Disseminated Choreographies, Nomadic Body-Archives

I'd like to open the imaginary 'choreography' of this speech by introducing my understanding of choreography, according to a brief theoretical frame.

Positing myself at the crossroad of Dance Studies and Deconstruction, I rely on the methodological concept of "dissemination" offered by the French-Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida, to explain how 'choreography' – behind and beyond its differ*a*nces, historical traditions or multiple styles – can be defined as a system of signs and memories which is always already 'differed' and 'dislocated' in time and space. I unfold the deconstructionist 'trope' in order to discuss the plurivocal drives or energies of the choreographic languages that disseminate 'themselves', let their meanings proliferate, and keep as many possibilities open as it is possible to imagine. The privileged technology is the 'body', that archives – "incorporates" and "excorporates" – its textuality in 'displaced' images and 'disseminated' choreographies, 'appearing' and 'dis-appearing' on the multiple stages, screens and digital architectures of our contemporary memory.

By embracing a methodological practice that unsettles the concept of choreography as a 'pre-established' and 'ordered' form of writing, I also want to adopt a gender-critical perspective so as to be able to investigate the 'turn' and the 'return' to a choreographic 'memory' in Western archival cultures. I adopt this perspective in reading the embodied memory of the 'anti-gravity' *technè*. This composition of dance is a body knowledge that has been archived, subverted and re-enacted – that is, 'disseminated' – throughout the Western performativity of dance history, especially by female dancers. The aesthetical dissemination of anti-gravitational choreographies is, in this sense, discussed here as the emergence of female spaces of critical belonging, where unfixed and fluid forms of agency can be engendered, and where nomadic politics of body affirmation are to be displayed.

In listening to my account, I'd like to ask you to open up your personal/collective 'archives' and read the mnemonic traces inscribed in your body-mind by the volatile images of female bodies. By dancing across temporal recurrences and spatial displacements, I would like to invite you on a brief journey across floating gestualities and nomadic subjectivities that

continually disseminate the gravity-free 'becoming' of their - and our own corporalities.

While dance keeps struggling to come to terms with its own 'ephemerality', I am interested in the "remains" – as defined by Rebecca Schneider – or the "detritus" – in Mathew Reason's notion – of a dance event inside the corporality of the dancer, and within the perception of the audience. In this respect, I try to investigate 'whether' and 'how' a choreographic language survives and migrates, from an 'original' environment to another hybrid space and temporality. In this sense I observe the "phantasmata" that survives in the 'afterlife' of a performance event. In the essay *Ninfee* (2007), Giorgio Agamben explains the 'phantasmata' with a reference to the treatise *De la arte de ballare et danzar* written by Domenico da Piacenza in 1460. I quote Agamben: "the phantasmata is the sudden arrest between two movements that virtually contracts within its internal tension the measure and the memory of the entire choreographic series." The "phantasmata" is the image that can last seconds, but that can linger in our memory for an indefinite time. Relevant to this point, I'd like also to quote the American video-artist Bill Viola when he asserts: "Images live within us. We are living databases of images, and these images do not stop transforming and growing once they get inside us."

Against the backdrop of these various interests, I rely on the creative and critical concept of the Body as a 'living Archive'. By re-elaborating Andrè Lepecki's notion, the dancing body can be conceived as a 'living deposit' that embodies a given technical gesture in its 'virtual' form, that is, in the abstract thinking of the gesture as an idea which, in becoming 'actual', disseminates in the fluid encounter with other cultural and kinetic expressions.

This 'body-archive' can, for example, belong to the migrant: the contemporary subjectivity that is constantly 'in-between' cultures, spaces and temporalities and which, on its migratory path, can activate new strategies of belonging (ex. the Post-colonial dancers). In this sense, the body-archive can be given in affinity with what Rosi Braidotti, in identifying the shifty and mobile nomadic subject, describes as the "polyglot". I quote Braidotti: "The polyglot as a nomad in between languages banks has no vernacular, but many lines of transit, of transgression". Envisioning her nomadic "polyglot practice of writing", Braidotti continues, and I quote: "writing in this mode is about disengaging the sedentary nature of words and meanings, deconstructing established forms of consciousness".

In the 'antigravity choreography', the writing of the "polyglot" interacts with the disseminated practices of those female dancers who, by relinquishing all ideas, desires or nostalgia for fixity, 'nomadically' re-archive the dominant systems of dance composition.

In this subversive "will to archive" (here, again I recall Lepecki's words), I see the innerved ability of the creation of women to deconstruct the patriarchal or, better, the 'patri-archival' orders and principles which have commanded and transmitted images of 'weightless' women as signs of 'in-consistent' subjectivities.

Starting with tradition, my point is that if, in our 'database', we consult the images of ballerinas depicted in romantic choreographies such as those of *Giselle* or *Swan Lake*, it is not unlikely that we remember the anti-gravitational quality of their kinetic virtuosity. Christy Adair's study *Women and Dance* (1992) remarks how much ballet history has been dominated by male principles. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, men were the 'archons': the teachers, the theoreticians and the choreographers of storylines which reinforced the stereotype of the 'ethereal' and 'passive' woman within the ideology of dominant culture.

It was not until the twentieth century that women had the opportunity to be the 'archons' of their own choreographic knowledge, interpreting and at the same time commanding new images of female agency. Both in Europe and North America, the pioneers of modern dance, gave new 'weight' to the female dancer on the stage and in the civil society. Hillel Schwartz argues that modern dancers reacted against balletic ideals of weightlessness; they re-discovered the effort, the weight and the torque as the forces behind their movements and behind their identity affirmations.

In the postmodern dance of the 60-70ies, as a result or in connection with feminist activism new defying-gravity patterns were improvised outside conventional theatrical contexts, with the aim of disturbing the presumed solidity of the surfaces upon which the dancers were used to perform. *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* is the famous performance by Trisha Brown in 1970 that constitutes the prime example of a body-archive that exploits the law of gravitation in a pedestrian choreography 'disseminated' in the urban public space.

An example antecedent to today's digital "gravity-free movements" can be found in Maya Deren's film *The Very Eye of Night* (1958). In this last document offered by the 'mother' or 'archon' of the school of 'film' as 'poetry', Deren anticipates the anti-gravity interventions carried out by the contemporary dancers who inhabit unpredictable spaces, over which to

hover, glide, suspend, or float, and the temporal 'disjunctions' that can be provided by the spectral dimension of digital dance.

The nomadic body-archive also refers to the contemporary audience or the "mobile-spectator", as Paul Virilio calls the users of performance artworks on the web. And here, on the web archive, we can access the short film *Weightless,* shot in 2007 by the Sweden architect, choreographer and musician Erika Janunger. With a cast all-female, and a sultry vocal score, this work is a playful game on human senses; the set is so cleverly designed that what appears to be 'vertical' is, in fact, 'horizontal'.

VIDEO http://vimeo.com/39908415

The set is split in two, depicting the everyday environment of a living room and a bedroom. Two territories "de-territorialized" by the dance of nomadic and suspended figures. I'd like to imagine that, by virtue of their bodily loss or disarticulation from the ground, the two women are enhancing their nomadic dances of affirmation of *A Room of One's Own*. As Virginia Woolf reminds us, 'there' the women have the time and the space where to disseminate their creative body-writings. Indeed, when the dancers Malin and Tuva gaze into your eyes directly, there is no doubt that this is the state of being they themselves have chosen. It is not a gimmick or a visual trick: 'weightlessness' is part of these women's reality.

In the nomadic intersection of architecture and choreography, Erika Janunger's body-archive experiences and disseminates the principles of different physical and visible languages. As she states:

I had always danced, ballet and contemporary, but even though leaving the path of dance, I still felt strongly for the way that professional dancers can control their bodies shaping them into almost anything. To me, a choreographer is a designer of sorts. It is vital to be able to translate words into images, bilingual, as you have to be.

When the 'polyglot' artist talks of the vitality of one of the dancers, she stresses that "Her movements were beyond dance, she could transform into any kind of shape, and it was not so much a matter of 'positions' but rather a sense of 'transitions'". Here, Janunger is stating something important for her anti-gravitational composition: she actualizes a choreography made of transitions, transgressions, alterations and modifications – what cannot be captured

and 'archived' in any definite visual frame or shape, because it is a 'metamorphosis' always in 'becoming'.

The nomadic transition of these body-archives insists on producing 'phantasmata' elsewhere, 'beyond' and 'outside' the architecture of the web-archive. Throughout August 2012, the choreography *Weightless* disseminates itself on the digital screens of Times Square in New York.

VIDEO http://vimeo.com/49039498

The film is shot at midnight every day, in a multiscreen version, as part of the project called *Midnight Moment: A Digital Gallery*, organized by the Times Square Advertising Coalition and Times Square Arts. The iconic public space of Times Square provides an exciting canvas where the work relies on/dwells in anti-gravity, through a multi-channel installation spanning seven city-blocks. In the canyon of Times Square, it is even more challenging to discern the position of the dancers against the walls, the floor or the ceiling; the dancers' bodies seem to float 'within', as if they traverse 'between' the buildings.

In their nomadic, chaotic transit through Time Square, thousands of people experience Janunger's choreography disseminated on the urban architecture. The outdoor digital gallery is a liquid archive that offers spaces of alternative belonging to the work itself, where other 'phantasmata' can survive in the body-archive of the nomadic spectators.

This space of hospitality results in the proliferation of what Jacques Derrida calls the "incalculable choreographies" in referring to the multiplicity of 'places' of the feminine in contemporary social-cultural representations and interpretations. The 'incalculability', 'weightlessness' and 'becoming nomad' of these disseminated choreographies are all affirmative elements of a female aesthetics that is 'placed' and 'rooted' in the fluid materiality of her body-archive and flowing subjectivity – just like the liquid voice of Virginia Woolf that resonates in *The Waves*: "I'm rooted, but I flow."