Consider the notion of choreographic objects proposed by William Forsythe as: ‘an alternative site for the understanding of potential instigation and organization of action to reside’ (http://synchronousobjects.osu.edu/media/inside.php?p=essay). This concept suggests that all things that involve matter and space-time dynamics might become choreographic forms of thinking.

Frame the discussion via choreography, movement in space and time; the philosophical implications of perceiving motion. More recently, Andre Lepecki speaking of critical dance studies in Western dance, in his book, Exhausting dance: performance and the politics of movement (Routledge 2006), writes:

Any dance that probes and complicates how it comes into presence, and where it establishes its ground of being, suggests for critical dance studies the need to establish a renewed relationship with contemporary philosophy. … A philosophy that understands the body not as a closed entity but as an open and dynamic system of exchange, constantly producing modes of subjection and control, as well as of resistance and becoming.

There is now in dance performance a resistance to codified movement, the inevitability of motion directed towards narrative, to signification, to subjectivity. European dance, regarding stylized movement, and choreographed art is condemned as at a representational dead end, productive only ever of the same, with a reproduction of forms that cannot shift perception or movement itself. Stillness is proposed as one alternative, a kind of slow plasticity of the body being allowed to resist co-option. Gesture is also usually regarded as codified, socialized, producing signifying recognizable social signs, even prescribing gender or race. There is therefore an emphasis on conceptual dance that slows and even stops time, and resists the organization of bodies into stylization, or hierarchies of representation.

This might further be extended by taking note of Lefebvre’s distinction in Rhythmmanalysis (Continuum 2004) between eurhythmia and arrhythmia:

The body consists of a bundle of rhythms, different but in tune. It is not only in music that one produces perfect harmonies … what is certain is that harmony sometimes (often) exists: eurhythmia. The eu-rhythmic body, composed of diverse rhythms—each organ, each function, having its own—keeps them in metastable equilibrium, which is always understood, often recovered, with the exception of disturbances (arrhythmia) that sooner or later become illness (the pathological state). But the surroundings of bodies, be they in nature or a social setting are also bundles, bouquets, garlands of rhythms, to which it is necessary to listen in order to grasp the natural or produced ensembles. (p. 20)

With this idea of produced ensembles and an arrhythmia that shows a disturbance of rhythm, let us conduct a rhythmanalysis of the film: to watch how the body parts are deployed, the types of persons being moved, the framing of the situation, the focus of attention for the spectator, the affect they have upon our perception and our sense of the individual body or the group, the frame—the floor as writing, the social sphere and organization, and the rhythm of the projector, its segmentation of time as counterpoint to the other formation of time in the bodies, that would otherwise be socialized, conducted according to the rules of contemporary corporeal stylization.

Six things to comment upon:

Koester himself draws attention to the history of choreomanias, dance possession—St Vitus’s dance, which became codified as the tarantella, a dance form in southern Italy. Its infectious rhythmic structure, 6/8 timing, speeds up in response to the music, with a leaping, springing through the feet.
Contemporary neuropsychology can map pre-conscious propulsion, a motor activity not controlled by the cortex, yet stimulated by impulses that are convulsive, frenetic etc., a desire to release inhibition. This imagery resembles epileptic brain-patterning, erratic, black and white graphic representations of states of mind.

Gesture becomes gesticulation, flagellation, a kind of repetitive non-signifying physicality. It has however a series of patternings in each of the segments of the film, and there are beginnings and endings to each elaboration of gestures ‘in extremis’, at the extremes of the body, such as fingertips flicking.

In Belgium in particular, a centre for contemporary choreography, led by the presence of PARTS, a major dance school, and the convergence there of many artists of different nationalities who can choreograph and work together, including musicians and visual artists, designers, computer artists etc. Ballets C de la B, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and others are making work that complicates the definition of dance, by changing its phenomenology, from one of cognition to one of participatory affect. The spectator finds herself in a state of not-knowing what it is that they are witnessing or watching.

Belgium is also a fractured state, no parliament, two conflicted languages spoken, and a European Union that produces diversity under tension.

The structure of the piece is in six exercises—what Koester calls ‘games’ with rules, thus playing back upon the rule-based matrixed performance of 1970s postmodern dance in New York. The games allow for a set of instructions that don’t prescribe the duration, or the shape of an action but allow for all the players to work with the limits of their own interpretation of the instruction. When I watch this video, I might try to imagine what the instructions the dancers have been given are. I don’t think the instructions are altogether literal in the sense of describing what they should do as much postmodern dance did but rather that they might more likely be working with what is a poetic image, such as is given in Butoh or the choreography of Deborah Hay, in which something unfamiliar is being imagined. For instance, it might be in one sequence that the dancers are told to imagine that there is a creature crawling between their shoulder blades and that if they can only shake if off it will not be able to seize them and strangle them.

The figures in the video are trained dancers. I notice that they know how to stay upright and when to stop—that is their training, which would be slightly different from those who were untrained, for whom these gesticulations would become more like a kind of possession of their nervous system attacking their corporeal function, perhaps tipping them off balance.

The sequences also ask us to look in different ways at the effects of ‘possession’—in one sequence we see only the circle of feet staring at a man who is writhing on the floor, we watch the scratch marks on the black surface and hear more acutely the rattling of the projector. After other events have shown us these bodies all shaking, the solitary body being watched has a kind of violence to it, which suggests his humanity is under scrutiny. Do we watch the epileptic or the dying man in this way?

Koester’s project therefore, I would suggest, presents a rhythmanalysis for the twenty-first century and is not a reproduction of a ritualized dance form, although the ritualizing of social deviance is certainly of interest in Tarantism. Ending with reflections from Lefebvre:

> The rhythmanalyst could, in the long term, attempt something analogous: works (œuvres) might return to and intervene in the everyday. Without claiming to change life, but by fully reinstating the sensible in consciousness and in thought, he would accomplish a tiny part of the revolutionary transformation of this world and this society in decline. Without any declared political position. (p. 26)

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