A Dancing Body Offers Legitimacy to the State

Ido Feder & Shir Hacham

One of the key endeavours of the Zionist movement right from the start was to constitute a new body for the new Jew. To have a land and nation of one's own, one must also claim a real body – national, ethnic, religious, and civic – as well as a corporeal body that could sense and make sense of its environment. In a word, the Zionist movement for the constitution of a Jewish nation-state depended on the reification of its national body. This desired body would no longer be "sheep at the slaughterhouse", as the Jewish people were in the hands of the Nazi regime, nor would it revert to the "spiritual people of the Holy Scripture", who, due to excessive study, ended up with a neglected physique. The new Israeli, the future Sabra, the Israeli-born Jew, would be thorny like the desert planet (Almog 2000), work the land, be pioneer and warrior.

Over the years, Israeli art and various academic disciplines, such as sociology, art history, political science, cultural studies, etc., have all extensively sought to describe the new Israeli citizen and the creation of the new Israeli body politic. These scholarly attempts have tried to understand the general act of *fabricating* culture, in which the incipient nation had to partake. As such, an enquiry into dance in Israel might shed light on the embodiment processes of the fabulatory machine that worked hard to produce a new Israeli ethos. Israeli poetry revived and reinvented the Hebrew language (Harshav 1990); architecture envisioned a land serving its geopolitical needs by redistributing population and space (Segal *et al*. 2003); and dance investigated an authentic dancing body that could reveal something about the constitution of the new body of the new Jew. Moreover, this quest on the part of the local dance community didn't develop from an existing Israeli folklore, as was the case in European cultures, because there was no *folk* present at hand, and thus no folklore that could be historically useful for nation-building. The only available cultural, linguistic, and contextual sources were (1) the Biblical Jewish kingdom that had existed 3,000 years ago and (2) the more recent Jewish identity, rooted in the Diaspora, exile, and dispersed bodies. The Biblical stories were indeed

often used in the arts but only to support Israel's claim of legitimacy over the land and were not a solid foundation for the new Jewish identity. The exiled identity, of course, was condemned to erasure, as it couldn't serve the aspirations of Jewish nationalism to appear as autonomous, strong, and free, but instead was a constant reminder of Jewish suffering and misfortune. And so, this new folk had to be summoned and interpellated from vast spatial and temporal distances, whilst at the same time engaging in an actual process of embodiment in constructing "Israeli Jewishness". Using different techniques of fabulation, including dance, the Jewish nation was now posited as a new nation of an old people, with timeless and divine legitimacy that would now, finally, become a fact in and of the region.

The unique body of Zionism, asserting this new national presence in the region, had to access other sources, which would no longer be associated with the Babylonian Captivity. Hence, Western theatrical dance was co-opted and recruited for the sake of promoting the new, tenacious, and creative body that Israeli dance aspired to develop. Right from the start, various dance makers who had heeded the Zionist call and immigrated to Palestine were artistically and intellectually curious about the ability of dance to constitute a "true" or "authentic" body for the future state of Israel. These modernist dance makers, most of whom were inspired by German expressionist dance, believed in the power of dance to unveil and constitute a legitimate and ideal body that would not just represent, but also manifest their Zionist-socialist ideological dream. Naturally, these explorations were quickly adopted by the nationalist agenda, which happily used dance as a tool in the competition for visibility, legitimacy, and the public and social demonstration of power that engulfed the region under the British Mandate. For example, the work of Baruch Agadati, then a young dance maker and visual artist, notorious for his Purim balls in Tel Aviv, which he organised as part of his artistic explorations, was loyally adopted by the Jewish leadership. Thus, what had begun in 1912 as Hebrew Bacchanalia, ended up in 1928 as a nationalist parade under the title of "Ten Years for the National Home".[1]

This nationalist affirmation of dance kept developing and thus today, in 2013, we may say that the Israeli state warmly accepts dance. The Israeli Ministry of Culture unequivocally states in their various publications that Israel is an "empire of dance".[2] Yet, unfortunately, recent history has repeatedly demonstrated that besides being an "empire of dance", Israel is an exemplary militaristic society – as empires tend to be. Thus, to read Israeli dance in

---

[1] For more on Agadati's Purim balls and early Tel Aviv in general, see Gross 2009.

[2] http://www.mcs.gov.il/Culture/activities/Dance/Pages/about.aspx (Hebrew) – accessed in October 2013.

isolation from its militaristic environment would be a misconception. This is because the "dancing body" and the "body in combat" are not two different entities, but rather one and the same, simultaneously fighting a war for legitimacy and dancing for presence and visibility. Moreover, we hope to show that both practices serve the same ontological and political mission of being and producing a valid and legitimate embodied nation in the region. In other words, seizing land by means of war, occupation, and conquest was and still is a constant task for the new Jew and thus an inseparable component of the national imagination, still present in all its endeavours. But Israeli culture continues to deny its legitimacy problem: mainstream political discourse forcefully rejects the colonialist tradition and history that gave birth to the Israeli state and its constant oppression of Palestine. Due to this denial, the hegemonic forces in Israel produce and emphasise various and competing arguments to shore up Israel's legitimacy and account for its actions, such as the "security threat" or its dubious claims on ancient Biblical land, when trying to justify the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, ongoing since 1967.

As such, these two embodied practices – dance and war – are not opposed, but in fact compatible and parallel in their concerted efforts. They reveal that the political and ontological issues encountered by the Zionist movement are in fact one and that the game of legitimacy and presence reveals the act of invention that became a fact in the region. Thus, the important questions for us would be the following: how to understand Israeli dance if it transpires from the same desire as the combat body? What discourses are chosen (and why) in the Israeli dance field that contribute to the struggle for presence in the region? And what is it in dance that can reinforce the legitimacy of the Israeli national body to such an extent that the state so eagerly adopts it?

As mentioned before, Israeli dance didn't grow out of an existing local tradition. Of course, there were many attempts to use local Arabic and Levantine influences, but these were ultimately rejected by the European project that was the ideological and cultural basis of Zionism.[3] Those attempts were branded as "folklore" and were thus expelled from the high art of Israeli dance. In other words, they retain something of the "local" or some traits of Israel's hybrid identity and thus are not regarded as real artistic creations that might postulate a new body. A "genuine" Israeli dancing body shouldn't be just a "melting pot" of the

---

[3] Israel and the Zionist movement have a rich history of orientalism, as even within the Jewish population there is a major ethnic hierarchy between Jews of European and those of non-European descent. For further information, see Khazzoom 2003.

identities and signs of its many ethnicities; moreover, this kind of mixture was dismissed as ontologically and ethnically inferior despite the official government doctrine of assimilating all Jewish immigrants. By contrast, the dancing body was considered apt to provide the nation with an *origin* to all of the above, since it was neither a depiction of the "local savage", nor could it qualify as foreign or colonialist.

Thus the Western dance canon was a fertile material and ground for this procedure, as it was perceived as an already global, universal, and expressive language, identified with the superior West and supposedly offering a legitimate meta-language that was well suited to the ongoing national fabulation of Israel. Israeli dance instrumentalised this attribute of Western dance – universality – to support the desire to fight the war for originality and survival in the region. If war meant the actual competence to erase the enemy, then dance contributed to this mission with the universal syntax of modern and classical dance. In that sense, war was the unconscious of the Israeli dancer, as this struggle for acquiring the sensibility of a dancing body was aligned with the struggle to fulfil the universal call of Zionism. Nowadays, just like the State of Israel continues to invest efforts and funds in bringing the Jews "back home" (the process known as *Aliya*, which literally means "ascending"), distinguished Israeli dance companies such as Vertigo and Kibbutz are also contributing by offering scholarships to Jewish dancers from all over the world to participate in their educational programmes.[4] As we can see, the dancing body delivers a legitimate position to the national body in its struggle for factual existence and moral, social, and historical survival.

In local dance history, aesthetics, and discourse, legitimacy was attributed to the dancing body by claiming it to be *original*. We believe that this mission was in some respects accomplished when Ohad Naharin took over the leadership of the Batsheva Dance Company in 1990. Naharin's work, international recognition, and artistic development in the company led Israeli dance to success, as proclaimed by the Ministry of Culture. Additionally, the Batsheva Dance Company has proved to be one of the most lucrative cultural organisations in Israel. Despite the State's ridiculously low budget for the arts (about 0.2% of the total budget) and especially the absurdly small percentage that dance receives out of that modest sum – Naharin has revived the interest in dance in Israel, which has experienced an unprecedented increase in its audience reach. Financially, Batsheva is the most successful company in Israel, as it attracts the greatest number of viewers and receives high revenues from ticket sales, as

---

[4] See: http://www.masaisrael.org/programs/vertigo–dance–company and
http://www.masaisrael.org/programs/dance–journey – accessed in October 2013.

well as private donations, state support for performances in Israel and abroad, etc.[5] Moreover, it seems that the winning ethos of dance in Israel appeared fully only in Naharin's project. The idea was and still is that the Israeli dancing body is an entity that transcends both the present and the past; in other words, a universal body that isn't contingent on the local historical situation of Israel, but instead channels the *facticity of being a body prior to anything else.*

In other words, dance served as a tool for instilling *originality* into the national body. And indeed, Israeli dance history shows us that a recurrent notion was its quest for the original "Israeli dancer" and not just any dancer in Israel. The mission was to prove the ontological legitimacy of the attribute of "Israeli" by means of a specific way of understanding movement, which the practice of dance offered. As such, the dancing body systematically erased the hybrid mixture of identities, signs, and conditions that it had to endure. It was finally completed in a total act of the creation – fabrication and purification – of a new dancing body, uniquely identifiable as "Israeli" both inside Israel and abroad, and singularly branded as "made in Israel". A systematic genealogy of this procedure would exceed the scope of this text. Instead, we shall give an indication of it and then focus on Naharin's more recent work, as it reveals the brand's trademark features.

When Naharin joined the Batsheva Dance Company, it was already the most prominent actor in the Israeli dance field. At the time, Batsheva was a repertoire company and had no key choreographic figures directing it. Moreover, this was in line with the conception of its British founder, Baroness Batsheva de Rothschild, for whom "the idea was to start with dancers, not with choreographers" (Gluck 2006, p?). As mentioned earlier, the mission was to find and brand the new Israeli dancer, in order to posit and show the world the capability and presence of the new Israeli body. But Naharin was first and foremost a choreographer, thus his contribution to Israeli dance history took the "tradition of dancers" a step further, despite being a direct result of it. Naharin became a reference point for a kind of completion, national and artistic success of Israeli dance, as he found a way to *instil the desired originality* into the dancing body, yet he did so by tapping into the universal values of Western theatre dance, used as a line of flight from the everyday hardships of living in what very soon became a

---

[5] According to the Israeli cultural research institute Pilat. These reports, commissioned by the Ministry of Culture, contain data for the entire cultural field in Israel. The data regarding dance in 2011 are available at http://www.pilat.co.il/download/tarbut/mahol2011.pdf (Hebrew) – accessed in October 2013.

"two-faced" regime: democracy and occupation between the Mediterranean Sea and River Jordan (Azoulay and Ophir 2008).

Paradoxically, Naharin himself is a proclaimed critic of the Israeli regime. For example, after winning the Israel Prize, the highest honour bestowed on citizens of Israel, he rushed to criticise the Israeli occupation in an interview for a Canadian newspaper.[6] In a broader sociological perspective, one should mention that Naharin is a Sabra, born in the 1950s, and belongs to a generation that was brought up to actualise their immigrant parents' dream. In fact, Naharin and his peers were the bodies that Zionism aspired to produce. Himself, Naharin is a success story: a young, handsome, heterosexual soldier turned dancer, in other words, a subject who has attained the ideal of both combat and dancing in one and the same body. But in fact, his generation was also the first to criticise the Israeli regime, especially after the 1973 war and the rising awareness of the Israeli occupation that had begun in 1967. Naharin's generation also initiated various Zionist leftist movements, such as Peace Now, which combine the general belief in the right of Israel to exist with self-criticism and an aspiration to lead the region towards stability and peace. Nonetheless, a number of scholars have shown that this traumatic and personal experience of war has been mostly normalised by those very same subjects, who are subordinate agents of society (e.g. Lomsky & Feder 2004), which means that the ideological necessities of the state persist and usually get the upper hand. Naharin's choreographic act is deeply rooted in his "generational story", as his work has a similar ability to criticise the endless variations of militant bodies around him by celebrating the individual body. But at the same time, an individual's critical act still ends up neutralising itself, precisely because "war is the unconscious of dance" and the act ultimately normalises the body, in this case the "original body", so desired by the state.

When Naharin joined Batsheva, he was not content with the "Israeli Dancer" brand, able to perform the best of the Western neoclassical tradition. He wanted to do original work and so trained the "Israeli Dancer" to be self-reflective and construct original choreographies and not just perform them, but in order to accomplish that, he had to strip the dancers' bodies of their nationalist uniforms. One of his early notable works, *Kyr* (1990), included a section in which a big group of dancers were sitting in a semi-circle and singing the most famous Passover song,[7] whilst taking their army uniforms off. Naharin thus made the unconscious of dance –

---

[6] http://www.kibush.co.il/show_file.asp?num=3808 – accessed in October 2013.

[7] The most celebrated religious Jewish holiday, well-incorporated into the mythology of the state, as it commemorates the Exodus, the ancient Jewish people's transition from slavery in Egypt to freedom in Canaan.

war – conscious, professing a need to cleanse the body of militarism. Another famous early piece by Naharin was *Tabula Rasa,* described by *The New York Times* as follows: "'Tabula Rasa' radiates a general sense of loss" (Kisselgoff 1987), possibly revealing Naharin's belief in, and desire for, establishing a body cleansed of all signs. Yet, Naharin's actions were not as intentional as they may seem and the demilitarisation proclaimed in his work actually seems to be continuing the involvement of dance as a discipline in the fabulation of the national body. *Tabula Rasa*, literally meaning "a blank slate", is a naming that reveals the constitution of the desired dancing body, perfecting the ability of dance to erase certain features of the body in order for another, "truer" and universal body to appear. As a result, this constant erasure provides the state with a body that is cleansed from its moral and political responsibilities, as well as from its present difficulties. In other words, Naharin's work has mastered the obsession with the real and the ability of dance to perform it. His work, heavily reliant on his experiences of American modernist and European neoclassical dance, such as the work of Martha Graham, Maurice Béjart, and Jiří Kylián, showed that his bodies could easily traverse and reinterpret this existing knowledge, but most of all, they simulated the presence of the *origin* of this knowledge. That is why at first the Batsheva Dance Company under Naharin continued to perform its international repertory, with its dancers known for their "smooth Israeli" style of performing the technical feats of neoclassicism. Yet Naharin used the language of dance to demonstrate his ability to transcend it and posit the Israeli dancing body as a primordial fact, able to shed militarism as it reinterprets the contemporary language of dance.

These procedures appear in a more methodical and elaborate way in his later choreographic works, as well as in *Gaga*, his dance technique and language. In our view, his work is an ongoing process of de-subjectification and de-signification, which culminated in *Gaga*. Naharin's set of movement coordinates serves as a vehicle for positing both the "truth" of dance and the end of the war, by positing "war" not as an aggressive bodily fight for life and death that requires the destruction of the enemy, but as a perpetual state of a passionate ethos of movement, directed toward a state of a declared original presence and an endless economy of pleasures. This process can be called a *demilitarisation* of the Jewish militant body, because it downplays Israeli militaristic significations (which Naharin perceives as "rough" or "vulgar"),[8] but in fact, its a-historicity suggests that the war has been won and that the

---

[8] http://e.walla.co.il/?w=/274/1775822 [Hebrew] – accessed in October 2013.

Israeli body is alive, well, and in control – a new prominent fact in the region. His criticism and demilitarisation are meaningful and revealing of many endeavours to come, but they also fully articulate the ability of dance to offer its body and nation the legitimacy of *being a fact in the world*. Dance offers something much more useful than the Zionist melting pot doctrine, because the dancing body somehow keeps the truth – its being a fact – of the new body, and therefore ensures that it's not hybridised, but instead *instils originality into it.*

Gaga's website defines it as follows: "The language of Gaga originated from the belief in the healing, dynamic, ever-changing power of movement".[9] It's professed as a new and contemporary language of movement that, according to Naharin, should stand on its own, that is, detached from his authorship, which is why he named it "Gaga" and not, for example, "Naharin". Supposedly, "Gaga" means nothing, it's gibberish, yet its euphony alludes to a newborn baby, who is only able to say: "ga ga…", a kind of mumble. Famously, a decade ago, when Batsheva performed a piece by Mats Ek, Naharin declared that from then on, the Batsveha dancers would use *Gaga* as their everyday practice, to prepare their bodies for work *in lieu* of classical ballet training. In a diplomatic concession to Ek, he allowed his dancers to take one ballet class a week, but now, *Gaga* is the company's only training practice. Over time, *Gaga* has grown articulate enough to address the general public as well and *Gaga* classes are now taught on a daily basis to dancers and non-dancers in Tel Aviv and around the world. The dissemination of this knowledge resembles a franchise, as only Naharin may authorise new teachers.

A typical *Gaga* class lasts for an hour, during which the participants are randomly scattered in space; they never stop moving, performing from a wide range of guidelines. Oddly enough, *Gaga* is based on instructions that invoke images about how to deal with the body's economy, investment of energy, simulation of textures and states of matter, and not with aesthetic shapes or visibility (mirrors, for example, are not allowed in *Gaga* classes or the Batsheva Dance Studios). But, in fact, when we look at an average Batsheva *Gaga*-trained dancer, we can easily identify a specific figure. For example, some recognisable features include the following: the arms are always floating and never drop; the body is never engaged in a penetrating touch with another body; the floor is hardly ever accessed. The reason for this generic resemblance is the most important ontological trait of *Gaga* – its constant invitation to engage in a *potential state of self-sensing*. Thus, *Gaga* leaves you pondering

---

[9] https://www.facebook.com/gagapeoplecom – accessed in October 2013.

whether its purported discovery of the original dancing body is just yet another romanticising claim of Western dance.

Naharin himself offered a hint at a press conference before the première of one of his recent pieces, which he named *Hora* (2009) after the eponymous Israeli national folk dance. Naharin said: "*Hora* unfolds several points of reference… the rhythm and inner logic of the piece invite us to view them as a sequence of climaxes without low points between them".[10] Obviously, there is no such thing as "a sequence of climaxes without low points between them", since there cannot be climaxes without low points in between and vice versa. Hence Naharin's statement indicates the illusion that the body he is manufacturing is meant to create and that this illusion is in fact the Israeli national folk dance. It demonstrates the denial of any kind of "low" points, including the economies of inflicting pain, displeasure, and the disfiguring of the body, and it is only interested in proclaiming the euphoria of its own success.

Moreover, Naharin's statement is a perfect description of the *Gaga* language and what it offers its practitioners: "a sequence of climaxes without low points between them". In a *Gaga* class, participants are not instructed to make any shapes with their bodies, nor is there a declared hierarchy of privileging one movement over another. Yet, watching or participating in a *Gaga* class, one easily recognises the way one uses a fourth position, how one attempts an arabesque, and that when the teacher says "Lana", it means "centre" (as part of Naharin's wholesale attempt to re-coin popular dance phrases). *Gaga* claims to consist not of a system of positions, like ballet, but of non-hierarchical sequences of movements, climaxes, and original libidinal impulses. Therefore, the fundamental principle of *Gaga* is shapelessness. Or maybe it's simply not a language, but a dialect or accent of what dance "as such" supposedly is.

In general, a *Gaga* class does not instruct the body to assume any particular positions, but uses metaphors instead, such as "imagine your spine as a snake" or "bathe in honey" (preferred metaphors in many *Gaga* classes). The image guides the body until it reaches a suitable manifestation of it. *Gaga* inhabits a region of heightened frequencies of pleasure and effort: from the excess of sensual pleasure to the suspension and gentleness of a hand rocking a cradle. All is accepted if the instruction "Enjoy!" is followed. That is why *Gaga*'s formlessness creates a type of expression that can carry contradictions by delimiting them, as

---

[10] http://www.mouse.co.il/CM.articles_item,698,209,34860,.aspx [Hebrew] – accessed in October 2013.

the body is by no means obliged to make any sense whatsoever, but simply celebrates the alleged primacy of sensation. As such, it pretends to be indifferent to any signs that it may wear, or, to put it in even stronger terms, signs are perceived as stains that blur the visibility of the body and render it opaque. *Gaga*'s constant disavowal of any kind of signification, which was initially set in motion to fight what Naharin calls "vulgarity", makes sure there are no signs at all, especially not military signs or any other questionable moral or personal signs that would attest to a failure or error in the body machine's investment of energy.

That is why *Gaga* embraces a New Age philosophy of life, a kind of illogical naturalism advertised around the world as selling a more "fun" morning class to professional dance companies, or as a way for more and more people to gain access to the potential of "winning" life by enjoying the moving body, rather than engaging it in critical thinking. In our view, this "Israeli way to move" brand is another sublimation of the unconscious of war, as it engages in an unconscious denial of war, instead of deliberating or dancing the legitimacy of war or lack thereof. And yet, Naharin wasn't the only one: the 2000s, when Naharin started using the term "Gaga", saw the beginning of the collapse of the Zionist Left's ideological meta-structure, in which it had subsisted for almost 40 years, following a wave of hopelessness that struck the nation after the assassination of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and the supposed failure of the Oslo Accords. Its set of basic principles (the belief in the right of the Jewish state to exist but also in its ability to criticise itself) couldn't stand its spectacular failure in the outbreak of the Second Palestinian Intifada (the Palestinian term for "resistance" or "uprising"), which saw unprecedented levels of violence on both sides. In those days, the phrase "no partner for negotiations" was coined to describe Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority. Besides, since the early 1990s, the Israeli society has undergone an accelerated process of privatisation and individuation, and neoliberal capitalism was already blossoming in what was once a unified socialist-oriented state. In this cultural and social climate, Naharin's work increasingly turned to the self, slowly closing on itself, as it was predicated on a body that simply couldn't bear its contradictory existence. But instead of engaging in resistance and criticism, this body preferred to escape and deny its existence. It seems as if Naharin's project was conceived simply to exit the society that had given birth to it, as though it could somehow boycott the culture by denouncing it as "vulgar". Under Naharin, the Batsheva Dance Company turned into a small enclave set up to keep the "roughness" of the outside world at bay, whereas it ended up keeping at bay the roughness of its suffering

bodies, dreams, hopes, and thoughts of change and resistance, and appropriated individualistic, and New Age discourses that suppressed those bodies even further.

There is another site of embodied activity where the maximum presence of the body remains close to the sensibility of pleasure, and that is sex. Therefore, it is no surprise that Naharin asks his dancers to connect to their sexual energy, to "activate" that source when dancing. Extracting movement from such boundless and instinctive forces allows him to create a kind of dancing that is free from the limitations of external time and place, just as it is free from gender specificities and political dogmas, bound only to the "fact of life" and authority of the libido, which allows procreation and pleasure to reside in a single gesture. This is a dance that is not inhabited by "one thought", because it seeks to harvest the potential of every thought, every time, and every place, as they appear by the mere fact of having a sensual yet generic sexual body.

Finally, *Gaga* has created a body that carries a somewhat sterile universality, since it shows no affinity for, or commitment to, any particular, historical, or actual events. In short, it strives to capture "eventality", being-in-event, which has no reference and even renounces any need for reference.[11] Trying to force any sort of thinking on *Gaga* or provide an explanation for its appearance would be considered foolish, naïve, or heretical. This innate liquefaction of sense and refusal of historicity are *Gaga*'s most important characteristics, as they inform its subversion of dance tradition, tapping into the *facticity of the body*. That's why *Gaga* heralds a kind of capitalist New Age, but in a very literal sense: an ever "new" age of a body that denies neither the past nor the future, but is simply not determined or limited by them and takes part in a kind of eternal present, in a *presencing*.

Nevertheless, lately, Naharin has immersed himself in more concrete "New Age" references, calling *Gaga*'s basic set of values "a universal ethics" – clean, "Green energy", availability. Those values are a product of his wish to detach himself from 20th-century languages of movement and, in a way, to "resolve" their problems. Shapelessness within shapes is supposed to counter the ruthless discipline of bodies "in shape". Imagination ("imagine your spine as a snake") is supposed to fight the mechanistic outlook of dance technique, and so on. And yet, *Gaga* only appears in the thin context of its self-sensing, which aims to be a

---

[11] We are thinking here with Alain Badiou's concept of *event* – a historical sequence that states a universal truth and redefines the structure of being *qua* being. See Badiou 2005. Contrary to this conception, we see *Gaga* not as an event, but only as "evental", because it's only a simulation of being in a constant "event"; as such, it doesn't allow a real event to appear.

platform for the origin of all reflexivity, but is in fact locked in a pre-reflexive mode of being. Maybe it is no accident that as soon as Naharin completed his formulation of *Gaga*, the company almost stopped performing pieces by other choreographers and focused almost exclusively on works by Naharin and his *protégée*, Sharon Eyal.[12]

In other words, the *Gaga* body denies the recognition of others, as it offers an individuating event before encountering any other events. As such, the *Gaga* body is a signature of being a fact, an original piece of knowledge made in Israel, but at the same time, it is a *fact that closes upon itself*. We are not saying that Naharin doesn't touch on social reality in his work, but that the vanity of his bodies, the concept of *Gaga*, becomes a fertile soil for delineating sense and erasing others, which is so desired by the Israeli state. In the contrasted political situation of Israel, and with a great will not only to criticise the politics of the state, but also to dance his way through a demilitarisation and exhibition of liberated bodies, Naharin has embarked on a journey of constant and unparalleled transcendence: first, out of the crude physical existence of the Jewish militant body and then, from the historical contingency of any particular performance.

Still, at the end of the day, this machine is burdened with the closure of its own self-referentiality. In other words, its endless self-affecting presence affirms the body as a fact and not as a being-in-the-world; as the substructure that sustains autonomy, but not as a ruptured self. His inability to bear a problematic reality led Naharin to engender a body prone to celebrate its own victory of silence, as he designs a pleasurable dance that denies the world around it. This version of the body can then easily be submitted to different kinds of rhetoric and propaganda, endless cultural hermeneutics, and finally to the branding of "Israeli Dance". Nonetheless, Naharin's invention, this alleged regime of self-sensation, still has an ethical impulse beating in it: it aims for a state of pure potentiality to be whatever ("you are a tiger"), which Naharin perceives as a total emancipation from the law of discipline and technique of dance, and ultimately identifies moving with living. That's why *Gaga* is a specimen of vitalist ethics and a way of life, but one that has lost its historical coordinates and is deeply uninterested in its outside.

---

[12] Sharon Eyal was Naharin's "muse" for many years, as she danced in the company from the beginning. Later on, she was made the company's in-house choreographer. Recently, she has won international success and famously left the Batsheva Dance Company and established her own, L-E-V. However, she still associates herself with Gaga practice, e.g. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rsebh20mdk – accessed in October 2013.

Therefore, *Gaga* is still closely tied to the conception of the Israeli body as morally justified and free and in that sense it's like an ex-territorial utopia that has lost its need to make sense and touch history, similarly to the post-Zionist Left today that resonates with the crisis of the Left everywhere. This "baby" body that *Gaga* nourishes remains in the good service of all the earthly forces around it, which appropriate it so they can unburden themselves from critical thought and ultimately declare Israel an "empire of dance". However, we see *Gaga* as a (golden) cage of *original facticity*, which has allowed it the false luxury of announcing itself as a universal truth. *Gaga*'s escapist route confirms that war is the unconscious of Israeli dance, as *Gaga* complies with and reaffirms the state politics of Israel.

Works Cited:

Azoulay, Ariella and Adi Ophir. *The One-state Condition: Occupation and Democracy in Israel/Palestine*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012

Badiou, Alain. *Being and Event,* London: Continuum, 2005

Gluck, Rina. *The Batsheva Dance Company, 1964–1980: A Personal Story,* Tel Aviv: Carmel, 2006 [Hebrew]

Gross, Yaacov (dir.). *Legend in the Dunes,* film, Jerusalem: The Spielberg Archive, 2009

Harshav, Benjamin. *Language in Time of Revolution*, Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993

Khazzoom, Aziza. "The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management, and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel". *American Sociological Review* 68/4, 2003, pp. 481–510

Kisselgoff, Anna. "Dance: Ohad Naharin and Company". *The New York Times*, 11 January 1987, http://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/11/arts/dance-ohad-naharin-and-company.html (24 October 2013)

Lomsky-Feder, Edna. "Life Stories, War and Veterans: On the Social Distribution of Memories". *Ethos* 32/1, 2004, pp. 1–28

Oz, Almog. *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000

Segal, Rafi and Eyal Weizman (eds.). *A Civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israeli Architecture*, London: Verso, 2003