PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

THE *HOW* OF POLITICAL ACTING: INFRASTRUCTURAL IMPROV THROUGH SOCIAL CHOREOGRAPHY – LOCAL CASE STUDIES IN HELSINKI

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CITE THIS ARTICLE (APA7): Lassinaro, K. (2025). The *how* of political acting: Infrastructural improv through social choreography – Local case studies in Helsinki. *Dance Articulated, 10*(1), 2-16. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5324/da.v10i1.5881

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how choreographed movement, through its collective orientation, builds political agency. How might shared gestures reform the public space and lay ground for new social structures to grow, structures that are restorative and reparative against the extraction that is commanding the way of life? This *how* is addressed by looking at the social choreographies *common moves* in 2023 and *Make Arts Policy!* in 2014, both realised in the sociocultural environment of Helsinki, Finland. These social choreographies engage in facilitating an active presence that emerges in shared movement. The article explores the political aspect of choreography as a rehearsal ground for new types of social structures and relations to emerge. This aesthetico-political possibility is considered through the notions of common and affective infrastructures, namely through Lauren Berlant's theorising. The case studies together with the theoretical perspectives offer a lens to look at the local gestures that have in their own ways ruptured the status quo, even momentarily. The ripples of these instances resonate and keep their movement alive. Altering and claiming the public space in unexpected ways enable new types of social structures to emerge. This article discusses the notions of agency and social change: movement and speculation, as well as the senses and emotions that tie into the aesthetic experience that emerges in social choreography.

Keywords: *social choreography, affective infrastructure, commons, aesthetics, agency*

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Kaisa Lassinaro is a PhD Researcher at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Their research focuses on political aesthetics and in the way performative means and movement are applied to convey feminist- and queer politics. The research brings to the fore collectively articulated demands realised especially in the local cultural environment, and how affects and desires materialise in the aesthetics of protest and artistic work. The research is supported by the Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation, Finland.

SOCIAL CHOREOGRAPHY AND THE ONGOING MOMENTUM

This article is an inquiry into the intersection of social choreography, public realm, and political agency: the way aesthetics and politicalness are entwined, and the way the diminishing public space in the economy driven society is politicised through shared movement – social aesthetics. I reflect on social choreography as an aesthetic strategy for demands situated in the margin, to become central – even for a moment. The aesthetic strategies are illustrated in two cases of social choreography: practices realised by the BIPOC community at Helsinki locales, reaching an audience of hundreds of people; and an event at the wall-to-wall packed Helsinki town hall, where art workers placed their demands in the middle of politicians' election campaigning. The cases exemplify the simplicity and (the) power of a shared gesture and the political agency raised by a mutual agreement in this gesture. Their purpose is not necessarily to push through a political demand, but the gesture and its choreopolitics are an end in itself. The energy that lingers after the event is over is shared and taken forward by those who took part in the movement, as well as those who witnessed it.

The *common moves* (Lindfors and the working group, 2023) social choreographies realised in Helsinki exemplify speculative practicing that creates affective commons where pleasure and joy can take place. The curatorial practice of Satu Herrala – an organiser in the *Make Art Policy!* event – entwines with embodied agency, ethics and care. The two practices are demonstrative of the agential potency of aesthetics and its articulations in public – a subject of my current dissertation, where I bring forward these types of articulations in the sociocultural sphere of Helsinki (see Lassinaro, 2023). The research builds cohesion for collective political articulations, exploring these from different angles. Being *a returning subject* to Finland after living elsewhere for two decades, my inquiry focuses on the aesthetic strategies pushing against the right-wing politics, highlighting the local histories of counter-movement in a country politically located in between Nordic welfare states and 1990s post-Soviet neoliberalism. I focus on aesthetic strategies that aim to pluralise the public discussion, namely by bringing forward queer feminist demands subdued by the consensus of a nation priding itself on gender equality (Finland is statistically one of the most violent European countries for women).[2] My research demonstrates the continuity in the local cultural environment that contains a variety of voices and demands, but that this plurality does not mean they are disconnected occurrences that appear out of nowhere. The actions represent a plurality that expands identities into a social movement "that depends more strongly on the links between people than on any notion of individualism" – as feminist philosopher Judith Butler notes (2015, n.p.). Feminism bleeds into queer politics, as well as into environmental and social justice demands that cannot simply be filed under *leftist identity politics* – an argument used as their dismissal.

[2] See Gender Equality Index 2023 (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2025).

AESTHETICO-POLITICAL PRACTICES

Philosopher Brian Massumi notes that art and politics are inherently intertwined, forming practices that are "aesthetico-political" and "integrally speculative-pragmatic" (Massumi, 2011, n.p.). Social choreography contains a speculative-pragmatic aspect that becomes apparent in engaged social modes such as a political demonstration. In this speculative mode the *how* of political acting is as relevant as the *what*. This *how* is the pragmatic and performative aspect of choreography that in return creates a connection between the social and the aesthetic.

The use of social choreography in public space can offer a more concrete form for political engagement than traditional parliamentary politics in the current crisis can. What evoked this text was the *everydayness* of the collectivity of the Finnish students' occupy movement, set up against the current government's (2023–) austerity politics. Many of the country's university buildings were taken over by tents and political banners – and most significantly, by bodies loitering in public space, lying in sleeping bags while reading books, using the space in ways not intended to be used. The students were altering and recreating the public realm by aesthetic strategies of protest. This strategising can create new relational structures, which can lead to what social theorist Lauren Berlant (2022) has called "affective infrastructures" through the formation of "commons." Berlant sees this shifting as "an orientation toward life and value unbound by concepts of property" (2022, p. 82). The political embedded in the students' bodies occupying the public space while going about their everyday business of reading and resting, led me to explore the choreopolitics of shared, common movement – or movement as a common. It is essential to acknowledge the diversity that exists in this social participation: it does not require mutuality, but is open to a restructured sociality.

The cases discussed in this article are examples of affective commons that are formed in an occasion: Satu Herrala reflects on the elevated feeling when witnessing the impact of the choreographed devise part of *Make Arts Policy!*. The 2014 event demanded electoral candidates to take arts and culture as serious and important elements in Finnish society.[3] Correspondingly, Ama Kyei and Melissa Linsa – participants in *common moves* social choreographies – recall the joy during the repeated practices, where bodies marginalised in Finnish society asserted themselves in the centre. The *common moves* choreographies that took place in different locations in Helsinki in 2023 articulated plurality while carving out a public sphere of their own.

After introducing the methods of this article, I further discuss the two cases of local social choreographies that have nearly ten years in between, and elaborate on the curatorial practice of Satu Herrala, with its emphasis on embodiment and care. After the analysis, I expand on the theoretical perspectives on social choreography through notions of infrastructure and speculation that play a part in the *pleasures of transgression*. I end by proposing (after Berlant) that, in opposition to neoliberal technocracy, new social structures can be formed through such strategies as collective movement and social choreography.

[3] Arts and culture are repeatedly allocated less than one percent of the Finnish state budget; the sum only continues to diminish in 2025 under the public spending cuts of the austerity government led by the National Coalition party (Kokoomus).

ABOUT THE METHOD

This article consists of a dialogue with the literature as well as an analysis of the artistic practices. It is a kind of a "bricolage" – to borrow from feminist art historian Linda Nochlin (2006) (who borrows from Claude Levi-Strauss). Nochlin considers her method as a back-and-forth between the issue and the theoretical apparatus of approaching the issue (Nochlin, 2006, p. 17) – a hermeneutic approach to the subject. This approach is made explicit in my article by using a number of citations from the theorists and authors, as I wish to include their voices within and possibly entice the reader to take up these texts. In a dialogical manner, I draw from the words of Satu Herrala from the conversation I had with her, while framing Herrala's descriptions and experiences within the theory. I aim to bring out the complexity of the subject of social movement, as complexity is what the technocratic efficiency economy wants to avoid. Neoliberal desire for quick solutions and quantifiable responses excludes any nuance or grey areas: simplified answers give an *impression* of security and certainty. Complexity requires reflexivity, which also means acknowledging my subjectivity as a researcher, which contains "feelings, attitudes, notions, [and] values" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018, n.p.). By having a queer-feminist political position in my dissertation research, my method can also be considered to be interested. This is transparency which is not concealed by an appearance of neutrality. My background as a white Northern European person who has had access to free higher education provides me with a privileged cultural background that is considered *a norm* in academia. My inquiry, as well as this article, follows the Eurocentric production of knowledge and its conventions (such as the rigid structure of a peer-reviewed article). Considering the way "who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel" affect my analysis (Pillow, 2003, p. 176), I approach the social choreographies by the local BIPOC community with the awareness that there are no *empirical conclusions* I could or should be making here. These choreographies were not practiced for *my* experience – they were not made as events for an audience per se, as choreographer and artistic director Sonya Lindfors and the working group point out (Lindfors et al., 2023). Therefore, I relay the experiences described by the participants dancer and artist Melissa Linsa, and dancer and choreographer Ama Kyei, together with Sonya Lindfors (initiator), and performance artist and educator H Ouramo (facilitator) during a video documented panel discussion[4] at Helsinki Biennial 2023.[5]

THE CHOREOPOLITICS OF COMMON MOVES & MAKE ARTS POLICY!

In this section I analyse the two cases of social choreography, and elaborate on the artistic practice of Satu Herrala.

Energising the public space: the joy and pleasure of common moves

[4] A panel part of Polyphonic Entanglements, a programme by Museum of Impossible Forms for Helsinki Biennial 2023 (Lindfors et al., 2023).

[5] Helsinki Biennial (2023).

> I believe in the world and want to be in it. I want to be in it all the way to the end of it because I believe in another world in the world and I want to be in that. – Fred Moten (Harney & Moten, 2013, n.p.)

"Another world in the world" in Fred Moten's words can be understood as a common that is concrete and undefined at the same time. According to Berlant, the common is "always political" and "inconvenient to the reproduction of power", for it aspires to "decolonise actual social and economic spaces" while being "incoherent, like all powerful concepts" (Berlant, 2022, p. 82). I consider these features as part of the *common* in the *common moves* working groups, as it suggests not only that which is shared, but a formation of a future-opening social space moving towards wider social change. The project asks the following (speculative) questions:

> Who has access to the common? What kind of bodies are present in public space? How can we normalise something by doing repetitions in public space? Who is allowed to feel belonging to a space?. (Lindfors et al., 2023)

An understanding of the way bodies shape the public space is part of speculative practicing: the conscious transformation of the space using the simplest of means by *being present*. Dance historian Mark Franko (2006) sees the political as an entanglement of "different forces and motives that partake of the personal, the artistic and the institutional" (p. 146). According to Franko, "politics are not located directly 'in' dance, but in the way dance manages to occupy (cultural) space" (2006, p. 146).

The *common moves* groups consisted of local BIPOC artists and participants from an open call. By creating a "choreography of the community",[6] they practiced different variations of this around the city as part of the Helsinki Biennial 2023 programming. Lindfors makes a point about this institutional frame: how an institution like an art biennial can also become a common by considering how it shares the platform, the resources, the visibility in such way that is not solely about the international, established *art stars* and high ticket prices (Lindfors et al., 2023).

The three groups appeared at the main public library Oodi (known as the *public living room* of Helsinki), and on Esplanadi (an affluent, touristy, white city centre area), as well as in Itäkeskus (a high-diversity East Helsinki neighbourhood focused around a shopping centre).

Melissa Linsa, who was part of the group on Esplanadi, describes how they walked in slow motion along the esplanade for thirty minutes with a few poses in between, as well as looking at each other while holding hands. The group repeated the practice six times, and Linsa recalls feeling "super uncomfortable" in the beginning, "to be in front of that gaze that I personally am trying to run away from, but being in that 'bubble' we created it got better and easier" (Lindfors et al., 2023). Linsa recalls a comment that their moving appeared *powerful*, while Linsa stresses the importance of being in a group, the strength gained from one and other. The Esplanadi group was also a "minority within a minority", consisting of trans and queer people of colour from the local ballroom scene

[6] https://www.sonyalindfors.com/#/common-moves/

(the LGBTQ subculture originating from New York's Harlem) (Lindfors et al., 2023):

Basically we were having a ball in Esplanadi. We decided this was our runway.

Linsa notes that the passers by were asking whether they were protesting. To Lindfors this is puzzling that "white people see Black people walking around in a group and think it must be a protest" (Lindfors et al., 2023). The participants asked the biennial's security staff to explain to anyone asking, that this was not a protest but they were simply joyful while claiming the space by "practicing synergy while sharing energy" (Lindfors et al., 2023). Comparing the social choreography with "doing *tai chi* in a park", Lindfors emphasises that *common moves* was neither a performance nor an event, but a practice of togetherness in public as well as an exercise in changing the energies of the place through "the power of gathering" (Lindfors et al., 2023).

While not a protest, the action's politicalness cannot be denied: expressing joy in public space where your dancing/posing body is seen as peripheral, as something that does not belong (to that white central locale). Elation while being seen and heard are political acts of those unseen and unheard in the public space/discourse of the society. Lindfors notes the negotiation in keeping the practice *horizontal*, meaning that the participants were not required to have previous knowledge of dancing or choreography. The open call was for BIPOC persons interested in participating, and those who signed up got an email with simple instructions such as "walk slowly while holding a flower", as the group in Itäkeskus did. If unsure, you could follow what the designated group leader did. It was aimed to be "as light as possible", as Lindfors notes (Lindfors et al., 2023). In the panel talk, Lindfors also referred to the role of art when pointing to the biennial's responsibility in "bringing art where people are." There were "many, many people" in all of the chosen locations, while the social choreography was also a chance for the passers by to engage with "the local BIPOC scene" (Lindfors et al., 2023). Ama Kyei of the Itäkeskus group recalls how children joined in the practice: a child got handed a flower, and off they went with the rest of the group, "becoming part of the biennial", as Lindfors notes, and adds:

> I wish that as a brown kid growing up in Finland in the '80s, I would've been able to see or take part in these kind of things. They are small things, but they can resonate. (Lindfors et al., 2023)

According to queer theorist Jose Muñoz, the "brown commons" begin in an already formed "affective commons that confirms the good life for a minoritized belonging in a way that gives a taste of what's possible at the scale of lifeworld confidence for a concrete, yet indefinite, common 'we'" (in Berlant, 2022, pp. 84–85). Berlant (2022) considers this *we* as an orientation that gets "negotiated into acts and attitudes that move the future around" (pp. 84–85). It is exactly what the *common moves* group did in the public spaces around Helsinki: they were moving the future around while forming an affective common of their own.

common moves aesthetic strategy contained pleasure and joy: sensuous aspects in our lives that serve the aesthetic function. Writer and activist Audre Lorde widens the idea of the sensuous into the erotic, to the way it accentuates the "capacity for joy":

> [T]he way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea. (Lorde, 1984, p. 56)

As noted, collectively moving becomes a political act that Lorde also speaks for: the aesthetic function serves democratic society as well as personal expansion. Lorde refers to "erotic knowledge" that begins to form once we allow ourselves to be in touch with "the erotic within ourselves" and allow this "power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us" (Lorde, 1984, p. 58). Personal connection to the senses conveys that "we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense" (Lorde, 1984, p. 58), thus forming a collective responsibility that defies the social isolation in the neoliberal society. Instead of coping as individuals within "the current regime of value", as Berlant (2011) puts it, true responsibility is embedded in the way we live outwards: in the way we transmit and share our sensuous beings with others – say, by moving, posing, and dancing together in affective commons, building a sense of belonging. But in order not to entirely idealise the *common*, Berlant notes:

> Just because we are in the room together does not mean that we belong to the room or each other: belonging is a specific genre of affect, history, and political mediation that cannot be presumed and is, indeed, a relation whose evidence and terms are always being contested. (Berlant, 2016, p. 395)

The opportunity to engage with a community – as for myself while witnessing *common moves* – is to be aware (but not self-conscious) of my own history and of my interactions with others. I like to think that we *belonged* during the practice; that in all our plurality we were leaning into each other's energies that were left lingering in the location while resonating in our bodies. My contested belonging in an incoherent common contains the notion of societal plurality that is formed from the social activities of individuals, as noted by philosopher Hannah Arendt (1958/1998). Rather than seeing the common as a simplified solution to the complexity of belonging, it can enable a shared subjectivity without erasing individuality (Berlant, 2022, p. 109).

Reorganising sociality with imaginative essential: Satu Herrala on curatorial care and choreography

Collective organising, such as social choreography, works to form affective infrastructures that reshape or replace the conservative structures of (illusionary) conclusiveness and certainty. This leads to the question posed by Satu Herrala:

> How do we move from overload and exhaustion to cycles of attention and energy that are alive, nourishing, and resourceful? (Herrala, 2023, n.p.)

In her curatorial work, Herrala aims towards social structures that base their ethics on care and pleasure; a pleasurable way of conducting social activities in the form of artistic

events. A curator and researcher with a background in dance and choreography, Herrala is involved in facilitating instances that speak of the societal, individual, and national politics through the methods of performative arts. Herrala seeks to understand the way collective agency is activated in bodily experience: how agency is enabled, and how our *attunement* can result in a formation of a collective body (Herrala, 2023).

Make Arts Policy! (Herrala et al., 2014) was an event Herrala organised together with curator Eva Neklyaeva, choreographer Dana Yahalomi and artist Terike Haapoja at the Helsinki Town Hall in 2014. The event was a theatrical public meeting performance held ahead of the Finnish general elections in the following spring. Social choreography was used to enable agency within the 500-strong audience consisting of artists and cultural workers. The strategy was to tease out the politicians' attitudes towards arts and culture – choreography was a tool for demanding clarity from the electoral candidates. During the event, representatives of ten Finnish political parties disclosed their proposed arts policies for the 2015 elections. Herrala recalls how the motivation to organise the event stemmed from the prospect of conservative and national populist parties coming to power and cutting the funding of arts and culture, as had happened in Holland in 2012 (and indeed in Finland in 2025). Herrala (S. Herrala, personal communication, February 22, 2023) on the impetus for the event:

> *The Finns Party had been slurring contemporary arts as a provocation, which had been passed over without processing. So, we thought now, as the elections were coming, it was time to process.*

It was also unclear what views and intentions the other parties had regarding arts and culture, as these were not given much space in the election debates (S. Herrala, personal communication, February 22, 2023).The politicians' presentations followed a score, and the audience members were handed cards to use during the presentations: one card asked for the politician to *be concrete*, to give examples of what they were talking about, and the other card asked *how?* Once there were enough cards held up by the audience, musicians began to play and the politician was forced to stop their talk in order to answer to the public. For Herrala, *Make Arts Policy!* was an incentive for her current research and approach to curating as *embodied*:

> *Such a simple thing that was: The feeling I got when holding up the cards and when there were many of them, it felt like were riding a wave together. Our agency in it: that we were going to stop [the politician] and ask [them to be concrete]. How we, as art workers, were not just going to be walked over by politicians. It was a collective body holding up those cards. It was that simple. I asked myself what just happened here?* (S. Herrala, personal communication, February 22, 2023)

The event led Herrala to formulate further questions on the conditions that create (political) agency, and whether there is a methodology that enables this to take place at an art event (Herrala & Neklyaeva, 2020, p. 11).

> I understand curating as a practice of setting up conditions for something or some things to happen in a particular spatial, temporal, social and political context. The conditions contribute to the possibility of emergence and the ability of those present to recognise *some-thing-happening* and be affected by it. (Herrala & Neklyaeva, 2020, p. 11)

Herrala sees the curator's task as listening and tuning into each situation, as each asks "for a different constellation of agents and ingredients" (Herrala & Neklyaeva, 2020, p. 6). As curator Chris Dupuis (2020) notes, curators – dance curators specifically,

> … bring the knowledge, working sensibilities, and politics from their choreographic practices into their curatorial work, intentionally or not, thereby strengthening the notion of curation as a form of choreography. (Dupuis, 2020, pp. 106-107)

While attending to the event and taking care of its potential, the curator also has a responsibility for the wellbeing of the participants: their time, nourishment, and rest being planned into the occasion (Herrala & Neklyaeva, 2020, p. 6). These elements are missing today in the institutions led by technocratic efficiency, arts and academia included, as Herrala notes:

> *I feel like when I go to seminars, artistic or academic, that there is a vast amount of knowledge there, and sharing of it, but I just feel like I cannot cope with it. That there is something in the circumstances, also at artistic events, that is 'off', that I cannot take it in. That there is a conflict between what the art wants to do and what it is actually doing. And it has to do with our corporeal receptivity; that we are not able to just 'download' information into our brains.* (S. Herrala, personal communication, February 22, 2023)

In the collective orientation of a social choreography, a public sphere is created that comprises ethics and aesthetics. This manifests whenever people act together, and it vanishes as soon as the act is over, but its energy lingers on (Marchart, 2013, p. 44). Arendt emphasises the boundlessness and unpredictability of the outcome of such acts (Arendt, 1958/1998). These speculative attributes are part of any political protest and movement, as their value is not solely in their goal but in the way they help to realise our capacity to act together in order to change the prevailing conditions (Marchart, 2013, p. 44). This transformative capacity contains the aesthetic dimension of energy, of "engaged action" without which, according to dance theorist André Lepecki,

> there would be no politics; and indeed, no dancing. … It is thanks to it that a movement becomes activation and actualization – of corporeal and critical capacities towards the composition and formation of **engaged modes of existence**. (Lepecki, 2013, p. 30, emphasis added)

As a dancer, Herrala is attentive to the way a collective experience forms an energy that is "self-charging" (S. Herrala, personal communication, February 22, 2023). The energy we gain from physical connections reduces social alienation, and a choreographic process conveys the possibility to alter the structures around us, as the social choreography of *Make Arts Policy!* shows. Herrala observes that enabling conditions that produce energy (instead of draining it) are formed out of "a constellation of bodies and things that

gather in a specific space and time" and notes how also "too much structure or too much content stagnates energy, whereas their insufficiency collapses it. … there must be just enough structure and content to create a container where energy can circulate and something unexpected can unfold" (S. Herrala, personal communication, February 22, 2023). Herrala has a fairly simple take on the *how* of enabling such conditions:

> Instead of perpetually aiming for a generative maximum, aim for the **imaginative essential** with better conditions and a capacious working process **within the available time and budget**. (Herrala, 2023, n.p., emphasis added)

Herrala's practice incorporates methods of collectivity and transdisciplinarity into formal, political articulations, while applying the restorative aspect of care, present in her curatorial approach:

> Live art is based on, but not limited to, bodily coexistence: a temporary community sharing time and space. Bodily coexistence often creates profound experiences of connection between those who are present. I am interested in the potential that emerges from these connections. … Acknowledging our existence as bodies among myriad bodies can strengthen the potential of art to be a transformative collective force in society. (Herrala, 2023, n.p.)

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: AESTHETICO-POLITICAL, AFFECTIVE COMMONS, ENABLING SPECULATION

In this section I further unpack the theoretical perspectives around the aesthetic strategy of social choreography. Social choreography is an aesthetic sphere that is immersed into our communality: choreography is a component of dance, but also found in our social relations, in our common contact, and in our gestures and manners. Dance theorist Gabriele Klein argues that because social aesthetics refers to the organising of bodies in time and space, it means that the aesthetic has "a fundamental role in the description of the political and the social" (2013, p.198). In like manner, the political function of social choreography is regarded by literary theorist Andrew Hewitt as a sphere where "the dynamic choreographic configurations" are forms applied to "the broader social and political sphere" (2005, p. 3). The aestheticised mass choreographies of authoritarian displays of power rely on uniformity that aims to subdue plurality – Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda films come to mind first hand. Mass choreographies are also affect-containing and agency-inducing structures. However, the diverse social practice of choreography contains ethics that are entwined with their affective aesthetic. Social choreography is considered as a political practice that creates "a space in which social possibilities are both rehearsed and performed" (Hewitt, 2005, p. 3). Philosopher Oliver Marchart asks "what if something of the order of dance was inscribed into the very structure of political acting?" (2013, p. 42). Marchart (2013) ponders on the way shared acts contain an energy that lingers on, a remark that echoes Muñoz's (2019) observation of the gesture and its aftermath: "the ephemeral trace" of a live performance that has more significance than "many traditional modes of evidencing lives and politics." To Muñoz, ephemerality is a mode of "producing arguments often worked by minoritarian culture

and criticism makers" (Muñoz, 1996, p. 10). The ephemeral (which is not unmaterial) in social aesthetics locates itself in between art and the everyday life, in a dissonance proposed by philosopher Jacques Rancière (2009, p. 44). According to Rancière, the aesthetic experience contains a political dimension that does not separate art from the everyday (2009, p. 44). This is the habitat for an active life of participation and for the political realm that "rises out of acting together", as Arendt suggests (1958/1998, n.p.).

The affective commons I associate with the *common moves* social choreography are also a sensuous realm. This affective realm is part of the politics of pleasure that opposes the austerity technocracy – not so much a politics, but rather an ideological control measure that is more evasive than an exclusively economic doctrine (Whyte, 2019). In a techno-austere society the innate quirks of human beings are stifled: experimentation and the humane need *to err* in order to expand our thinking and way of living and being in the world are reduced to mere existence.

> [W]estern dance reformed in the early twentieth century as response to the factory assembly line, to the rationalisation of the movements of the working body … when any kind of false, expressive, slow, stationary, unexpected, wrong, clumsy, personal, lazy, ineffective, imaginative, additional movement was eliminated from the work performed by the body. (Kunst, 2015, p. 12)

Affective uncertainties, up-in-the-air human attributes arising from the changing conditions of physical and mental health, from moods and desires, were already a spanner in the works of the factory assembly line of the early nineteen hundreds. The risk-calculations of financial speculation aim to eliminate the human(e) factor by discipline and measure, as the accumulation economy requires clockwork machinery; it requires the living breathing species to work like well-oiled machines. The subjugation of bodies to the capitalist system is manifested in the image of a factory line – just think of Chaplin's *Modern Times* (Chaplin, 1936). This disciplining continues today in forms of self-monitored digital surveillance, as we have internalised the terms of the economy. The pleasure that is lacking in our (working) lives can be gained through the aesthetic experience.

> The function of the aesthetic sphere has always been to articulate the possibility of another way of life. The mere existence of 'art' testifies to the insufficiency of life. (Hewitt, 2008, p. 4)

Social aesthetics feed the senses as well as the sense of belonging: in collective encounters, we may come to accept the uncertainty of the present by drawing support from the *shared*. The commons that are formed through social engagement carry "plans for structural transformation" (Berlant, 2022, p. 101) and "a radical opportunity" (Berlant, 2022, p. 96) is embedded in their openness and uncertainty. As noted, infrastructures contain an affective and aesthetic dimension (Bosworth, 2023), which can be reshaped through the organic patterns of our social relations.

Communal bodies formed in artistic practice or in political protest help to envision and work towards social structures that are *enabling* futures. This kind of speculative action is the antidote to the enclosing financial speculation that is *cancelling* futures (Brown & Lothian, 2012; Lothian, 2018), which goes hand in hand with the closure of

the political imagination in neoliberal capitalism (Whyte, 2019). Enabling speculation is associated with fiction writing: feminist science fiction and Afrofuturism have visualised futures beyond the normative (gendered, white, heterosexual) linear narratives, reaching beyond technological solutionism (Lothian, 2018, p. 4). By imagining, the fiction is helping to reshape the present and the future (Streeby, 2020, p. 513). The peripheral cultures reproduce "the pleasures of transgression" without conforming to dominant societal norms (Martin, 1998, pp. 12–13). The fringes contain a political pressure that builds not only from the anger and frustration against the status quo, but also from joy and pleasure – as exemplified by *common moves*. The excess from the energy gained from pleasure can carry further and expand into a movement advancing social change.

TO CONCLUDE: THE *HOW* OF POLITICAL ACTING

The social choreographies discussed convey the potential of social reorganising through collective movement. Like the Finnish students' occupy movement – or any collective political protest – social choreography mediates agency. The collapse of the existing infrastructures, as suggested by Berlant (2022), is not only to do with the distribution of resources, but also with social relations and affective continuity. Berlant equates politics with "the reinvention of infrastructures" in order to (re)organise "the unevenness, ambivalence, violence, and ordinary contingency of contemporary existence" (Berlant, 2016, p. 394). Social choreography is a type of political acting, *infrastructural improv*, that is aiming for the reinvention of sociality. The social impact of artistic practicing is part of what Berlant calls "worldmaking as infrastructural improv" (Berlant, 2022, p. 98).

To sum up, the featured theorisation emphasises the role of social choreography as both an aesthetic and a social practice that intersects with politics, ethics, and collective life. The article builds on Rancière's (2009) idea of the political dimension of the aesthetic experience in the midst of *the everyday*, encouraging participation that is not confined to the institutionalised cultural spaces. In *The Human Condition* (1958/1998), Arendt critiques the erosion of the public space and calls for participatory politics that is based on plurality, while Berlant's (2016) concept of affective infrastructures highlights the emotional, relational, and aesthetic dimensions of collective life. Berlant (2011, 2016, 2022) calls attention to care, improvisation, and the building and sustaining of the commons as a site of radical potential and resistance.

The *how* in the title of this article situates in the political pressure that builds on the fringes of society and is channelled through artistic practices and *jouissance*, where the body politics confront the sociopolitical hegemony and its attempts to tame the joyfully resisting body. The speculative methods of social choreography help to gain freedom from the violence of consensus and pave the way to a regenerative life consisting of pleasurable loitering, moving, and dancing, in public spaces, building a sensuous understanding, and forming an intelligence attuned to collective bodies in ongoing, moving histories.

AI DECLARATION

No AI was used in this article.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research is supported by the Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation (grant no: 00240191)

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