

RE-CHOREOGRAPHING THE CITY

Strategies for Space-Making Through Choreographic Performances in the
Public Urban Space

IRO VASALOU



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Supervisor: Dr. Laura Karreman

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The city lives on the body...

Abstract

The aim of the present research is to detect in site-specific performances in the public urban space which employ choreography, strategies for challenging the way the space in the city is perceived and used. Choreography is suggested as a tool to study and reflect on the public urban space considering it as a social construction and a fluid process, adopting a critical view on the hypermodern capitalist city. The concept of Urban Choreography introduced by Gabriele Klein is used to describe the city as a choreographed space and to further study the social currents that influence that choreography. The choreographies of three performances in the public urban space, made by Dutch artists - the aesthetic choreographies - are studied as a symbolism of and change motor for the everyday-real-life urban choreographies of the city. Katja Heitmann's video installation *For iTernity*, Lotte van den Berg's theatre piece *Wasteland* and Erik Kaiel's dance piece *Murikamification* develop communal choreographies, dystopian choreographies, empathetic choreographies and playing choreographies in respect, which are all choreographies of resistance. The three makers set (intentionally or unintentionally) choreographies that resist the problematic socio-spatial patterns of the hypermodern city.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Chapter 1: The City's Choreography	
1.1 The space as a social construction	4
1.2 Space-Making	5
1.3 The Body in Space – Urban Choreography	6
1.4 The Political Potential of the Aesthetic – Participation	8
Chapter 2: Choreographies of (Spatial) Resistance	10
2.1 <i>For iTernity</i> by Katja Heitmann	11
2.1.1 Playing as Purpose	14
2.1.2 A Meaningful Community of Social Bodies	15
2.1.3 Conclusion: Communal Choreographies in a Cloud of Light	16
2.2 <i>Wasteland</i> by Lotte van den Berg	17
2.2.1 Wasteland as Terrain Vague	19
2.2.2 Wasteland as Urban Dystopia	20
2.2.3 Real Body – Dystopian Body	21
2.2.4 Conclusion: Dystopian Choreographies	23
2.3 <i>Murikamification</i> by Erik Kaiel	24
2.3.1 A Visceral Experience of Space	27
2.3.2 Kinaesthetic Empathy with the “other”	29
2.3.3 Conclusion: Choreographing Kinaesthetic Empathy	31
Conclusion	32
Bibliography	34

Introduction

The city is the stage where the plays of our everyday life take place. The constructed spaces of the city, the buildings, the streets, the transport, the parks, is where we live, move and socialize in day by day. Our society is shaped in this setting. The life of the citizens is structured according to specific social patterns, behaviours and rules that bloom in the urban space. The city is a physical and geographical space as well as a social condition. From the industrial to the post-industrial and in turn to the modern, to finally end up in the hypermodern city of today, the material urban space, the way the people move in it, the reason they dwell it and the social interactions encouraged in it have been changing, creating new cultures and new geographies. The material and the social world of a city are intertwined in a reciprocal interaction of one generating and being generated by the other.

By accepting such a statement, one can't consider the space as a rigid milieu, pre-existing and imposed to the people anymore. The citizens have the power to rewrite the urban space, transforming it according to their needs. However, this statement contains abstract notions that rise questions: By who are social and spatial patterns created and imposed? Are citizens practicing this power in response? What is the connection between the space and society? Why is it crucial for the space to be experienced as a process instead of a product? And most importantly, what are possible strategies to challenge the problematic socio-spatial patterns that constitute the hypermodern, capitalist western city? Each section of the Thesis investigates one of these questions, searching for possible answers and solutions, in the world of performing arts, suggesting choreography as a lens to study and then a tool to influence the public urban space. As a result, the research question raised is: What strategies for space-making can be found in choreographic performances in the public urban space?

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

In approach to the research question, qualitative research methods are used combining literary research from the fields of sociology, urban studies, performance studies and choreography with the analysis of three choreographic performances as case studies. The texts were mostly accessed in print via the Utrecht University Library, or as digital online sources via WorldCat. Two of the performances have been experienced live while the third one has been accessed through video. The official websites of the makers are secondary sources for the description of the pieces.

The first chapter introduces the elementary theoretical framework of the research. In the first section the space is studied as a social construction following the theories of Guy Debord and Michel De Certeau, two of the most important theorists on the subject of every day urban space and life of the twentieth century. A short but enlightening historical trajectory is drawn, enabling a deeper understanding of where the intention for studying the space as such, comes from. Henri Lefebvre, probably the most influential sociologist on the topics of the right to the city and the social space, couldn't be missing from this theoretical analysis. The three authors' analyses are chosen because although divergent, they agree on three elements: the focus on the body, the critic on the capitalist city and the understanding of space as a social process rather than a product.

Debord's participation in the Situationist International organisation is of major importance for the research because its brief study drives the analysis to the assumption that art and art interventions can be used as tools to challenge the problematic capitalist norms that govern the public urban space. The second section continues with contemporary performance and theatre scholars who

adopt a similar position. Immanuel Schipper and Jekaterina Lavrinec build their definitions of the concept of space-making (transforming the identity, perception and use of the urban space) in relation to art projects that use the city as their stage.

The third section arrives to the theoretical destination of the first chapter, introducing Gabriele Klein's concept of *Urban Choreography* (2017) as the main tool to study the public urban space. In order to arrive at Klein's theoretical approach, at first, the research places the body in the centre of this investigation considering it the main medium to perceive and in turn generate space. "Each living body is space and has its space; it produces itself in space and also it produces that space" (Lefebvre 1991: 170). Here the space is considered as a bodily practice. The movement of the bodies in relation to the materials and their interactions is a complex real-life choreography staged in the city. The choreography as a system that arranges and organises these bodies is called Urban Choreography. Urban Choreography will be studied in combination with the aesthetic choreography of the performances analysed in the second chapter.

The topic of the present research has been investigated frequently by many artists and scholars. Although most of these researches refer to cases such as protests, activist actions and community work art projects. The fourth section analyses the reasons why the Thesis follows a different avenue, avoiding such cases.

The originality of the Thesis in comparison to similar approaches, emerges from the cases chosen to be studied because of the focus on the political potential of the aesthetic and because of the variety of the performance styles which address choreography, spectatorship and site specificity in unconventional ways.

The analyses of the video installation *For iTernity* by Katja Heitman (2015), the physical theatre performance *Wasteland* by Lotte van den Berg (2008) and the dance performance *Murikamification* by Erik Kaiel (2008) constitute the second chapter which is the case studies. Each piece is analysed with the support of a newly introduced theoretical concept as a sub-theme, in order to detect the specific problematic socio-spatial phenomena that challenges and reverses. *For iTernity* is analysed next to Sigmund Bauman's (2000) theory on the hypermodern city focusing on the creation of a meaningful community. Patrick Barron's description of *terrain vague* (2013) and Gordon MacLeod and Kevin War's definition of *Urban Dystopia* (2002) explain the character of *Wasteland's* site and the phenomena of socio-spatial segregation and otherness that the piece comments on. The influence that *Murikamification's* dance have in the audience in a spatial, physical and sensorial level is studied through the two theoretical concepts of *(Syn)aesthetics* by Josephine Mackon (2009) and *Kinaesthetic Empathy* by Susan Leigh Foster (2011).

Chapter 1: The city's choreography

1.1 The space as a social construction

It doesn't happen very often to step out of the city's busy flow to observe its movement and pay attention to its "habits", but it's when one drifts away and looks out of the window or takes a walk with no particular objective or destination that the space takes form in her mind, it is then that the space is conceived. In these moments one notices the characteristics of the urban space; the buildings, the streets, the way people move in and around them, the social interactions, sounds and rhythms and in patterns that keep on coming up. This process of drifting in the city is suggested as a practice for transformation and active participation in many theories that study the space in relation to social behaviour.

Such a walk was first introduced as the *Dérive* (drifting), by Guy Debord, a founding member of the Situationist International. Situationist International was an organization formed in 1957 which brought together artists, intellectuals and political theorists that were critical on the capitalist mode of production and the way it affected all aspects of life, "leading the everyday practices in the city to social alienation and commodity fetishism" (Plant 1992). According to Debord, "the *Derive* involves a playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects and is thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll" (Debord 1956). In a *derive* one drops his relations, work and leisure activities during a certain period, and let himself be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. The aim of it is to awake the awareness of how space is used through the physical practice of walking, encouraging an embodied engagement.

Some years after the SI, the French scholar Michel De Certeau addresses the phenomenon of the unconscious reproduction of the pre-existed socio-spatial patterns in the capitalist city.

"The practitioners of the city [...] walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms [...]. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness" (De Certeau 1988: 93).

De Certeau, close to the Situationists' view, detected the symptom of the "blind walkers", the citizens who passively follow the current spatial instructions and noted the importance of stepping out of that state to take an active role in using the space and reading its social structures, through the bodily practice of walking. De Certeau describes the urban space as a text written by its users – or better, practitioners. However, these poems composed by bodies in space are usually made unconsciously, passively.

The two approaches support the realisation of space as something made, and the awareness of it. The urban space is often perceived and experienced as a fixed condition where people don't have the power to act upon, only to react to it in a limited way. This limitation is posed by the materials of the

space but mostly by the rules, rules that arrange these materials and the bodies in space. As Jekaterina Lavrinec, a researcher, participatory artist & educator in Urban Studies, who often derives theoretical support from De Certeau and the SI notes “the way these bodies move, interact and behave, which form the social configurations of the city, and its spatial configurations are interconnected (Lavrinec 2013).

Starting from this realisation, the Situationists wanted to create situations in the urban space through art interventions where urban planning, architecture and the citizens would interact, dwelling the space in their own terms, activating the notion of community and the awareness of space. Art intervention was thought as a strategy to encourage citizens to actively participate in the reorganization of the urban space, change its use and rewrite its socio-political patterns. The Situationist International suggested that “we must develop a systematic intervention based on the complex factors of two components in perpetual interaction: the material environment of life and the behaviours which that environment gives rise to and which radically transform it” (Debord 1957).

The practices of the situationists have been criticised repeatedly. As Bennet explains in his analysis on the SI (1992), they have been judged as self-contradictory for being unsuccessful to abandon artistic ideologies and because of their theoretical suggestions not being applicable. Specifically, Debord’s Derive has been aptly criticised for excluding the female experience in the public urban space, adopting an entirely male perspective (Bennet 1992: 76-79). Similarly, De Certeau’s analysis is gender biased and not self-questioned properly. These reflections on the SI, the Derive and De Certeau’s writings are right. However, these theories are still relevant to the discussion on space as a social construction and its relation to art for many reasons, at least in a historical level. The Derive addresses the physical engagement necessary to explore and deconstruct the public urban space. The space is recognised as a bodily practice. Secondly, the SI considered art as the central category of change. These approaches have been the theoretical ancestor of various contemporary artistic projects and movements that intervene in the public urban space. Although criticised by their contemporaries, they have set a solid theoretical base on the critic of the capitalist city which constitutes the starting point of various theories mentioned in this research.

The theoretical base established by prior space theorists lead to the idea that in situations when the established social norms are challenged, and the citizens are invited to new social interactions, the experience of the physical and social space will also change. Then the identity of the space becomes a fluid element in the hands of its users. This is a process of space-making.

1. 2 Space making

The urban space is a process of the social and material world influencing each other. This process should be constantly in motion, changing and developing by the citizens. This process of changing the urban landscape is defined as space-making. The designation of space-making within an art and performance studies context has been frequent. There are numerous writers that address strategies for space-making through art interventions. The following examples of two definitions by performance scholars will help the reader to approximate the notion of space-making.

The dramaturge and theatre scholar Imanuel Schipper notes that the urban space “is not produced by city planners and architects alone, but by all the people using those spaces and places and the ways in which they use them” (2014: 24). Schipper in his article “City as Performance” (2014) looks at

how different art interventions contribute in activating the production of the space by its users instead of the unconscious, or 'blind', consumption of it. He argues that art interventions in the public urban space use a form of aesthetic power as means to trigger the imagination and experience of space, meaning the way citizens think about the city and how they live in it (21).

The article suggests specifically the expansion of public space to change the urban landscape, studying interventions that challenge the private sphere. Here the problematic structures of the capitalist city come down to one: "the actual physical space of what could be public and is therefore not determined by neoliberal, profit-oriented dictums, is reducing" (24). For Schipper, space-making refers to the public sphere and regaining space for it. Art interventions create some kind of a temporary community by bringing audiences together that share the same experience; watching their city used differently. The citizens by being in the audience contribute to this activity as they become its most important component.

Jekaterina Lavrinec on the other hand, focuses on the act of forming the identity of different spaces, through the three actions of: "actualization of bodily experience, shared emotional experience, and emerging new solidarities (temporal communities of citizens, who are involved in active reinterpretation of public space)" (2011: 70). The last component of Lavrinec's definition of space-making agrees with Schipper, placing the creation of community in the centre of the transformation of the public urban space into a social place¹.

For her, art interventions and actions in the public urban space are the ideal medium to achieve the making of space as they interrupt the daily routine scenarios, suggesting new alternative ones. As a result, they "build a new experience of a place" (71). The interruption of the order of everyday practices in the city is an important action for space-making.

Inspired by the authors mentioned above, the research defines space-making as a process of a) redefining space through the creation of community, b) becoming aware of the use of the space as a bodily practice (analysed below) and c) breaking with its everyday routine by challenging the socio-spatial patterns of the city.

1.3 The body in space – Urban Choreography

In order to find different strategies coming from art interventions for space-making, it would be beneficial to first address the socio-spatial patterns to be questioned and challenged. For that purpose, an analytical tool is needed through which to study the patterns of the city and connect it with art interventions. The concept of *Urban Choreography*, introduced by the sociologist, dance theorist and professor Gabriele Klein, will be used as a lens to look closely at the social and material order that governs the city.

If one looks out of the window from distance when drifting away, they will see bodies. Bodies marking different routes in the city moving around its materials and the other bodies. This composition that may seem as a chaotic dance performance made by many different structures that coexist simultaneously, can be seen as the choreography of the city. The arrangement of materials,

¹ Space becomes places after human action practiced in it. "Whatever space and time mean, place and occasion mean more. For space in the image of man is place, and time in the image of man is occasion" (Lawson in Hunter 2018: 284). In the city, an abstract space with no use can be transformed into place, which is a dwelled space, a meaningful space.

people and the rules that exist among them are mentioned as space syntax (Lefebvre), urban scenography (Lavrinec) and flow among others. The thesis chooses to use the term choreography. The motivation for such a choice is the focus of this term being the movement and the body.

All the theories mentioned above and more, talk about the body as the carrier of space. For the French geographer, philosopher, and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who is cited by every other author that explores the space as a sociological phenomenon, because of his important contribution on the topic with his *Production of Space* (1991), “it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived and produced” (162). In his book, the attention to the space as a bodily experience and practice is significant.

The professor Reena Tiwari cites repeatedly Lefebvre stretching the importance of the body as an essential factor of making and experiencing space. She emphasizes that an understanding of the lived space is only possible by an analysis of the body involved in everyday practices. All space is occupied by bodies but also bodies are occupied by space (Tiwari 2010: 24), in other words they are interrelated notions in an infinite circle of bodies creating space and space in turn, forming the movement and behaviour of these bodies. In that way, “the city lives on the body” (van Erven 2007:34). Addressing the everyday practices in the urban space as bodily practices is a valid conclusion, affirming the second factor of space-making mentioned in the previous chapter.

The word choreography shows structure, a specific set of rhythms, movements and relations implied on the bodies in space. The city routine is choreographed bodies and materials in space. Or choreographed spaces. These choreographies are shaped by political and social currents. Following this line of connected theories, the resume is that the space is a socio-political construction made by materials, bodies and the interaction between them. The terms that these elements coexist in can be read as the choreographic order of the urban space.

The question that will help this syllogism develop further is: “By which choreographic order is urban space characterized” (Klein 2017: 137)? What is the current *Urban Choreography*?

The choreography of the city, or the *Urban Choreography* is the bodily interactions in the urban space and the reading of different urban places as choreographed environments. As Gabriele Klein defines the term in her article “Urban Choreographies: Artistic Interventions and the Politics of Urban Space”, “these materialized choreographies regulate the movement flow and behaviour of people and thus also patterns of social perception and experience” (2017:141). The urban space is formed by urban planning, architecture and transport infrastructure which are responsible for establishing the interactions and behaviours of the users and thus their movement. Urban choreography looks at the movement order of the urban space in relation to social norms and rules manifested in how space is arranged.

“The concept of urban choreography follows a critical theory of modernity, which characterizes social and cultural patterns of society, especially in its bodily-sensual practices” (142). The urban choreography of the modern, or, now, the hypermodern city², is a choreography of socio-spatial segregation, isolation, inequalities, marginalisation, and otherness. Otherness – a theme frequently addressed here – is about “instituted differences within a dominant corporate spatial (social) practice that places social justice and inequalities as a low priority against consumption and safety” (Wright

² A common term to describe the cities of today is “postmodern”. Nonetheless, the Thesis adopts the view that the city of today is a hyper-modern city since “hypermodern presumes that the current production of new urban spaces is not a postmodern break with the past but rather an extension and intensification of prior policies of modernism” (Smith, Marcuse and Wacquant in Wright 2000:25)

2000: 25). The present Thesis argues that by creating temporary aesthetic choreographies in the form of site-specific performances, the current urban choreography can be changed.

1.4 The political potential of the aesthetic – participation

Choreography is a term connected usually with dance, spectacle and art. On the contrary, Urban Choreography studies real bodies and real spaces as socio-political phenomena. The debate about the separation between the aesthetic quality of dance, theatre, in general artistic activities and political actions, or the separation between everyday life and theatre, is an old and complicated one. At this point it is necessary to dive deeper into the definition of the aesthetic and the political, when talking about choreography and art interventions. Another big theme that emerges in relation is participation. Speaking of artistic actions aiming at political and social change, it is crucial to specify the type of performances that the present research refers to and the reasons for excluding the rest.

“Choreographies do not exist separate from social norms and structures, but instead perform them” (Klein 2013: 198).

The theory of Urban Choreography departs from an older term introduced by Andrew Hewitt in 2015: *Social Choreography*. Hewitt suggests that choreography can be viewed in social and political terms, discerning choreographic mechanisms in the domain of “non-dance” social practices (Cvejić and Vujanović 2013: 7). Social Choreography refers to choreography as an aesthetic reflection of, and an aesthetic model for, ideology. Hewitt’s claim is that the aesthetic is inseparable from the political and the social. This double nature of the political and aesthetic coexisting is often used as a lens to study actions that can be considered both as art interventions and protests.

In her older article “The (Micro-) Politics of Social Choreography: Aesthetic and Political Strategies of Protest and Participation” (2013), Klein uses Hewitt’s view on the aesthetic when trying to map Social Choreography in the urban space through examples of different art projects and interventions. Surprisingly, some examples given neglect the aesthetic factor. This phenomenon is frequent in analyses on ART interventions in the urban space. These examples are artistic actions that have, to some degree, as their axis community and participatory practices and aim at concrete and socially “useful” artistic outcomes.

On the one hand. Klein doesn’t argue in favour of participation and inclusion. She rather highlights the problematic neo-liberal approach to art having “to render a contribution to cultural education, while being aware that this is only possible at the price of the dissolution of the boundaries of art itself” (Klein 2013: 206). On the other hand, she brings up the examples of protests and community projects, which make her theoretical approach more complicated to support.

Klein’s risky attempt serves as a counterexample for the Thesis, excluding community projects and performances made by the public through participatory work.

Another element to be avoided is the disturbing character of cases like artistic activist actions and protests, mentioned often in similar analyses. Instead of demonstrations and flash mobs, what Gabriele Klein calls political choreographies, aesthetic choreography is suggested as a change motor, equally but not similarly active to the namely political ones.

Choreographic performances³ don't disturb the inscribed structures of the panoptic urban space, but they are in conflict with them as imagined spaces. They challenge the users' idea of the choreographed spaces of the city, fighting their socio-political patterns through a different technique.

Having said that, Klein's later article on Urban Choreography (2017) will be used as an example to follow, due to the specific case study she uses then, which is LIGNA's *Radioballet* (2003). This performance brings the aesthetic factor back to the centre of her analysis. Likewise the present research, she studies community as a bodily practice and addresses choreographic tools within art interventions.

As a result, the case studies that follow look at performances whose analysis highlight the aesthetic factor in the conversation of socio-spatial change. In addition, these performances come up with choreographies that undermine, change and rewrite the current choreographic order of the public urban space without disturbing it.

Participation is a key concept appearing, which needs further analysis due to the fact that the research's cases include a degree of participation as active spectatorship, although it has been already argued that participatory projects will be avoided.

On the one hand, "participation rehumanises a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production" (Debord cited in Bishop 2012: 11), working often as an antidote to the passive consumption in the commercial capitalist world of the spectacle and the neoliberal individualism. On the other hand, like any other activity of resistance, it is liable to being part of the very order it fights, another mechanism for neoliberal efficiency. The tendency towards participatory and community art projects has in some cases undermined the value of art per se, supposing that art exists in social vacuum and that it doesn't have any social function. Consequently, it has instrumentalized art valuing its social efficiency. It has also dichotomised the political and the aesthetic placing them in opposite sides. This dichotomy leads to negation of the aesthetic experience triflingly considered as a socially "useless" or elitist activity, as if art, especially the one that wishes to resist the neoliberal oppression and production mania, should have a "use".

In a research that aims to address strategies for challenging the neoliberal tendencies, one must be very careful when addressing terms like efficiency, creativity and community as "these terms no longer occupy a subversive, anti- authoritarian force, but have become a cornerstone of post-industrial economic policy" (Bishop 2012: 14).

³ After this analysis, the term used to describe the works studied, changes. The term "intervention" has served until now to map the practices and theories of performances designed for and realised at the public urban space aiming at socio-spatial change, directly or indirectly (Schipper, Situationists, Klein, Lavrinec). However, it has a complicated connotation with participation and political action to be avoided. "Site-specific" sounds a more relevant and updated term, often used in the dance world, although it's too general concerning the spatial context. I will continue my investigation addressing the works of my case study as choreographic performances (meaning pre-programmed, professional performances that employ aesthetic choreography) in the public urban space.

Chapter 2: Choreographies of (Spatial) Resistance

The next step for the research is to analyse specific choreographic performances in the public urban space, in an attempt to detect strategies for space-making through aesthetic choreography, investigating the assumption that the latter is able to resist and transform the urban choreography of the space it takes place which is the city. The previous chapter introduced the theoretical pillars where this assumption is based on and constructed a solid theoretical framework for the upcoming discussion.

The strategies detected being the intention of the artist, is not always the case. The performances' analyses don't aim to decode the intention of the makers in relation to socio-spatial patterns. It rather wishes to detect conscious or unconscious choices that may stimulate an alternative socio-spatial experience by studying their possible results.

The three pieces are made by Dutch artists, performed in the Netherlands and abroad and made between 2008 and 2015. The three of them are presented at different sites in the public urban space and although they address choreography in different ways, they all use the body and movement as the main medium for their spatial exploration.

Another element that all three performances share is the spectatorship address which is unconventional in one or another way. Different levels of participation are involved, producing the effect of active engagement for the audience.

Due to the previous extensive argumentation on participation, Klein's categorization of different types of participation, will be used, to clarify the character of each performance. Klein distinguishes three categories of participation in artistic projects: a) implicit forms of participation, via a conceptual involvement of the audience, b) participation as taking part, where the audience is active in shaping the structure of the piece in the moment and c) participation as involvement, where participants are taking up an active and co-producing role in the process (Klein 2013: 201). Each case study falls within one of these three participation conditions which enable a deeper understanding of the different techniques and dramaturgical choices made by the makers.

2.1 For iTernity by Katja Heitmann



Figure 1

Jekaterina Lavrinec detects the emergence of new solidarities through the formation of temporal communities by citizens “who are involved in active reinterpretation of public space” (2011: 70) as a strategy for place-making. Similarly, this chapter focuses on the reinforcement of gathering and interaction between strangers as a way to transform the public urban space into social place. The Dutch choreographer Katja Heitmann creates a space for gathering, inviting the passers-by in a park to interact with each other at a physical and social level while participating at her video installation *For iTernity*. Through this interaction and with the input of technology, the maker stimulates new experiences in the public urban space.

The piece belongs to the second participation category introduced by Klein: “participation as taking part, where the audience is active in shaping the structure of the piece in the moment” (2013: 201). This type of participation creates “a community, which is open, unassuming in its identity and continuously redefining its ‘we’” (201).

The present case study is chosen because of the particular way it addresses and practices choreography in space and due to its interactive element that encourages the participants to become choreographers, performers and makers of space and community. The temporal community created is a meaningful one as it brings together different people and because it is open to everyone.

In order to detect the strategies that prompt the creation of such community, the present case study unfolds in relation to Zygmunt Bauman's analysis on modernity in his book *Liquid Modernity* (2000). Bauman looks at how different urban spaces are experienced in the hypermodern city and investigates the problematic characteristics of the communities created in the urban space. The application of Bauman's theory results in the finding of two strategies for space-making: Playing as an alternative purpose for dwelling space and the creation of meaningful communities through physical interaction.

Description of the piece:

Leiden's Rembrandtpark is illuminated by big scale projections forming a circle. The buildings, trees and concrete in and around the square have an amorphous and unfocused figure projected on them, enfolding them in "a cloud of lights" (Katja Heitmann official website). The passers-by are offered big plastic rectangle screens that capture the projections around the park which enables them to see the image of the video, clear and focused (Figure 2). The image can be seen from either side of the screen. The video shows a dancer moving, wearing a plastic mask, point shoes and a leotard. The pre-recorded video's location is the same park during the day. The virtual dancer's background is exactly the same landscape as one sees in reality and even the same angle.



Figure 2:

The choreography is inspired by the famous ballet solo *The Dying Swan*, accompanied by an alienating, "strange yet soothing" (Katja Heitmann official website) version of Mozart's Requiem, sung by an autotuned Californian YouTube-blogger who tells about her demise on Wikipedia. The

themes that Heitmann wishes to explore through the reference on the classic dance solo in combination with the use of projections and the screens, are immortality in the digital era and data movement. The screens catch data “floating around in the cloud” (Katja Heitmann official website) and they also depict the “eternal dying swan”, a non-physical dancer that dances everywhere, forever in a choreography of lights and images.

The screen-holders, the participants, move around trying to capture different parts of the projection, chasing the movements of the virtual dancer. They collaborate with each other, arranging their screens in space in such a way so that they can capture bigger patches of the projection. Usually, only the face of the dancer fits in a single screen. Three or four screens put together may be able to capture her whole body (figure 3). The participants frame the dancer with their screens composing what is seen at every moment, deciding the angle, the size, the body part, the duration and the direction of the reflected projection, composing together in the moment, as if they were an improvisation group on stage. This composition process is a social and an amusing one. The participants talk to each other, they laugh, they propose different techniques to catch the virtual dancer and they share their individual interpretations of the narrative. A circle of sharing and making is generated, interacting with the space, collectively.

There are also people around observing from the outside. This condition transforms the installation into a live performance. The performers are the participants and their audience are the rest of the passers-by. This relationship is augmented by the fact that the projection is visible from both sides of the screen, making the participants to both compose for themselves but also to demonstrate to their audience the selected frames. One could say that the virtual dancer, the lights of the projection and the space are also performers and co-creators in this improvised – choreographed in the moment – performance.



Figure 3

2.1.1 Playing as purpose

For iTernity's interactive element emerges from the fun and creative task of chasing and catching the projected dancer with the screens. This task can be experienced as a game. While the participants are trying to achieve their goal, they negotiate with each other, they find different techniques to catch the image efficiently, they giggle, they run around, and they collaborate.

This game is clear, simple and has no restrictions. The participants' interaction and involvement doesn't require any copying, preparing or learning material. In that sense, there is the necessary amount of direction (the task of following the projection) for the participants to feel safe, in control and comfortable, knowing what they are doing. Simultaneously, there is freedom for them to be creative, enter a state of improvisational composition and collaborate with each other spontaneously and organically. This game is a creative process because it encourages exploration and at the same time it is a task as there is a goal to be achieved.

Going to the park or stopping one's route for playing a game, doesn't happen often in the adult life. Heitmann's installation offers the opportunity to spend time in the park playing for as long as one wishes. The situation of participating through carrying out a task, through playing, transforms the urban choreography of the park and the way it is used by shifting the purpose for being in it. The latter statement can be supported, seeking theoretical support in Bauman's description on the experience of time, space and purpose in the hypermodern city (2000: 97-104).

The park is often used as a short cut to get to somewhere else, or as a place to sit and rest from the tiring flow of the city, but only for a short period of time. On the one hand, the park belongs to the least accelerated, production driven and alienating places in a city. On the other, this breath away from stress that the park offers, is a short one. Parks are parenthetical spaces, little oasis or according to Bauman's description, as "being elsewhere" (98). They don't deny the rules of govern quotidianity, they are short breaks to make them bearable. Sitting in a park with no particular purpose could be considered as a spatial practice that opposes the city's flow. Nonetheless, it doesn't remove the awareness of this action being the opposite of the usual "productive" activities, an action of spending time. The park being this parenthesis, doesn't make the "spending" not felt as "wasting", much easier. The separation of the city's user in sitters and the ones that "have some business" (Bauman 2000: 97) is still present, even if it's temporarily invisible. In other words, even if one chooses to sit in a park and do nothing for a bit, she still experiences it as lack of purpose, instead of the valid purpose being the sitting.

The situation of carrying out a task, experienced as a game, especially as a collaborative and non-competitive one, may encourage the understanding of being in a park as spent or used instead of wasted time, offering a different purpose from the usual production/consumption one which governs the city's movement. The installation makes up rules in any direction with no limitations and can create worlds from scratch, whatever worlds it wishes to. The participants are merged to this world where time and space are experienced differently. In *For iTernity* one feels welcome to either watch, interact, be active, be passive, be creative, be shy, dance around or do nothing. If someone sets the actions of doing nothing, socializing or watching, as tasks or as the rules of a game, then they may be experienced as justified ones. By inventing new tasks to be carried out in the actual public urban space, the installation transforms its pre-decided socio-spatial patterns and changes the use of it.

2.1.2 A meaningful community of social bodies.

In the task of screen catching the body becomes the vehicle. In the piece, the space is perceived through the senses and is made by the movements and decisions of the body, triggering a physical experience of space and the social interactions happening in it. Body and space awareness occur in completely different terms than in everyday life, stimulated by the distorted melody, the projections and the virtual presence. Rembrandtpark's temporary choreography is composed by many bodies and other materials interacting with each other, breathing in and forming out space in spontaneous collaboration. This bodily practice in space is closely connected to the creation of community and the shift from the individual spatial experience to a collective one. This physical-spatial game encourages strangers to meet.

The meeting of strangers is a frequent phenomenon in the everyday city life in the public space, although occurring in very different terms in comparison with the encounters in *For iTernity*. In the city, the body is rarely involved in accidental meetings between strangers as they are often unwanted and thus resolved in seconds.

According to Bauman, a strangers' meeting in the public urban space is a meaningless and superficial one, an unavoidable situation which is "trying at least to avoid the dealings" (Bauman 2000:105). It happens on the spot, it has no past and most probably no future and it avoids any delay. There is no time for errors, second chances or learning (95). After that meeting strangers are not less strangers to each other than before. The reason for being in hurry and distant towards the others is the main purpose of being in the public urban space which is consumption or labour.

On the contrary, Heitmann offers the alternative purpose of playing which allows strangers to proceed to a more meaningful and durational encounter, making the "dealings", a kind of negotiation, the main ingredient of the game. The participants are not forced to interact with each other simply for the sake of it, they rather have a task to perform. Sooner or later they discover they can succeed in and enjoy it more, by collaborating and by being physically active. They may have nothing in common as the reason that brings them in the park, be it watching the performance or walking in the park, doesn't unite them in advance. Nevertheless, the existence of a temporary meaningful community is achieved. These very different people and bodies become open to physical and social interaction.

The process in which strangers come together in the piece abstains from the *myth of community solidarity* (Bauman 2000: 100), a myth blowing in a purified community, free from risk, difference and negotiation. This type of superficial community can be found in a place like a shopping mall. There, the myth of community solidarity creates a mistaken perception and experience of community; The shoppers/consumers seek the comforting feeling of belonging in a community with no differences that can offer "we are all alike" feelings and the "no need to negotiate since we are all of the same" assumption (Bauman 2000: 99). In a homogeneous community, "the other", someone different that may interrupt the sameness of the group, is unwanted. As a result, in order to transform the condition of heterogeneity from a source of fear into a desirable situation, difference is a crucial factor for space-making as Lefebvre highlights

The homogeneity promoted by abstract spaces is contested in the possible development of differentiated spaces, new spaces of difference; and the threat to establish city power is putting an end to those localizations which shatter integrity of the individual body, the social body, the corpus of human needs, and the corpus of knowledge (Lefebvre in Wright 2000: 51).

In *For iTernity* there are no points in common within the group, rather than coincidental ones. The group is changing constantly, “redefining its ‘we’”. It is also unpredictable and full of risk (not to be confused with danger) of a real strangers’ encounter. As a result, this temporary community is not exclusive, it doesn’t have the need to conserve its purity or homogeneity because there is none, so there is no need to point out or fear “the other”. Here, difference is the exciting element that contributes to the task of creation and exploration, not a threat. Through this task, moments of togetherness can be experienced within this fluid community.

In the world of the piece the most important medium of the experience of togetherness is the body, as explained before. The creation of a fluid community through physical interaction challenges the everyday use of the park and the way strangers interact with each other in it. Going back to the shopping centre as an example of a public urban place where the main purpose is consumption and labour instead of social interaction, the body is experienced as an obstacle. If one observes the urban choreography of a shopping centre, she will notice bodies moving around each other in a safe distance, ignoring their own and the others’ physicality because it seems to get in the way of their destination.

In some urban public spaces that adopt the false idea of the homogeneous community, the body as a medium is neglected. The park differs from a shopping centre in many ways, nonetheless, it is governed by similar unwritten rules when it comes to strangers’ interaction, purpose and the body. Hence, the community created in Renbarktpark during the installation, which uses the body as its medium for interacting with space and the others, is a meaningful and a rare one, celebrating difference. Because of these characteristics it becomes the perfect platform for collective space-making in this specific scenario.

As Klein explains “By means of the bodily - sensual (in other words, aesthetic practices), it is feasible to question the possibility of and the ways in which strangers from different cultures and backgrounds, with different lifestyles and beliefs, can communicate” (2017: 138). The latter statement confirms the connection between the body as a receptor and generator of social space and the potential of eliminating otherness as a threat. Katja Heitmann manages to encourage the passers-by to surpass the social restrictions that keep them away from each other and experience the public urban space as a place of meaningful encounter. The installation creates a temporary heterogeneous community, where difference is welcome, and which is practiced through the body.

2.1.3 Conclusion: Communal choreographies in a cloud of light

The participants’ choreography is one of resistance as it is social, collective, heterogenic, physical, durational and open. It resists the rules that govern the quotidian urban public space and it challenges the pre-existed urban choreography of the park. The creation of space is achieved by the participants who actively transform the use and experience of the park; They are aesthetically choreographing instead of being urbanely choreographed. They are making a new space through re-choreographing themselves in it. Driven by the projection’s game, they establish new rules in the space based on their needs and desires in the moment. Momentary but meaningful togetherness enforces the process of space-making. Togetherness becomes physical as it blooms through the aesthetic experience and movements of the participants.

2.2 *Wasteland* by Lotte van den Berg



Figure 4

For the second case study, *Wasteland (Braakland)* by Dakar company (Guido Kleene), directed by Lotte van den Berg, leads the research to a completely different spatial context than the one referred to so far; From the quiet and temporarily social park, where alternative imaginings of space are encouraged, this case study takes the reader to the abandoned industrial peripheries of the city, an urban wasteland where a cruel reality is shown. This analysis changes the focus of the discussion on a meaningful community, to examine a completely distinct type of uncanny community and its socio-spatial characteristics. The site-specific performance is placed in an abandoned space in the urban peripheries, showing the human activities taking place there, belonging to the city's margins. The piece brings the spectators before a cruel reality represented by a cruelly realistic fiction. Although there is no audience participation, the performance forces them to step out of their everyday practices in the city to find themselves in an unfamiliar place. Lotte van den Berg takes the spectators to the edge of the city, to see for once, what is happening "out there". This case study addresses spectatorship, site-specificity and choreography in a divergent manner, adding to the research the necessary variety of spatial contexts explored.

Description of the piece:

Two kilometres away from Kaai Theater, between “a dumping ground and a factory, between the noise of a motorway and the scarce twittering of birds” (Kaai Theatre Website), van den Berg places nine characters in an urban wasteland, who are wondering around totally surrendered to the laws of life and death, interacting without any purpose. Their actions are violent, brutal and animalistic, free from hope and emotional involvement. They are in an open and abandoned space. Rocks, mud and erratic plants are its permanent dwellers. They are in a dangerous, hostile and lonely space, ideal to host their descending humanity. The audience is at the same space, fifty metres away, observing the characters from distance. There are no other sounds rather than the environment’s ones: cars, birds, the wind and the characters’ bodies against the ground. There is a cold breeze and an unfamiliar abstract smell in the air.

A man is walking from far, getting closer, in slow pace, in no hurry. He sits down on the soil. After a while, another man becomes visible, walking around with more urgency than the first one. He is holding a shovel. He looks around. Then he falls on the ground. He is dead. That makes four other characters to gather around him. They undress him, they put on his clothes and shoes and they leave him on the ground indifferently. A man is chasing a woman on the back. He pushes her on the ground and rapes her. He leaves, and she goes to clean herself to the closest moss (figure 5). A man hits another woman with a bat three times (Figure 4). A man is trying to light up a fire. When the fire is on, a woman throughs water on it. In the end, all characters end up inside a big hole in the earth, a grave, some voluntarily and some others forced or already dead. The last image finds a woman laying on the ground naked, crawling to the hole. The wasteland is empty again.

Any displacement, proximity among the characters, any action is dangerous and uncomfortable. The spectator expects the worse coming out of casual encounters, casually violent. Every displacement and action have a real duration. The emptiness of the space, the time that takes to go from one spot to the other, the naked skin rubbing against the rocky ground, are real.



Figure 5

Strategies

2.2.1 Wasteland as *Terrain Vague*

“Attention: this is an open-air performance; please wear suitable clothing! The walk there and back is part of the duration of the performance. We can on request provide transport” (Kaai Theater Official Website).

The symbolic space of the world of the performance, the physical space where the performance takes place and the space that the audience takes up, coincide. All these spaces are the abandoned industrial wasteland. The walk from the theatre to the site and back is part of the performance as it is announced in advance, making the spatial experience a real one. The audience crosses the borders of the recognisable city on foot, passing from the familiar everyday urban space to a hostile “out there”, where one would never go as, most probably, there would be no reason to. Immediately there is a separation between two different spaces and the feelings they provoke; the “in here” and the “out there”, inside being the city with its main purposes like consumption, production, transit, and the outside being a less defined space with no clear purpose of existence or use. While when being “inside” one feels more secure in knowing what the space expects from her, “being outside” evokes a dystopian world characterized by exposure, isolation and vulnerability” (Judd in MacLeod and Ward 2002: 160). Even before the performance starts, the spectators may feel vulnerable and exposed in the open, vast and abandoned wasteland and perhaps for the first time they may become aware of this spatial separation and its origins.

Patrick Barron in his introductory chapter of the book *At the Edge of the Pale* (2013) categorises such derelict industrial sites as *terrain vagues*. *Terrain Vagues* are abandoned spaces in the margins of the cities that are left to their own devices, sometimes empty from human presence and action or other times used very differently than their initial designated use, by excluded individuals or groups searching for temporary shelter (Barron 2013).

According to Barron, *terrain vagues*’ alienated and unfamiliar environment may inspire reflection on the way the everyday urban space is used, by being its alter ego, a space with totally different characteristics, existing almost in a vacuum. “Residual and ambiguous, [terrain vagues] allow us to examine ourselves and our everyday surroundings from outside the frenetic circuits of work, commerce, and transit” (Barron 2013: 1). Here there is a dichotomy observed between the two spaces, as mentioned before, the inside and outside; the city and its peripheral *terrain vagues*. The city’s activities seem to have abandoned the peripheries, leaving behind a “useless” wasteland. There, the ruins of the declining capitalism reflect a rotten part of the problematic system. The latter is the point where Barron detects the potential social values of *terrain vagues*. He cites Tim Edensor who notes that ruins and other forms of leftover space can be useful reminders of the “depredations wrought by a destructive capitalism”, whose allegorical presence “can cause us to question the normative ways of organizing the city and urban life” (9).

At this point one comes across with the many paradoxes found in such a space. On the one hand, in *Wasteland* one may feel paralysed while dwelling the threatening emptiness and loneliness. On the other hand, the body in that space has the freedom to move in unusual ways as there are no prohibitions and no set behaviours assigned to it. This wasteland is free from vigilance and regulation, free from the usual experience of public and private space and free from socio-spatial norms. These are the freedoms that the characters make use of which turn into terrible interactions. These very freedoms make the space so hostile and unfamiliar, bringing its visitors before the

realisation of their own, unquestionable until then, perception of space. Martegani cited in Barron describes this sense of uncanny freedom as “having the option of not existing, of disappearing, of creating one's own void without having to put up with other people's” (10).

2.2.2 Wasteland as Urban Dystopia

The latter quote describes perfectly the performance's characters' state of being. This grotesque purpose of dwelling the space is what transforms *Wasteland's* wasteland into an Urban Dystopia.

One may give in to the temptation to define this “unearthly” (Kaai Theater Official Website) space as a *non-place* because of its uncanniness, lack of history and lack of meaning. “Non-places begin with unrootedness [.....] when human beings don't recognise themselves in it” (Augé 2010: 228). Although non-places are to be found usually in the heart of the hypermodern city, a wasteland could be characterised as such too in some cases. A wasteland is the outcast space of the city however, it preserves some identical elements with it, composing a paradoxical space which hypermodernity has abandoned but where its trails are still visible.

The quality of non-places could be found in the abandoned industrial site too however, Van den Berg transforms that space into a place, temporarily, by placing a human community in it. A space becomes place after human action. The most “unearthly” in this place is the human action; the characters wonder around with no purpose and no big emotions nor familiar relationships. Walking, raping, eating and dying are their everyday activities, in a hopeless and animalistic circle of life, death and the in between decadence. These human (inter)actions, although anarchic, random, distant and at the same time dangerous, form behavioural patterns which define the rules that govern *Wasteland's* group: the rules of violence, abuse and surrender. The space seems to be the ideal land for such a symbiosis as it already provokes behaviours belonging to the margins, being left out of the world. On the contrary of the performance's situation, a wasteland has no (coherent) human action in it, neither a community, nor even human presence at all. In the present case, there is human presence and although difficult to recognise or make sense of, there is a system of behaviours that connect the human bodies. For the two hours of the performance the wasteland is hosting a dystopia.

As a result, the concept of urban dystopia serves better the study of *Wasteland* and the spatial phenomenon it is based on, which is the separation between the city and its peripheries, because of the special way it is addressed through human action.

Gordon MacLeod and Kevin Ward define the dichotomy of the “inside” and “outside” spaces - the city and the peripheries - in terms of the *Urban Utopias* and *Dystopias*. The way they analyse the phenomenon of dystopia in their article “Spaces of Utopia and Dystopia: Landscaping the Contemporary City” (2002), may shed light to the dystopian world of the performance and the identity of *Wasteland's* temporary population.

MacLeod and Ward attribute the existence of urban dystopias to social diversity considered a threat in the hypermodern city. The hypermodern utopia wants everyone being the same, avoiding any expression of otherness, making “the other” one's biggest fear. Diversity is not sealed by protecting the rights of the most disadvantaged. Some are seen as “unsuitable or even dangerous” (Flusty 2001: 659). Similarly to Bauman's homogeneous community of the hypermodern city, an urban utopia pushes out of view “the other” in the name of safety, in order to secure its sameness and purity. People whose “class and cultural positions diverge from the developers and their target markets”

(Flusty: 2001: 659), minorities, the unemployed and the poor are destined for large scale displacements, driven to social and spatial margins.

Hypermodernity is the theatre where the biggest social inequalities are staged, leading to social isolation, homelessness, the enclaving of privileged communities, increased instrumentalization and incarceration of the underprivileged. "The heavily marketed new urban spaces are not about citizenship and popular sovereignty but are, principally, about consumption and constructed affect free of fear of the 'other' (Wright 2000: 25). "The other", including highways in disrepair, charred and abandoned tenements, the scourge of drugs, the wandering homeless and deteriorating transport networks, "all are erased and ignored in the idealized city tableaux set up before the spectator's eyes and presented as an entertaining show" (Boyer 1992: 191). A dystopia is the socio-spatial aftereffect of that severance.

Wasteland's temporary population may reflect metaphorically identities of "the others", being thrown out of the city's utopias to this dystopia in the abandoned periphery. The fictional dystopia created by van den Berg may be an abstract parable of any real socio-spatial dystopia which is the result of exclusion and marginalisation.

Van den Berg's words in an interview trigger such an assumption concerning the intention of the artist and the readings of the performance. She mentions the importance of the spatial distance between the audience and the performers as a comment on the current political situation that imposes the separation of "us" and "them" and the sense of helplessness that is generated for both parts by this irrevocable separation:

"When watching *Wasteland*, the audience is unable to influence what they are witnessing, which I think is a situation we are constantly in. Like you say, you can watch the news but because of the distance we cannot do anything. We know about Syria; we know our computers and phones are made by people who do not have good working conditions. We know so much but what do we do with this information, how can we turn this into useful action which has some potential? We are in this state of helplessness constantly" (van den Berg 2016).

The artist puts "the others" on the other side, minorities, vulnerable populations or underprivileged people, a symbolism that may refer to all the above. The news show what happens "out there" maintaining the distance, narrating the story subjectively, from "the inside". In *Wasteland* there is no story telling. The spectators are in the first line, witnessing the cruel events and sharing physically the same space with the news' protagonists. Simultaneously, the audience is placed in the necessary distance for them to feel the helplessness that the artist uses to point out the current political state. The dystopia that is usually mediated on the screen, on the daily news, in a performative way, this time is taking place right in front of the spectators, in the most realistic manner. The most powerful element of van den Berg's work is the paradox of the fictional world of the performance offering a real experience in real space and time in contrast with the events in the real world, staged at the screens, absolving the spectators from any experience and involvement.

2.2.3 Real body – dystopian body

Coming back to the transformation of the wasteland into a dystopia through human presence and actions, the Dutch maker achieves the latter by placing bodies in space, the physicality of which is prominent as there is no text, sound, nor possibility for communication through facial expressions

because of the distance. Choreography is the only medium of communication among the characters and the audience. One can observe a structured and precise choreography composed by the pedestrian movements of walking, running, lying, sitting, standing. Less often, some recognisable gestures create short stories of abusive encounter. Every movement is simple and big enough to be seen from distance, although never exaggerated or “performed”.

When witnessing for the first time a naked body lying on the rocky ground of the vast industrial wasteland, a very unusual bodily practice in that space, one wonders: Where do these bodies come from? Why do they interact with space and the other bodies in this way? How does the body feel being exposed in the industrial wasteland? Van den Berg doesn't answer these questions in the piece. Instead, she invites the spectators to imagine where these bodies come from and why they choose this wasteland as their temporary home, by presenting the dystopian bodily practices in it and by focusing on the position of the spectators towards them.

What are these dystopian practices? What elements make them dystopian? In this final section of the present case study, choreography will be used as a lens to study the space and meaning of *Wasteland's* dystopia, bringing forth some more questions: How does the artist achieve to stage *dystopian choreographies* and what do these do?

The first element that turns the structure of the piece into a dystopian choreography is the physicality embodied by the characters. The characters' bodies are vulnerable, exposed to the dangers coming from the outdoor hostile environment and from the other bodies occupying the same space. Death is embodied in all its expressions: biological death, death of hope, death of emotions. However, despite the dystopian turn of all events, the bodies don't seem paralysed nor desperate. The bodies of the characters are open to receive all these types of death. They don't seem to be searching for something better. Any friendly encounter, any soft touch, any familiar and rational bodily interaction seems to be a short coincident. The contact with dirt, sharp objects and infected water happens with an awkwardly casual ease because these bodies don't care anymore. Nothings is dramatic, exaggerated nor overacted and as a result there is a very real, non-theatrical image projected towards the audience.

The second element that contributes to establish the dystopian character of the choreography is the distance among the bodies. The characters are spread in the vast wasteland being very distant from one another in the beginning, which reinforces the feeling of loneliness and individualism. As the performance goes on, the spectators notice that every time the characters get closer to each other something bad happens. The long distance among the bodies is alienating but quickly enough one gets used to it. Then, proximity seems even more dangerous and upsetting. When a character approaches another character, the spectators get tense because they expect the worst to happen.

The long distances that the bodies have to traverse require a certain duration. As nothing is sugar-coated, time neither. Everything happens in real time exposing every millimetre of boredom and decadence. The long duration and slow, real-time pace of the choreography that the spectators observe from distance, manifests the resignational state of the bodies given into their faith. No theatre device of time manipulation is used, removing any trace of the fictional.

In these dystopian choreographies, the absurd events of killing with such an ease fit with the assumptions that the spectators may have, concerning the space, in a realistic way. Even if they are part of a performance, the rapes and murders probably fit the spectators' imaginings of the abandoned wasteland. Before visiting this wasteland as performance audience, they may have expected such cruelties to be the real urban choreographic currents of that site. However, this time they are present. They are witnessing with their own eyes these imaginings becoming (almost)

reality. The distance that privileges the city users to only imagine wasteland's reality is minimized to fifty metres. The city users are co-present with the bodies that kill and get killed. The choreography staged in front of their eyes is dangerously real.

Wasteland's elements that generate a realistic experience, in combination with the audience's distance from the events make the choreography a source of an oppositional feeling of simultaneous empathy and repulsion. On the one hand, the real experience of witnessing another breathing body being dragged on the ground, not very far away, stimulates empathy, experienced through the body, a kinaesthetic empathy⁴. On the other hand, as a result of the (spatial and symbolic) separation between the performers and the audience, as well as the alienated and irrational "otherness" that characterises *Wasteland's* group, the audience may respond with aversion. This in between state of (physical) empathy, living from close the pain of the other at the same space, and concurrently of alienation and separation, may reproduce the same frustration one feels when watching the news and not being able neither to react to nor identify with the people in them, like the artist describes in the interview.

2.2.4 Conclusion: Dystopian choreographies

In a space like a terrain vague, there could be endless possible scenarios of how bodies occupy that space and what human interactions it triggers. The Dutch maker explores one of them, probably the darkest and most pessimistic one. As a result, one may wonder what the reason for such a political and dramaturgical choice is. Earlier in this analysis, terrain vague is described as a space that may inspire reflection and questioning as it "unsettles the familiar terrain of cultural landscapes, designed spaces, and the organizational logic of modernity [...] posing an ideological as well as practical challenge for the utilitarian impetus of capitalist urbanization" (Gandy 2013: 1311). In addition, a wasteland offers some freedom, lacking restrictions and recognisable socio-spatial patterns which usually govern the hypermodern city. Many artists, scholars and social workers propose to benefit from this freedom for the revitalisation of marginalised spaces, using them temporarily as spaces of creation for artists, places of encounter for various communities or even as gardens and greenfields.

On the contrary, van den Berg takes advantage of the wasteland's freedom and reflective power in a completely different way. The maker, instead of revitalising and changing the space, chooses to set up dystopian choreographies that underline the political decadence and frustration of our times, hinted in the use of the space. Rather than offering alternative good imaginings of how to occupy and reclaim the space, van den Berg forces reflection through the experience of the real. The distance, duration and physical abuse that compose the dystopian choreography of *Wasteland*, are responsible for the uncanny effect, making it threateningly unfamiliar and disturbingly familiar at the same time. The artist decides to stage a dystopia, reminding the audience that "looking, thinking, and representing the familiar in an unfamiliar way can also be a kind of radical cultural and political praxis" (Gandy 2013: 1311).

⁴ In the next chapter the concept of kinaesthetic empathy will be explained in detail. Kinaesthetic empathy describes the phenomenon when one's senses and body are activated by watching someone else performing a movement.

2.3 *Murikamification* by Erik Kaiel



Figure 6

This is a dance performance in a city centre, executed by professional dancers that move around and interact with pavements, fences, balconies and traffic lights. The choreographer Erik Kaiel creates a world of running, playing and socializing, where pure physicality creates urban narratives.

Similarly to the previous cases, the audience is an important component. There is no direct participation, although the spectators are physically engaged the whole time. The piece belongs to Klein's first category of participation; The conceptual participation.

The only medium used in *Murikamification* is dance, making it different from the previous cases that address choreography in more unusual and unconventional ways. While *For iTernity's* choreography is to be found either recorded on the screen or set by the participants' bodies when screen catching, and while *Wasteland's* choreography is composed by the actors' walking and lying bodies, *Murikamification* is made by virtuosic movements and dance choreography executed by professional dancers. So far, the reader had the chance to follow an analysis on choreographies of bodies and materials arranged in space, exploring the moving body. At this final stage, it is the turn for the dancing body, dance being here, probably, the most expected type of it.

Description of the piece:

Murikamification takes the audience to a highly physical and surreal journey through their own city. The dancers set short dancing scenes on the streets, balconies, narrow alleys and parks and the audience follows them in site after site, walking or running along with them. The dancing partners of the performers are the materials found on the streets. Sometimes they even dare to dance with some audience members and passers-by. The movement vocabulary results from the meeting of the three contemporary dance techniques of Floorwork, Contact Improvisation and Partnering work along with acrobatics.



Figure 7

The choreographer Erik Kaiel sets a precise and at the same time living and breathing piece as a game which allows the dancers and spectators to move in the city as if they were children again. The piece is alive in the sense that it's never the same as it adapts to the different site and city it is performed at and it stays open to improvisational interaction with unpredictable happenings on the street. Through these choreographies Kaiel transforms the ordinary flow of the street into a dream world; "Using the magical, surrealistic stories of Haruki Murakami (JP) as a source of inspiration, Kaiel creates an intensely physical and absurd performance trail [...] His performers evoke dream worlds, layering them upon ordinary urban space" (Arch8 Official Website).

Sometimes the dancers climb on walls, passing above the spectators' heads (figure 7). Some others, they lead the audience group inside a basketball court where they perform a trio of lifting, flipping over and orbiting around each other (figure 8). Finally, they invite the audience to step over them when lying on the ground, search them in the city when they are quickly gone to their next site and dance with them in a soft contact dance for some seconds.



Figure 8

Strategies:

2.3.1 A visceral experience of space

The movement vocabulary in *Murikamification* consists of virtuosic, athletic movements that require the skills of professional dancers. In that sense, the movements of the dancers are far from the everyday movements the spectators are used to do and observe in the public urban space. The piece presents abstract, highly physical and technical dance which doesn't portray any narrative, at a first glance. Nonetheless, there are some elements that may exhort the spectators to connect the dance with the everyday bodily practices in space and recognise some aspects of it in their own physical experiences.

Although virtuosic and spectacular, the movements of the dancers are functional. The choreography doesn't include any unnecessary, decorative movement; One never sees an arm floating or a back arching without the practical reason of catching another body or reaching a wall, to be supported on. The dancers lift each other (figure 6), they climb fences, they run, they push each other. While they execute these tasks, no extra aesthetic layer is applied. They go from A to B in a casual and practical way. They are constantly resolving physical challenges. Their gaze and their touch are functional too, instead of theatrical.

After getting familiar with such a highly physical and abstract movement material, one may be more open to perceive and interpret meaning through pure physicality. The simple situation of a body lifting another body already carries a complex set of meanings and offers a wide range of possible interpretations. As a result, for the maker, it's not necessary to add extra layers of information, in terms of, say, the past, the gender, the psyche, the desires of the characters. In point of fact, the performers can't be called "characters" in a traditional sense, they are rather dancing bodies, just dancing bodies.

The fact that there is no obvious narrative, doesn't stop the movement from generating meaning coming from physical interactions. Erik Keil plays with the potential of movement and human contact to move emotionally and physically the spectators and to stimulate a process of interpretation. This process is a rather visceral instead of a cognitive one. As they don't have a traditional story line or characters to relate to that could have helped understanding the work intellectually, they may allow for a subconscious and instinctive interpretation to happen, through the senses.

The senses here are seen as the body which becomes the main conduit through which to experience the performance and make sense of it. The body of the dancer as the signifier and the body of the spectator as the receiver and translator of the sign are connected. This connection is made possible because of the capacity of the body to relate to the movement of another. When one sees a body moving, not only her mind but most importantly, her body recognises the movement and the sensation of it. The muscles, ligaments and neurons imagine the movement seen performed. "The viewer watching a dance, is literally dancing along" (Machon 2009: 54).

In order to understand in depth the notion of the visceral audience experience through the senses on the one hand and its dependence on the physical empathy that dance stimulates on the other, two main theoretical concepts will be used: the analysis of *(syn)aesthetics* by Josephine Machon and the theory of *kinaesthetic empathy* by Susan Leigh Foster. The aim of this theoretical combination is to address the strategies used in *Murikamification* for re-choreographing the public urban space,

investigating the assumption that the audience after being physically and sensorially engaged, may be able to experience and use the space alternatively. This assumption is partly based on Kaiel's vision concerning the potential influence of Murikamification on the city dwellers: "[...] in the public space, the audience is physically alerted. They walk around, they place themselves in relation to the performers. We are all in the same level managing space, composing. The world is in motion before the audience arrives" (Kaiel 2018).

Zooming in the different possible impacts of the performance, the two theoretical concepts support the finding of two effects respectively: It is argued that a) the (syn)aesthetic audience experience triggered by the dance encourages the spectators to interpret the site of the dance differently through a visceral process and b) the kinaesthetic empathy created among spectators and dancers eliminates the phenomenon of otherness.

The English, contemporary performance scholar and practitioner Josephine Machon presents in detail the components of a visceral audience experience and highlights the importance of the physical engagement of the spectators in the process of sense-making in performance. In her book *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance* (2009), she introduces the concept of the (syn)aesthetic audience experience, according to which, all the senses of the spectator are stimulated, and the body is transformed into an active receptor. The spectator goes through a sensorial experience in order to interpret the work, instead of following a logical, cognitive process. In her attempt to stress the significance of the perception through the senses over the sensible intellectual reading, Machon plays with the double meaning of the word *sense*: "This fusing of sense (semantic 'meaning making') with sense (feeling, both sensation and emotion) establishes a double-edged rendering of making-sense/sense-making and foregrounds its fused somatic/semantic nature" (Machon 2009: 14).

For the perception of Murikamification's abstract dance material, the somatic factor added to the semantic interpretation process is essential, because of the lack of narrative and due to the high physicality activated by the dancers.

In this process, both the body and the mind are active in interpreting the material which exists vividly, as an experience, in the mental and corporeal memory ever after. Machon asserts that the sensorial experience is recorded on the body's memory. Based on this memory, one is able to watch the movement of another body and recall its own experience, empathizing physically and sensation wise with the mover. This capacity to embody the movements of someone else leads to a physical sharing.

"The performing body has the ability to communicate via the shared human capacity for a corporeal memory, the traces and memories of corporeal experience in the perceiver's body – which incorporates the fused capability of the human body; emotional, physical, sensational, physiological and so on. In this way the human body actuates 'the shareability of sentience' via embodied experience whereby 'having a body means having sentience and the capacity to sense the sentience of others'" (Scarry in Machon 2009: 23).

One can imagine how it feels like to climb a fence even if she hasn't done so, because of the corporeal memory and imagination of the body that has experienced similar situations. When a spectator watches a very difficult and dangerous choreography, her muscles contract and her posture becomes tense. She is empathizing with the effort of the dancing body.

Murikamification engages the spectators physically, in two ways: Firstly, by making them move around the dancers in the city and secondly, by the visceral interpretation through the senses

triggered when watching the intense physicality of the dancers. The spectators run on the streets, pass through narrow alleys, jump above the dancers' bodies in pavements and in the end, they orbit around the dance and the spaces it occupies. At the same time, they watch the performers climbing fences and walls, which are movements that their corporeal memory may be able to recall, or at least the sensation of it, creating a visceral and shared experience. The dancers manage to take the spectators to a dance duet, a shared physical exploration in the city.

Through the capacity of dance for stimulating making-sense/sense-making and the awakening of corporeal memory, in *Murikamification*, the space is also experienced in a similar process, in contrast to how it is used ordinarily. The dance located in the public urban space invites its dwellers to connect with it in a more visceral, primordial level. Subsequently, they can reflect upon it without repeating the cognitive spatial interpretations that are formed as a habit based on the social and political narratives that the individual has established in her intellectual mind which are the most rehearsed reactions to space in the everyday life.

The spectators not only experience but also interpret the main components of the piece which are the dance and the space, through their active bodies. They see the dancers as part of the space and they realise they are too. The dancers transform the space, they move it around, they make it theirs and they take the spectators with them in this corporeal-spatial crafting. The visceral reading of space through the (syn)aesthetic effect is achieved: the spectators feel *with* (=syn) all the senses and they sense along *with* the dancers, in the public urban space.

2.3.2 Kinaesthetic empathy with “the other”

The concept of the shared physical/sensorial experience is not introduced by Machon for the first time. The American choreographer and performance scholar Susan Leigh Foster investigates the contagious quality of movement and presents the historical track of the three terms of Kinaesthesia, Empathy and Choreography in her book *Choreographing Empathy: Kinaesthesia in Performance* (2011). She sews them together in an attempt to term a similar phenomenon to the one described by Machon focusing on “the shareability of sentience” or as she names it, *kinaesthetic empathy*. Foster wishes to investigate how the notion of kinaesthetic empathy has been studied by different scholars and scientists over the centuries, revealing the different political and social power forces that has affected the study. In the end she connects it with choreography searching for possible answers to questions like “how knowledge is acquired; how desire is configured; on what bases otherness is identified; and how power circulates through and between bodies as they make claims to feel what others are feeling” (Foster 2011: 175). Inspired by these questions, the present section will focus on the phenomenon of otherness and on how the choreography that creates a bodily bond among the dancers, the spectators and the space in *Murikamification*, may affect their experience of power circulations in the space.

Covering a broad historical spectrum, Foster arrives to the late twentieth and twenty first century when the most influential scientific discovery which changes the understanding of bodily empathy and memory, is the mirror neurons. These neurons fire when one performs an action and they also fire when one sees the action being performed. Thus, as one watches someone else moving, motor circuits in the brain are activated that do not necessarily result in visible movement but nonetheless rehearse that movement (Foster 2008: 54). Mirror neurons are considered responsible for the capacity of humans to learn through observing the others and to develop socially, to gain cognitive

and emotional skills in order to recognise, understand and react to the other individuals' actions appropriately (Galleze 2001: 33).

The perception of the world through the body and the senses, is deeply linked to cognitive learning and intellectual processes like (self) consciousness, reflection and comprehension. Based on this mechanism humans build their identity mentally and corporeally, in relation to the others and relate to them, copying social patterns. As a result, comprehension, empathy, understanding, and bonding have a physical dimension too, not referring to physical contact but to the actual experience of these processes that come into existence through and in the individual bodies. This conclusion may help addressing what dance does to people, dancers or spectators, and in what way it is social.

“Now at the beginning of the twenty-first century neurophysiologists are likewise claiming an intrinsic connectivity between dancer and viewer based on the discovery of mirror neurons” (Foster 2011: 1). Dance as a physical activity, but most importantly, a metaphoric, symbolic, artistic and performative act whose aim is to communicate and transmit, may be one of the utmost experiences of the junction between cognitive and sensorial processes of self and social sensitization. As Foster argues, it is possible to set up a choreography of kinaesthetic empathy, a pre-designed set of movements, stimuli and meanings which will sensitize the spectator and encourage her to empathize with the other through a visceral process. To “choreograph empathy” thus entails the construction and cultivation of a specific physicality whose kinaesthetic experience “guides our perception of and connection to what another is feeling” (Foster 2011: 2).

In the urban public space, the main stage of hypermodernity's social and political inequalities, the kinaesthetic empathy – the ability to feel “what another is feeling”- could be a significant factor for socio-spatial change. In the urban space governed by the neoliberal and capitalistic order, “the other” is seen as the opposite of the self, the one to be repelled from or contrastingly defined by. Otherness leads to segregation, limitations in accessibility, ghettoization, marginalisation and other socio-spatial diseases, some addressed already in this research, which star in the contemporary city. As analysed in the previous case studies, sameness is the desirable condition, making the accepting and embracing of diversity impossible. What happens then, if on the other side of the empathetic exchange between bodies that dance triggers, is this “other”? What happens if the kinaesthetic empathy is stimulated in the public urban space among strangers? Could performances like Murikamification open space for sharing and would it influence the use of the space?

Based on the theoretical line drawn in this case study along with the experience of the performance, the hypothetical⁵ answer to these questions is positive. The dancers are in the same space and level with the spectators, both being choreographed by and in the urban public space. ‘The world is in motion before the audience arrives’, or even before the dancers start moving because the stage here is the pre-existing public urban space. The spectators are invited to recall their childish spatial behaviour of exploring, being active and social. This alerted and open – child-like – behaviour allows for the kinaesthetic awareness and kinaesthetic empathy to happen among strangers. At the same time, they become aware of the space. The space is experienced as a bodily practice and the city becomes a platform for sharing and “dancing along” with the others and “the others”. As Machon concludes, “sentient and sensuous shareability enables an embodied knowledge of other(ed) identities and experiences. As a result, embodied knowledge can engage in a unique and actively political way with the marginal and transgressive” (Machon 2009: 23).

⁵ It is hypothetical because it results from a total of theoretical and empirical evidences the link of which is made instinctively and because of the task of measuring a performance's impact being almost impossible in this case. However, not unfounded.

2.3.3 Conclusion: Choreographing kinaesthetic empathy

Erik Kaiel choreographs dancers in the city transforming the streets into a play-ground. The audience is merged into the physical world of the performance being an active component of this alternative experience of movement, space and sharing. On the one hand, the piece triggers a (syn)aesthetic experience while all the senses of the spectators are alerted in interpreting meaning coming from the dance and its space through a visceral/bodily perception. They explore the otherwise recognisable space, anew, moving in it in different ways. On the other hand, they see the dancers moving on it and they empathise kinaesthetically, sensing, to a degree, what the dancers sense. Simultaneously, the spectators allow the body to become a channel for socialization. The senses are open to perceive and interpret space and the kinaesthetic empathy connects the different bodies, making them forget for a moment what separates them.

This experience connects the physical and the mental, the cognitive and the sensorial, the self and the other. It is visceral and as a result it stays recorded in the corporeal and the cognitive memory. The spectators may recall the experience every time they dwell the urban public space, which will never be the same for them. Erik Kaiel has managed to “create a warm space. Nobody wants to go back to its old existence because of that. Even after that performance, the space has changed for the people because of what happened during the performance which stays forever (Kaiel 2018). The initial assumption that the audience after being physically and sensorially engaged, may be able to experience and use the space alternatively resonates *Murikamification*'s reality.

Conclusion:

All three performances create a temporal community which dwells the public urban space in unconventional and creative ways, in contrast to the daily experience of space. They achieve so by stimulating a physical audience engagement through the spatial practices presented as bodily practices. The bodies of the performers as well as the spectators become available to create and interpret meaning and simultaneously, they make and perceive space. The process of space-making is successful as the performances take care of all three aspects of a) redefining space through the creation of community, b) becoming aware of the use of the space as a bodily practice and c) breaking with its everyday routine by challenging the socio-spatial patterns of the city.

The invitation for a meaningful community is important in order to shake down the most problematic socio-spatial pattern of the hypermodern city which is the phenomenon of otherness. Without being a condition or analytical tool for the research from the beginning, after the case studies, it proves to be a crucial concept in order to address choreographic strategies for space-making and by extension to realise what needs to be changed in the public urban space.

In response to the problem of otherness and other hypermodern symptoms, the performances develop (intentionally or unintentionally), communal choreographies, dystopian choreographies, empathetic choreographies and playing choreographies. These are choreographies of resistance.

The resistance transgresses the performances' temporary character due to the new imaginings they inspire in relation to the site. Lefebvre called these imaginings the imagined space which co-exists with the physical space and the social space (1991: 18).

Many space theorists, some of them already cited in the present research (Hunter, Soja, Pinder, Wright, Tiwari), stretch the importance of the concept of the imagined space, considering it the gate to arrive to the transformation of the other two spaces, the social and the physical. "It is in acting in those imagined possibilities which can produce the differentiated spaces that can nurture counter-imaginaries" (Wright 2000: 51). Opening up the possibilities for the imagined space is the answer to the question of how these ephemeral activities and temporal communities can affect the use of the space in the long run. These choreographies of resistance are made possible because the "physicality of the body tends to mediate the imagined and the social space" (Tiwari 2010: 29).

Theatre makers, artists and most importantly choreographers could apply the strategies found for the creation of imaginative, physically practiced and heterogeneous communities through their performances. "By placing dancers in city settings [...] possibilities open up for exploring the ways in which cities and bodies can mutually define and construct each other" (Briginshaw 2001:56). Choreographies of resistance, similar to Katja Heitmann's, Erik Kael's and Lotte van den Berg's works, could challenge the symptoms of otherness, segregation, individualism and efficiency obsession that govern the spaces in the city.

Nonetheless, even if choreographers apply such strategies, there is a possibility of failing to challenge the hypermodern spatial order and to become part of it. This possibility is detected not in relation to the content of the performances studied, but, in terms of the artistic practice as labour and the political and economical implications that the artistic work on the streets brings along. The Thesis addresses the specific scene of site-specific work in the Netherlands. Although, in other European countries, for example the southern ones, where funding an independent performance is much more

complicated, the streets have become the stage that embraces the excluded artists from the institutions and theatres.

In this context, the site-specific work transforms from an innovative artistic vision to a practice influenced by neoliberal exploitation, flexibility and care for the self. From this point of view, the suggestion of choreographic performances in the public urban space as a tool to criticise and change the hypermodern, neoliberal order of the city, is challenged. Following the present Thesis and inspired by personal experience, further research and reflection could be made in this other geographical and cultural direction, studying the artist at work and comparing different realities asking: How does the body work in the public urban space? What kind of political, social, economical and jurist obstacles is exposed to? Are there structures that protect it? How does the independent public urban site-specific work change the cultural sector? What kind of choreography emerges out of a dancing body that lands on concrete and rolls on gravel?

Until then, the Thesis invites the readers to pay attention to the urban choreography of their city, to notice how their body responds to the urban environment and to simply observe the movement of the bodies that surround them⁶.

15.096 Words

⁶ The readers are invited to download this audio track with simple choreographic tasks that guide the listener to a physical urban exploration: <https://soundcloud.com/iro-vasalou/tracks>. This task has been the starting point of an artistic experiment with professional and non-professional dancers, taking the present research to practice.

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Figures:

Cover’s photo: *Pájaro Mosca*. Festival Trayectos 2018. Photo by Mariana Torres.
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Figure 1: Katja Heitmann, *For iTernity*. Rembrandtpark 30 May 2019. By Iro Vasalou 2019

Figure 2: Katja Heitmann, *For iTernity*. Rembrandtpark 30 May 2019. By Iro Vasalou 2019

Figure 3: Katja Heitmann, *For iTernity*. Katja Heitmann Official Website. By Robert Koekkoek
<http://www.katjaheitmann.com/work/for-iterernity/>

Figure 4: Lotte van den Berg. *Wasteland*. Lotte van den Berg Official Website
http://www.lottevandenbergnu/english/events/album/?page=werk-foto&evt_id=33

Figure 5: Lotte van den Berg. *Wasteland*. Lotte van den Berg Official Website
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Figure 6: Erik Kael. *Murikamification*. Arch8 Official Website <http://www.arch8.nl/en/projects/>

Figure 7: Erik Kael. *Murikamification*. Arch8 Official Website <http://www.arch8.nl/en/projects/>

Figure 8: Erik Kael. *Murikamification*. Arch8 Official Website <http://www.arch8.nl/en/projects/>

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