

Walking and Dancing - Locomotion in the example of "mnemonic nonstop"

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How can urban experience be expressed in choreography? This question stood at the beginning of the process of the "mnemonic nonstop", a collaborative project of Martin Nachbar and me. In various rehearsal phases, distributed over the course of one year, we visited five European cities, first Tel Aviv, then Brussels, Berlin, Zagreb, and, eventually, Graz.

In each city, we explored urban space by doing *dérives*, a French Situationists' technique, which we had adapted for our work. The *dérive's* concept suggests an alternative form of moving through urban space: instead of getting from A to B on the shortest or fastest way possible, one follows the traces of another movement concept. It is either based on an algorithm (e.g. 'first right - second right'), or on manipulated maps (e.g. 'use an anatomical chart as city map'). Choreographed movement on stage functions similarly to a *dérive*: If dance was about efficiency, that is to say, about the economical covering of the distance between a certain point A and a certain point B, the movement vocabulary of a dance piece would consist of little more than walking. Instead, the performer enjoys a non-efficient movement in the *dérive*, as well as in a dance: namely, connecting the two points in space in an indirect way.

The political potential of the *dérive* lies in overcoming the obligation to be efficient. Anti-globalization activists and urban guerrillas such as the Dutch group *socialfiction.org* use collective *dérives* in order to lay a net of new paths in the urban space, which is largely organized along capitalist interests. Thus, it seems to have become possible to undermine the neo-liberal vigour (French *dériver* = to get off course, to deviate, or to derive). One of *socialfiction.org's* slogans is: "The *dérive* is the opposite of the navigation system in your fucking new Mercedes!" If dancing choreography is a similarly 'inefficient' way of locomotion as walking a *dérive*, the following question arises: How could dance and choreography be used to reorganize spaces with their hierarchies?

Maps measure cities according to supposedly objective geographical criteria. But in fact, they represent the urban spaces only according to the cartographer's ideas: Just as West-Berlin appeared as a white area without any contours on the maps of the GDR, the street names in the maps of Brussels alternate depending on whether one looks at the map of a Flemish or of a Walloon editor. Thus, the process of cartography comes to equal the reorganization of the written-upon space. We have initiated this kind of process in the development of the "mnemonic nonstop" by superposing different maps. When one copies the map of the city one is in, onto a transparent foil, this foil can be put onto another map and hidden structures appear on them just like secret ink appears when exposed to its developer agent. When, for example, laying a transparent map of Brussels onto the map of the Congolese capital Kinshasa, the superposed cities seem to plainly deconstruct the Belgian colonial past.

This revelation effect works by associating two systems; in the ancient Greek mnemonic technique, the orators placed the core issues of their speeches in specific places in a certain space. While speaking, they imagined walking from place to place – Thus, these paths represent the orator's process of thoughts. On the other hand, the patterns that evolve by superposing foils in a "mnemonic nonstop" simulate urban experiences: The choreography reorganizes space and becomes itself a map that describes this very re-writing.