iranians dance to protest regime/DW news. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvXzEiqHPtU> (accessed on 1 November 2023).

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