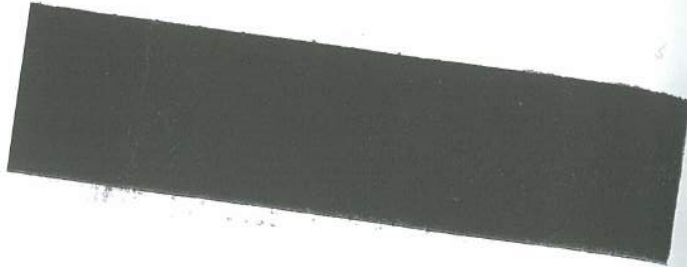


PUBLIC MOVEMENT



THE ART OF PRE-ENACTMENT

The popular genre of re-enactments, for which Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreave* came to stand as the canonical example, has recently experienced its temporal inversion: the *pre-enactment*. In most cases, for instance in the performances of the German collectives Interrobang or Hofmann&Lindholm, the point of pre-enactments is to critically extrapolate from contemporary developments an image of our social or political future. This meaning of pre-enactment is based on the concept invented by role playing communities that do

not seek to revive events of the historical past (like historical battles), but rather, to immerse themselves into science fiction scenarios. However, a second and, perhaps, more interesting use of the term pre-enactment occurred recently to describe the activities of the Israeli performance collective Public Movement.

Public Movement was founded in 2006 by the dancer and choreographer Dana Yahalomi and the visual artist Omer Krieger, and is led by Yahalomi alone since 2011. The name of the group refers, on the one hand, to

ritualised public choreographies of the nation state, i.e. to state choreographies. On the other hand, it refers to the political or protest movements of a potential counter-public, i.e. to protest choreographies. It is of importance for the group that these choreographies will always be inscribed into the bodily knowledge of individuals. As Yahalomi puts it: 'Politics exists within our bodies, as an often dormant knowledge'.

This is perhaps most obvious in *Positions* (2009), one of their most emblematic performances. A rope is stretched across a public square. A member of Public Movement announces a series of binaries: 'left'/'right', 'Israel'/'Palestine', etc., and the participants are supposed to 'take a side', that is, to move, according to their choice, to one or the other side of the rope. This setting may appear simplistic, but one should not be deceived by the exposure of simplicity, as from the setting a political form of 'complexity' becomes visible: the complexity of intersecting lines of antagonism. While politics is always premised on an underlying logics of simplification ('which side are you on?'), it will rarely remain a simple affair as one is rarely confronted, in political reality, with a choice between two options only. As in the case of the Public Movement performance, it turns out that one's own positions (in the plural) are far from consistent. One may be constantly forced to move back and forth between the two sides of the rope. Some of those who have previ-

ously moved onto the side of 'the left', for instance, might subsequently move onto the side of Israel, while others move onto the side of Palestine. They will thus have to divide, shift positions, and confront the possibility of a more intertwined, contorted and contradictory political terrain. Hence, what regularly occurs in this performance on the side of the participants is a moment of hesitation. Rarely a point is reached where it is already clear which side one is on; it depends on the particular situation, of one's readiness to expose one's political views publically, of experiencing or espousing group pressure, and of accepting a particular political interpellation in the first place rather than ignoring it.

As in the case of *Positions*, many Public Movement performances are geared towards awakening the dormant political knowledge of bodies, and some of these performances have been explicitly described by Dana Yahalomi as 'pre-enactments'. They are not meant to imitate an actual event in the past, but engage in the paradoxical enterprise of re-staging an event that has not yet occurred, for instance, a state ritual of a future state, or a memorial ritual. In this spirit, Public Movement have staged rituals — for instance in the Warsaw ghetto — that are meant to be repeated year by year. These proto-rituals are, as it were, *pre-formed* by Public Movement with a view to them becoming rituals (provided that something is only a ritual if it is repeated).



Public Movement, *Cross Section. Positions* (2014)

In their performance *Also Thus!* of 2009, for instance, the group staged a fictitious state ritual in front of the fascist architecture of the Berlin Olympic Stadium. This ritual, which included mock violence and a car crash, ended with an Israeli folk dance and the audience joining in. In this Public Movement performance, as in some others, a quasi-Zionist occupation takes place in an anti-semitic historical setting, a sort of over-writing which, nevertheless, leaves visible the background. In some cases, these *pre-formances*, as one may call them, can assume a disruptive rather than a ceremonial quality. In these cases, what is announced by the intervention is not a future ritual, but a future protest: a future moment of antagonisation.

In their 2006 guerrilla performance *How long is now?*, the group blocked crossroads in Israeli cities by performing a circle dance to a popular Israeli song from the 1970s, *Od lo ahavti dai* (the same song that ended the *Also Thus!* ritual). After having blocked traffic for two and a half minutes, the dancers disappear and traffic can continue circulating. In order to understand this intervention, one has to know that Israeli folkdance does not in the slightest emerge from an age-old tradition. Round dances, of course, belong to the cultural heritage of the Mediterranean region and south east Europe. Yet, modern Israeli folkdance has its roots in the 1940s when the Israelis were forced to create a new, synthetic culture for heterogeneous groups of

immigrants. For this purpose Israeli folkdance did not only integrate choreographic elements of highly diverse traditions, it also became very much part of popular music production. Every new Israeli pop hit was immediately outfitted with a choreography which was then passed on in dancing classes. Among these hundreds of songs, *Od lo ahavti dai*, with the relatively simple choreography by Yankele Levy, has proven to be one of the most popular ones. It is probably because every Israeli child learns the choreography in kindergarten that Public Movement chose the song. In this sense, Israel's state choreography is expressed through communal dancing and registered by the bodily knowledge of its citizens. Because it is a universal (and individual) knowledge, passers-by can potentially join in and become part of the circle. By using this dance in order to block the crossroad, a dance symbolising the communitarian closure of society (but also, of course, the attempt to gain courage and solidarity within a fundamentally hostile environment) is re-appropriated and used to disturb the public order of this very society.

How long is now? is a guerrilla performance in which a strong sense of public community is carved out of the urban space. This is achieved through blocking the circulation of traffic with dancing bodies. Yet the passage to politics in the strict sense does not occur, as no real conflict appears that would force everyone to position him or herself on this or the other side of a political antagonism. In summer 2011 such an antagonism broke out in Israel when tents were planted in the centre of Tel Aviv and other cities. Starting with the call of a single student, social protests against high living and housing expenses grew to the point where Israel witnessed the largest political

demonstration in its history. In the course of the protests, Public Movement took up their intervention and offered this format to the protesters. Repeatedly dozens of activists would assemble on different crossroads in order to block traffic for two and a half minutes to the music of *Od lo ahavti dai*. In so doing, they actualized a conflict much wider than a simple clash with angry car drivers. Such clashes occurred, but they now referred to the wider line of political conflict drawn by the social protesters all over Israel. By offering the demonstrators a new and easily collectable protest format, the original guerrilla performance was turned by Public Movement from an artistic intervention into a political one. The latter actualized what was only announced as a future possibility by the former pre-enactment of 2006. Or, to put it differently, *How long is now?*, danced by the protesters, was not an artistic re-enactment of a political event, as in the case of Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreave*. It was, inversely, a political re-enactment of an artistic event.

We have thus approached a definition of the pre-enactment as envisaged in the practice of Public Movement. The pre-enactment presents itself as something like the *pre-formance* of a future political event. I would thus propose to use pre-enactment as a term for the artistic anticipation of a political event to come. But this event cannot be anticipated through simple extrapolation from well-known contemporary tendencies (as in the sense of role-playing science fiction scenarios). In the realm of politics, nobody can see what the future brings: it is unclear where and when social conflicts will break out. The artistic pre-enactment could, in this sense, be subsumed under the category of the *rehearsal* – the

rehearsal of a future political event. To the extent that this event is unknown, however, the pre-enactment — with its entirely open outcome — cannot be a rehearsal of a determinate event; at best, it could be the rehearsal of an entirely indeterminate event, the event of *the political*. For this reason, it is perhaps preferable to think of pre-enactments not so much as rehearsals in the strict sense (as if the definite script of the future political event were available), than as training sessions. These sessions are there to produce the skills necessary to engage in the 'actual thing', should it occur. In the latter sense, the pre-enactment is what in the world of classical ballet would be the *exercice*, the training of basic movements at the barre. It would be the warming up for something that may or may not occur. If it occurs, an artistic intervention on a cross-road may turn into a collective protest format of a social movement.

Public Movement describes itself as a performative research body which investigates and stages political actions in public spaces such as public choreographies, forms of social order, overt and covert rituals. Founded in 2006 in Israel by Omer Krieger and Dana Yahalomi (who has been the director of the group since 2011), *Public Movement* has devised manifestations, fictional acts of hatred, new folk dances, synchronised procedures of movement, spectacles, marches, inventing and re-enacting moments in the life of individuals, communities, social institutions, peoples, and states. Their different projects include the outdoor state choreography *Also Thus!* (2007), a new ritual of memorisation constructed as a procession in Poland Spring in Warsaw (2009), the collective performance *Positions* (2009), the image campaign *Rebranding European Muslims* (2012), an action in collaboration with the Taiwanese military Honor Guard (2013), as well as *Make Art Policy!* (2014), a summit of choreographed debates between politicians and artists.