

## Choreographing the City: Techniques for Urban Walking

Megan V. Nicely

I am a walker. I like to be in motion and feel the play between place and space, a sense of fluid identity, and the shifts in temporality that hold me close and set me free. I am accountable to my steps' duration as the time created unfolds. Rhythms pulse and change speed through repeated stepping—the stepping of living in an urban environment without a car as has been my adult predicament. I am also a dancer, and I consider walking an extension of my dance practice. Whether in New York or San Francisco, London or Tokyo, the city presents structural limitations that invoke a multitude of small choices, redirections, manipulations, modulations, and at times a sense of liberation. The overall environment through which my paths chart a unique map is a choreography not just through the city but a process by which both my body and that of the city provisionally take form. The materiality of the physical body and the city's architecture work together to contain, make sense of, and think beyond what is initially apparent. If there is an ideology (beyond the obvious politics of not owning a car) that dictates this dancer's goals, expectations, and actions in walking, it is that concrete meanings held in certain experiences start to loosen as thoughts flow and are then directed and re-embodied. This is the process of a dancer's

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“choreographic thinking.” Walking, from this perspective, is a way to move thoughts out of representation and into action.



SALTA collective event *City Church Judson Limits*.  
City Limits Gallery, Oakland, CA, 18 March 2014.  
Photo: Chani Bockwinkel.

With this essay, I extend the now common relationship between walking, thinking, and the urban landscape into the realm of the choreographic. By choreographic I mean the ways that the planned city acts as a kind of movement prompt met by our physical body in any given instance, leading to an action-encounter that re-maps the already “known” space toward a new and unique dance. Jenn Joy refers to the choreographic as a mode of contact that touches across distance, “a metonymic condition that moves between corporeal and cerebral conjecture.”<sup>1</sup> A visceral force that exceeds dancing but still is quintessentially of dance, for Joy and the artists she engages, the choreographic tells stories across disparate encounters. It is not the art practice of sequencing steps

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<sup>1</sup> Jenn Joy, *The Choreographic*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2014: 1.

particular to dance so much as the kind of work that disorientation does by acting on physical bodies and psyches.<sup>2</sup> Choreographer William Forsythe furthers the specific kind of thinking that might invoke such sensations when he notes that “choreography’s manifold incarnations are a perfect ecology of idea-logics; they do not insist on a single path to form of thought and persist in the hope of being without enduring.”<sup>3</sup> Getting lost and re-orienting the known aptly describes both urban navigation and choreographic processes. The city is similar to what Forsythe refers to as a “choreographic object”—an element outside the dancing body that suggests new dance solutions with each engagement and subsequent iteration. For Forsythe, choreography is the realm of ideas from which potentials for and organizations of action reside. The city as choreographic prompt is thus an invitation to disorient known spaces toward new idea-logics. Its twists, turns, planning, and routes manifest not just in our physical activities but also in our decisions, choices, thoughts, and surrender. Urban structures pose problems that cause us to navigate, orient, span distance, and imagine ourselves and the city anew. Walkers unleash a choreographic force that is neither active initiation nor passive reception but rather a kind of “choreographic thinking” that makes direct and meaningful connections and then lives them out. On-going stepping builds a logic by “making sense.”



Top down view: DUMBO and Manhattan, summer 2014. Photo: M. Nicely

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 146-47.

<sup>3</sup> William Forsythe, “Choreographic Objects,” n.d., <http://www.williamforsythe.de/essay.html>, n.d. (accessed 19 December 2014).



On the ground view: foot molds at a Tokyo market, winter 2011.  
Photo: M. Nicely

The city is often cast as a stimulating performance partner, formed by the global flows of people, economy, opportunity, and discourse. According to Michel de Certeau, it is formed by a three-fold operation: the production of its own space, a “nowhen” substituted for the place of tradition, and “the creation of a *universal* and anonymous *subject* which is the city itself [...]”<sup>4</sup> De Certeau calls this spatial practice a “rhetoric of walking” or “silent grammar,” where the city is rewritten through street-level tactics that can never be fully determined by institutional maps and top down organization. The vantage point of what he calls a “pedestrian speech act” is the crowd, which creates a “migrational, or metaphorical, city”<sup>5</sup> overlaying the planned, strategic one. Walkers choreograph a constant yet contingent map of on the ground experiences that assemble a dynamic archive of revisions and micro-adjustments similar to Forsythe’s multiplicity of dance solutions to any given prompt. The city as subject is thus best defined as a process rather than a concrete place, destination, or historical marker. One way to understand the complexity of this performance partner is in four interwoven levels of the city laid out by Imanuel Schipper: (1) Environment—physical structures, climate, geographical site, urban morphology; (2) Urban structures—laws/policies, institutions, production of surplus; (3) Urban practices—

<sup>4</sup> Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984: 94.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

social behavior, exchanges, interactions; (4) Representations—our idea of the city, mental images, social values.<sup>6</sup> The city as performance and provisional subject is a complex layering of these elements. However, the slippage between them is where the choreographic arises as felt experience.

There is a robust and quickly growing field of urban studies literature and artist walking projects. However, few of these discourses focus explicitly on the *felt* experience of thought, or how walking as an embodied mode of thinking moves human ideologies in ways that re-choreograph social registers. Feeling, however, is hinted at in Baudelaire's and Benjamin's flâneur, who strolled the city with sensitivity as an unmediated artistic counter to consumerism and overwhelm. The earlier social critiques of urbanization in the pastoral walks of Rousseau and Thoreau and continued in the works of English artists Hamish Fulton and Richard Long also put forth a kind of affective solitude arguably scant in urban living and institutional museum settings. More recent projects by now familiar to those drawn to walking as art also seek to intervene in capitalism's perpetual motion by slowing our thinking down so as to sense and listen to the body's many stories. Some examples include Sophie Calle's *Suite Vénitienne* (1979) in which she followed a man in the streets of Venice as a way to reclaim her own identity, William Pope.L's 9 year project *The Great White Way, 22 Miles, 9 Years, 1 Street* (1990s) that included crawling the length of Broadway in Manhattan dressed in a Superman costume with a skateboard strapped to his back as a comment on race, labor, and mobility, and audience participation projects such as Janet Cardiff's story-based audio walk *Her Long Black Hair* (2005) or *The Walk* (2012) by choreographer Martin Nachbar, just two of the many projects that activate story, personal memory, and directives for real-time activity in participants' bodies. By layering walking with movement strategies for thought, each of these projects causes us to question our social existence. As I will continue to put forth, such questions are also *felt* experiences.

Sensation has the ability to move beyond individual sentiment to address larger society. Thinking and walking are inextricably linked as aesthetic and political practices with the potential to re-map social systems. Andrew Hewitt works the aesthetic and political realms together to conceive the social in this way when he notes that the very frames by which we think and organize perceptions become self-perpetuated embodiments that give form to how we participate in social life. He poses choreography not as isolated artistic practice but as a discursive realm in which we work through systems of representation, understood as both aesthetic and political. His term "social choreography" conceives both the social order and actions as the performative workings of ideology. This

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<sup>6</sup> Imanuel Schipper, "City as Performance," *TDR: The Drama Review* 58, 3 (Fall 2014): 22.

is also a kind of “choreographic thinking,” what Hewitt calls “articulation,”<sup>7</sup> which refers to choreography as a discourse and performance of relation—as Hewitt puts it, a praxis, not merely metaphor. He notes, “We might think of choreography in terms of ‘rehearsal’; that is, as the working out and working through of utopian, nevertheless ‘real’, social relations”<sup>8</sup> where “the body I dance with and the body I work and walk with are one and the same [...]”<sup>9</sup>

Using Hewitt’s thinking, if urban walking is already choreographic and re-organizing our thoughts, then everyday perambulation is a mobile cartography of ideology that reconfigures the social realm. It is therefore not surprising that this mundane activity was central to radical dance practices in the 1960s, a time of great social change. What better way to dismantle social norms than by creating a bridge between the dance studio and the street? In the case of American postmodern dance in New York, Yvonne Rainer both adopted the quality of walking in dance as uninflected task-like movement and took the walk as dance onto the streets in protest of Vietnam. In Tokyo, butoh artist Tatsumi Hijikata posed a “dead body walking” as a critique of Western modernity and hyper mobility. His display of an ongoing struggle against gravity and the slowed act of walking revealed the weight of an ever-present dark side, and the paradox of life in death and death in life. In both dance examples, altering the posture and movement quality of walking itself changed the sensation of motion, and thus the thinking that accompanied it. These innovations also changed the structures and discipline of dance itself, allowing for new conceptions for movement practiced both inside and outside the studio.

Considering walking as a choreographic activity further revealed its potential as philosophy—a proposition for living differently. To live otherwise requires the re-distribution of known elements, an operation familiar to choreographers. Dance artist Susan Rethorst calls a “choreographic mind” one that organizes space and navigates faster than cognitive, linguistic rationality. Dance training involves a “heightening and specifying of the body’s mind”<sup>10</sup> she notes, by which she means somatic intelligence, practiced daily. “Making is a form of thought itself, done with the body’s mind,”<sup>11</sup> Rethorst observes. Creative solutions arise in response to choreographic problems—and social ones may not be so different. As is becoming clear through this dance mapping, there is no single solution to a problem. Walking is often rightly linked to contemplation and a

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005: 15.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Susan Rethorst, *A Choreographic Mind: Autobiographical Writings*, Helsinki: Theatre Academy Helsinki, 2012: 54.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

general sense of healthy unstuck thinking,<sup>12</sup> but it also re-writes new aesthetic relationships and logics in radical ways. Trisha Brown discovered this perambulating her toddler in a stroller around Manhattan in the 1960s. With little money for rehearsal space, Brown looked up at the architecture and had “dance visions” that would re-cast the city as her collaborator in re-thinking choreographic problems. From these imaginings she crafted *Roof Piece* (1971), in which dancers passed movement like a game of telephone across the tops of buildings, and *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970), which suspended a solo figure by a harness who then descended a three-story building on Wooster Street. Each of these dances used the city to change the relationship between bodies and forces so that new problems arose to be solved by the dancer. These pieces importantly reveal thinking processes from both inside and outside a crisis situation, which might suggest how movement, body, and thinking work together as social choreography.



Trisha Brown Company in *Roof Piece*. The Highline, New York City, summer 2011.  
Photos: M. Nicely

Training is essential if new thought pathways are to be embodied, for we can't change thinking without experience. Inscribed onto and into bodies, ideology works powerfully on a somatic level, as Sally Ann Ness's and Carrie Noland's writings suggest. Ness defines inscription in dance as meaning marking to “create ‘place’ or ‘place-ness’ out of something that is both a ‘no-where’ and a ‘no thing,’”<sup>13</sup> indicating that location is the manifestation of specific social principles lived out. Noland also discusses gesture as not just individual but as migrational

<sup>12</sup> For example, see texts such as Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (2001), Karen O'Rourke's *Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers* (2013), and Ferris Jabr's recent “Why Walking Helps Us Think” (2014).

<sup>13</sup> Sally Ann Ness, “The Inscription of Gesture: Inward Migrations in Dance,” in Noland and Ness, eds., *Migrations of Gesture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008: 1.

pathways to different bodies, locations, and contexts. She marks a critical distinction between what she calls a “‘maintained’ gestural routine” produced through training and the repetition of skills (performative, past), and a “‘modulated’ gestural routine” that emerges through the particular energies of a performer (affect, future).<sup>14</sup> In these perspectives, gestures are culturally based choreographed patterns learned through training, but they also evidence the form-taking of thought particular to time, place, and a somatic experience of non-identity. Practice is always underway, even if on an unconscious level. Before introducing some techniques, let’s take a walk...



Stepping toward the street. Oakland, CA, winter 2013.  
Photos: M. Nicely

### The City through the Body: Training Principles for the Urban Choreographer

There are certain risks. Have you ever:

*Fallen in the middle of a busy street?*  
*Tried to cross a 4-lane highway?*  
*Felt the spatial dysphoria of a human entangled with a cellular device?*  
*Run up behind someone and startled them?*  
*Followed a person at a distance?*  
*Given an hour to walking around a city block?*  
*Taken a turn you did not want but had to make?*  
*Had a fight/flight response to wrong gender, wrong race, wrong place?*  
*Not known where you were going, but gone there anyway?*  
*Experienced a true breath of freedom?*

<sup>14</sup> Noland in Noland and Ness, xi-xiii.

Given the risks, daily practice and attunement are needed for survival. Our current situation is precarious, unstable, de-centered—what Peter Sloterdijk calls the kinetic condition of modernity, where the planet’s self movement is self-perpetuating.<sup>15</sup> The unstoppable motion fuelled and attended by individual bodies operates presently without the protection of an intermediary voice of authority. This de-centered condition is what Randy Martin calls the social kinesthetic, “the capacity to move an idea in a particular direction through the acquired prowess of bodies in action.”<sup>16</sup> The power of urban perambulation to reorient our thinking in a post-industrial capitalist-driven society has great potential since, as Martin notes, capital is a force of movement itself that is alive and speaks. However, bodies must now learn to navigate from within motion since authority is decentered and dispersed across bodies in flow.<sup>17</sup> Experiencing motion as sensation further suggests that there might be a felt sense to capitalism. It’s a feeling condition we might need to get used to. Here are some techniques for practice:

*Breathing a Body of Sensation*

Dance and somatic educator Andrea Olsen notes two kinds of respiration: lung breathing that takes in oxygen, and cellular breathing that distributes oxygenated blood to the rest of the body.<sup>18</sup> The first is felt in the chest, rib cage, and/or belly depending on the focus of expansion and exhale. The second cellular breath is subtle and perhaps imperceptible until one turns one’s attention to it. Breathing accesses both the conscious and unconscious realms. Try these on as you leave your apartment and descend the steps. Once felt, perhaps initially through imagination, the cellular breath in particular can be used to motivate the body in new internal directions, even as your form remains the same. Breathe into, breathe with, breathe alongside—these all create qualitative changes. Now whisper to yourself silently, activating a vocal or speaking breath. Coordinate walking with these various breaths of lung, cellular, and speaking. When ready, detach these various breaths from one another and allow the breath and walking to be separate trajectories, like the treble and bass lines of a sheet of music. Coordinate but allow them to also operate independently, to start and change

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<sup>15</sup> See Peter Sloterdijk, “Mobilization of the Planet from the Spirit of Self-Intensification,” trans. Heidi Ziegler, *TDR: The Drama Review* 50, 4 (Winter 2006): 36-43.

<sup>16</sup> Randy Martin, “Dance and Its Others: Theory, State, Nation, and Socialism,” in André Lepecki, ed., *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*, Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2004: 48.

<sup>17</sup> See Randy Martin, “Toward a Decentered Social Kinesthetic,” *Dance Research Journal* 42, 1 (Summer 2010): 77-80.

<sup>18</sup> Andrea Olsen, *Body and Earth: An Experiential Guide*, Hanover: University Press of New England, 2002: 112.

course at different times from one another. Feel the vibrations and qualitative shifts. Go about your normal business.

*Seeing Self, Foreground and Background*

How does one move from walking a representation to fully embodying or stepping up to and into one's own skin? How do we fill our form with body?<sup>19</sup> There is a hierarchy to the visual function that, left unchecked, tends to dominate. An attachment to objects is a kind of curious fetish-like fascination that draws us to the other. It is completely necessary in our social environment. However, sometimes we neglect to complete the physical part of the feedback loop, instead retrieving the visual information only mentally. When physical response is required it happens, but more often than not we go seeking more visual stimulation without ingesting the initial fix. Remaining in the serotonin high of immediate gratification, the body's capacity to feel and process lags behind or checks out altogether. Notice the bombardment of advertising and other directional signage. Try to simply notice the way this other choreography is working on you, possibly making you a passive receiver of information. Susan Sontag noted this in the 70s with photographs of Vietnam, and today with the Internet and social media, it's not just images but words, stories, betrayals, they all slip by on the newsfeed. Try to let the visual be background for a while. Butoh dance artists know this tactic. Blur the eyes, seeing far off into the distance as a way to be present in the now, corporeally. Navigate with heightened senses of sound and kinesthetic memory. There is haptic vision, where the eyes touch things. See words and images this way, as merely other objects, unessential to your actions. Close a transparent inner eyelid, like a cat. Let the seer be a witness, separate from the you that you think you are with the things you think you are seeing. Change what is foreground and background. Change the self's relationship to near and far. Make them simultaneous experiences.

*Internal Skeleton Meets External Architecture*

Sense your skeleton, the mobility of this boney architecture, the ways your joints slide and articulate as your feet contact the pavement. Don't look for them. Instead, feel them, test their location, range, and capacity. Notice how reaching into a direction extends one joint and compresses another. Let the ground hold and meet you. Try to maintain equal spaces at the joints so that there is freedom within the limitation. In the Alexander Technique the sense is of holding back slightly, so as to fully embody trajectories. This also reads visually (just in case

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<sup>19</sup> The idea of filling our form with body is taken from a dance workshop with Neil Greenberg, Movement Research Melt Festival, New York City, summer 2014.

you don't believe me). Now look at the urban architecture the same way, a body with form and dynamic alignment. The buildings, parking lots, and alleys do not comprise a rigid unchanging system but instead a dynamic and flexible one. They suggest potential lines of activity and support. Notice that you are already in relationship to this structure, your architectures gauging each other, conceiving scale, relationship, meaning, and further action. See if you can again feel this connection and relationship, and allow yourself to be supported by the city's external structure so you do not need to do much more than stand to be in the world. Buildings extend your skeleton's articulations and almost catch you. Their structures are a resource; they are there when you need them and they can help relieve some of the weight of gravity, and of the present moment.

*Institutional Rules and How to Break Them: Cognitive Mapping Strategies*

Conceive the map of your walking journey as a playing field and your form as dynamically in play. Your body does not walk or blindly follow but instead sets the game in motion, alters the map. Parkourists and stencilists know this kind of re-orientation. Psychogeography too aims at a target of undermining rules. It's not about breaking but instead how bending unleashes creativity. Fluxus artists in the 60s also did this with movement instructions. Take Milan Knizak's "Walking Event" (1965): "On a busy city avenue, draw a circle about 3m in diameter with chalk on the sidewalk. Walk around the circle as long as possible without stopping." Or Alison Knowles "Street Piece" (1963): "Make something in the street and give it away." These prompts have many solutions, and the unique answer is the art, is the dance. Such non-linear thought opens curvilinear spaces within the urban grid, and in our thought processes. Richard Long and Hamish Fulton understand the walk as both art process and product, where what appears in the museum is merely a kind of archival record that it happened. The actual experience is, I might suggest, embodied in changed thinking, and in the many ways that a partial and limited view opens vistas. It is rather like the experience a dancer has within a work. Inside the dance, one cannot see the whole and so makes decisions in motion that suit the immediate conditions while keeping the overall structure in play, mobile but coherent. Keeping the unfolding logic of the moment as it accumulates is one way to subvert overarching rules. It is a kind of remapping. Over time the original map of your walk will take on new meaning, become something different, flexible. Follow your interest; compose the landscape of your own walk as it takes form. Every redirection, intention, and reorientation changes the game.

*Thinking as Moving/Thinking in Activity*

Notice the organizational aesthetic structures of your mapping, how you are creating and writing this map, your position, this neighborhood, familiar and strange, the ways places change. Notice the quality of your thoughts, the kinds of things your mind returns to, is drawn to, where it goes, where you bring it back to reset, what you keep, what you reserve for later, what you throw away. Notice your body as you do this, its tone, form, the ways the breath moves—or not. Start to chart what thoughts and body postures or qualities go together. Which arrangements are pleasurable or feel right, which are off-kilter but curious, and which are removed from your choreographic walking lexicon? Notice the effect certain senses of time have on these things. What is your timetable? When do you have to be somewhere? When is there open structure? Does time create space, or is it the other way around? Where do you begin and end? Keep walking this dance. Asking questions is the choreography, is the way to open the potential for something else to happen. It's already happening, now.



L: Millions March/#BlackLivesMatter. Oakland, CA, fall 2014.

R: View from Alcatraz Island. San Francisco, CA, fall 2014.

Photos: M. Nicely

**Choreography Now: Protesting Overflow**

It is easy to idealize walking, especially as an anti-capitalist slowing down. And we should slow down. As I write this, police brutality against black bodies, brought to the fore again recently in the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, has stirred choreographic responses in New York, Berkeley/Oakland, and Minneapolis. These actions—on foot—have generally served to halt the flow of productivity, or business as usual, with street marches, highway blockades, “die-ins,” and recently a shutdown of the Oakland Police Department. As dance scholar Anusha Kedhar has written on these events, “hands up don’t shoot” and the “die-ins” are two choreographic tactics that call out the politics of the moment, one of life while the other representing the ongoing death toll of

young black men.<sup>20</sup> The de-centralized organizational structures around Ferguson recall Occupy and the earlier MoveOn campaign, with social media linking people across geographic terrain through the dispersal of “news.” We feel involved, yet we can also passively consume this information, even by showing up with our own bodies, as I experienced at the Millions March in Oakland this past December. I stood with other concerned citizens listening as heart-wrenching stories were relayed over a microphone and calls to action were summoned; yet the experience was strangely disembodied. Is it that we are so overwhelmed with more stories of injustice that we simply cannot feel and digest them, or is it that the situation is not new but instead like so many others – unfair, devastating, frustrating? Outrage is called for, but I wonder if we might also need inspiration – perhaps a new movement aesthetic?

Throughout this article I have been valuing the perspective of a walker as dancer who unleashes the choreographic as a felt sense to thought as it takes form. The problems posed by the city might elicit new logics for reorganizing space as social relation. This operation I refer to as a kind of “choreographic thinking,” which includes both individual and collective action. Rarely is experience singularly focused, as experimental dance practice makes clear, for each individual in a dance, in a city, or in other kinds of civic engagement must manage both the personal and public realms. As Jacques Rancière notes, the movement of the political is found not in set structures but in unsettledness and a lack of consensus.<sup>21</sup> A certain tension is productive since pure compliance removes movement and thus politics from the equation. Randy Martin’s earlier mentioned notion of the social kinesthetic as a re-mapping of risk also makes this point. The question, as Martin insightfully puts it, is how can we move together but not as one?<sup>22</sup> How can we move without having to agree on one solution, instead occupying multiple small spaces—initially imperceptible gaps expanded into as a new social practice and kinesthetic? Further, how can walking as training allow more of the public to embody sensations, and move into and create these spaces?

Our current situation is both real and a rehearsal, for wrongful acts will happen again. Uncomfortable, life threatening, and unsustainable situations will continue to arise to be re-navigated, so we must learn skills to maneuver. Dis-

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<sup>20</sup> Anusha Kedhar, “Choreography and Gesture Play an Important Role in Protests,” *New York Times*, 15 December 2014. See also Kedhar, “‘Hands Up! Don’t Shoot!’: Gesture, Choreography, and Protest in Ferguson,” *The Feminist Wire*, 6 October 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics,” in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran, London: Bloomsbury, 2010: 27-44.

<sup>22</sup> Randy Martin, “Performing the Changing City: Public Space, Transformative Events and Creative Action in New York,” *Movement Research Studies Project*, 19 March 2013, <http://www.movementresearch.org/criticalcorrespondence/blog/?p=9813> (accessed 15 February 2015).

placement and de-centering characterize motion now, particularly for artists and others living at the margins of financial gain in urban centers. However, presently in urban centers such as New York and San Francisco, while some artists move outward where there is more space, others remain and move differently by performing not on known pathways but off the grid. Conceived as roaming entities that find available space to convene temporarily, collectives such as SALTA in Oakland and AUNTS in New York de-center dance performance by occupying affordable and eclectic venues ranging from people's homes to commercial spaces in transition, at which audiences gather to watch and socialize.<sup>25</sup> Such events practice a different economy where admission is often by donation of non-monetary items such as food and clothing, shared amongst the audience. Other events such as 8x8x8 in the Bay Area or Dance Now at Joe's Pub in New York make a small stage for dance in public gathering spaces like bars, where another economy already exists. A third strategy capitalizes on public spaces as civic opportunities to engage art. Companies that do so through site-specific work in the Bay Area include aerial dance companies Zaccho Dance Theater, Flyaway Productions, and Project Bandaloop, and on the ground projects like Kim Epifano's yearly Trolley Dances, where people are led on a walking and public transportation adventure to different dances staged throughout San Francisco.



L: Poster from Trisha Brown's *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*. Exhibit at Governor's Island, New York, summer 2014.

R: Project Bandaloop at the Mint Building, San Francisco, CA, fall 2010.  
Photos: M. Nicely

<sup>25</sup> See <http://www.saltadance.info/> and <http://www.auntsisdance.com/>

While these projects do not solve social problems, they do provide ways of making space where it is not apparent, and thus imparts some inspiration for imagining rather than merely passing through. André Lepecki writes that police activity today tells us to move along, “there’s nothing to see here,”<sup>24</sup> a kind of choreopolicing where bodies are kept in constant agitation. Lepecki then poses another kind of movement, a choreopolitics of the dancer who might transform spaces of circulation into spaces of freedom by training in such mobility. Training, however, is not just physical practice. It is a cognitive mapping and organizing of spaces and ideas to address the prompt at hand. Experimentation is not open-ended but rather builds its own logic by stepping into spaces that were not visible before. Brown’s *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* makes this point, as did the moon landing some years earlier. These walks completely rewrote the perspective on our position in the universe by opening spaces that were not previously visible but nonetheless available. The known was re-thought and re-organized by a choreographic prompt that acted both aesthetically and socially, bringing with it new sensations then actualized. Cities pose ongoing prompts that do not necessarily require spontaneous and intuitive reaction but rather a sustained training and attention so we can be present to crisis. Walking in the risk environment of today’s global economy and on-the-street reality is not a small thing. Getting lost in thought may now be a luxury. However, by attending to thinking in action as actively mapping the social, ideologies are practiced and adjusted to accommodate the present in ways that can shift our perspective on the problem at hand toward new ways of moving with it. So step outside. Take a walk. Find new pathways, temporary solutions, and new logics. Walking in the city is a mode of thinking and re-mapping that actively changes what the social is and can be.

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<sup>24</sup> André Lepecki, “Choreopolice and Choreopolitics: or, the Task of the Dancer,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 57, 4 (Winter 2013): 13-27.

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