Dancing Human Rights: Politics in *Archive*

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Abstract

In his solo work *Archive*, Israeli choreographer Arkadi Zaides provides a physical and choreographic interpretation of footage collected by the Israeli humanitarian group B'Tselem as part of its "Camera Project" initiative. Arkadi Zaides conducts a self-analysis of the modern Israeli body by extracting, imitating, and repeating this material. As isolated choreographic material, the gestures reform in an ongoing act of abstraction: as a critical pointing at absence, they defy any metaphysics of presence, activating an archive of gestures, focusing on the aesthetic and political potential for the disappearance, pausing poses and positions — literal and figurative, ambiguous positions. Here, deconstruction techniques call into question the linearity of a history's causes and effects. This paper will discuss the synthesis of the following questions to illuminate the methodology and political impact of Zaides' Archive. How does the duality of *Archive* help it to serve as a tool for criticising Israeli society? How does the implementation of Zaides' forms of expression and dance techniques change the role of the Israeli people in Israeli-Palestinian conflicts? To what extent does Archive engage with real politics, both locally and globally?

Keywords: dance, human rights, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, social identity

In his solo work Archive (Archive, Concept, Choreography, and Interpretation: Arkadi Zaides, 2014), Israeli choreographer Arkadi Zaides provides a physical and choreographic interpretation of footage gathered by the Israeli humanitarian group B'Tselem as part of its "Camera Project" initiative. B'Tselem's full English name is "The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories." This organization aims to record the actions that violate human rights in the occupied territories to educate the Israeli public and policymakers, combat the phenomenon of denial prevalent in the Israeli public, and help create a human rights culture in Israel (About b'Tselem | B'tselem, 1989). By observing human rights violations by Israelis recorded by Palestinians, Zaides mimics the physical and vocal gestures of the aggressors, such as throwing stones, scattering sheep, destroying olive branches, and verbal and physical intimidation, and conducts a self-analysis of the modern Israeli body by extracting, imitating, and repeating these materials. Here, deconstruction techniques call into question the linearity of a history's causes and effects. Beyond neoliberal openness, choreographic opacity becomes a call for withdrawal, subtlety, shadow, and vanishing. This paper will discuss a synthesis of the following questions to illuminate the methodology and political impact of Zaides' Archive. How does the duality of the *Archive* help it to serve as a tool to criticize Israeli society? How do Zaides' forms of expression and implementations of dancing techniques switch the role of the Israeli people in Israeli-Palestinian conflicts? To what extent does Archive involve real politics locally and globally?

The duality of the *Archive* makes its criticism of human rights abuses in Israel more powerful. Before officially starting his performance, Zaides rejected all possible metaphors and symbolic and abstract interpretations of the work by making a very clear self-introduction and artist's statement about the video:

My name is Arkadi Zaides. I am a choreographer. I am Israeli. For the last fifteen years, I have been living in Tel Aviv. The West Bank is twenty kilometers away from Tel Aviv. The materials you are about to watch were filmed

in the West Bank. All the people you will see in these clips are Israeli, like me (Archive, Concept, Choreography, and Interpretation: Arkadi Zaides, 2014).

Zaides revealed his social identity to the audience through this introduction, letting the audience know that the body we see in no way embodies a character; neither is it a gestural symbol or emblem (Frédéric Pouillaude, 2016).[1] This clarified that the dancer did not play a role or represent anyone else, so audiences were initially forbidden from interpreting Zaides as a microcosm of the collective. Zaides himself, an Israeli dancer, was expected to imitate the movements of the characters in the video. Moreover, by introducing the people who will be featured in the video are all Israelis like himself, Zaides reaffirms the authenticity of the dance Archive and avoids the audience's misinterpretation of his dance. This act also has a political significance, that is, as an Israeli, he is about to criticize his own society. In his interview, Zaides states, "In doing so, I am trying to reflect on the society I belong to and by that on my position in this situation (Archive Interview with Arkadi Zaides, 2014)."[2]

Before each dance performance, the original recorded video will be played first, and then the file serial number of the video, the name of the camera crew, the date, the location of the recording, and a short description of the scene will be shown on the screen on the left side. This information once again strengthens the audience's recognition of the authenticity of Archive and prevents the audience from misunderstanding these images. In other words, that information minimizes the possibility of unrealistic interpretation of the videos by the audience. Zaides intends to convey a message that the images were real events that took place in the real world, which were recorded by unprofessional Palestinian photographers. As to whether these videos are symbols of oppression, violence, and human rights violations, it is up to the audience to interpret and reflect for themselves. This is the duality of the Archive: its co-occurring authenticity and vagueness. Zaides, as a choreographer, does not contribute any meaning or any interpretation of his own. Zaides just imitate the Israeli aggressor and lets the audience experience the Palestinian situation. Zaides believes, "We all have different perceptions, different readings of the situation. I was afraid that translating what is being said would lead to a flattening of those reactions, as everyone would have understood the same thing (Benyamina, 2014)."[3] Through imitations, the act of aggression is brought closer to the audience. Because video is not an appropriate medium to galvanize viewers who are desensitized to extreme violence due to exposure to movies and games, performing the imitation of aggression in front of the audience has a stronger visual and psychological impact on the audience.

The format of the video itself also builds a rich political meaning. In all the filming, the ongoing violence becomes a distant confrontation, a terrifying, mutual, and at the same time, unequal encounter. The camera becomes an intermediary that can't be ignored, which takes the place of the viewer to witness the occurrence of violence. Not just because the person shooting the video is not a professional photographer, but because the camera shaking, or being attacked, gives the viewer a first-view experience. The viewer, on the other hand, becomes a witness to the violence, a real experience of human rights violations. The footage displayed during Zaides' performance alludes to a cinematic resistance genre. Whether via the unpredictability of a moving camera, the suspense of covert shooting, or the reassurance of direct encounter. Archive emphasizes the ambiguous, antagonistic duality and suggests the dominant people and the oppressed subjects in each instance.

Forms of expression and implementations of dancing techniques in Archive force the audience to face the real violence and switches the role of the Israeli people in Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. As the dance begins, Zaides stands in front of a screen with his back to the audience and watches the video. Zaides then begins imitating one of the characters in the video, superimposing the simulated aggression in sync with the filmed action. He mimics someone shouting over the balcony with his right arm outstretched, a soldier charging forward to aim an assault rifle, a teenager running to add strength to the stones he throws, and so on. In section 6, Zaides mimics the behavior of the person in the video without playing the original video. There is no playing video, no sounds of shouting and abuse, no original background sounds, no context, and no obvious meaning given by the environment. Zaides' performance allows the audience to see the nature of the movements, not just their role in the conflict, but their inherent violence, their gestures and dynamics, and ultimately a recurrence of body image. Section 6 implements a transition and introduces a linguistic structure for Archive: identified and discrete entities (syntax) and cross-references to a meaning that transcends these entities (semantics) (Pouillaude, 2016).[4] In the final chapter of Archive, Zaides departs from the performance framework of the preceding chapters. Both videos in the final part are projected independently, and none was interpreted or mimicked by Zaides. They are dense in symbolism yet very legible, resembling abstract representations rather than simple documentaries. While Zaides tries to emphasize the authenticity of the recorded videos in his early performances, he deliberately guides the audience to a deep, multi-dimensional, and abstract interpretation of the videos in the final part. Regarding the last video, Hebronian settler youngsters attempting to conceal the lens using mirrors in the first film, it was an abrupt and urgent reminder that the relationship between the photographer and the recorded subject is, above all, the topic and the subject. From a political standpoint, both Archive and "Camera Project" have become a reflection of Israeli society. What is more ironic is that Israeli's rejection and opposition to Archive and "Camera

Project" make these two projects completer and more successful. As a subject reflected in the mirror, Israeli refused to see their own malevolence in the mirror and reflect on it. Another video depicts an Israeli soldier being taken from below by barbed wire, and he glares contemptuously at the photographers, who will soon throw stones at him (the video does not show soldiers throwing stones at the time, but this is explained in the caption). This last video is obviously an iconic symbol of the rule: it is a type of the weak, the rule of self-destruction, and in this type of rule, when the master oppresses, he also degrades himself. In the latter two movies, however, the paradoxical source of symbolic force is its link with events. Because we have labored so diligently throughout the performance to retain the references underlying these images, to give them unique names, and to keep their documentary character, their symbolic significance is ultimately exposed. These pictures, given names, and dates occur in locations that are both realities and symbols, and their symbolism derives from their veracity.

By highlighting certain elements of the video, selecting one specific character to mimic, and amplifying some of its dynamic properties, Zaides acts as an intermediary for the viewer's perception of what is captured on camera. Nevertheless, rather than a simple intermediary, he is a user of images and makes a preliminary who collects and selects movements and poses which will constitute a sign of dance by the power of imitation and repetition.

Recalling dance practitioner Erin Manning's statement in describing another dance's function in the real world, "It (Tango) becomes a prism through which she inquiries about the possibilities of a sensed body in movement (Erin Manning, 2009),"[5] it is what Zaides' dance achieved, allowing the creation of two conflicting worlds in parallel. Inside the theater, Zaides' body began in a spectator's position; then his body was introduced to the scene and slowly integrated into what he saw on the screen. The space is divided into three zones: a screen for the projected images, the audience seated inside, and the performer Zaides. He sometimes stood with the audience while watching the film, and at other times he was with the person being photographed, or just being himself. Zaides' body changed how those recorded scenes were perceived and interpreted, emphasizing specific elements and looking at the issue from a different angle.

Zaides creates a shared embodied space by allowing spectators to feel the conflicting cores between the aggressor's body and their own experience of violence as a bystander. Because the audience is tied to their seats, Zaides mimics the aggressor's action, inflicting violence on the audience so that they are experiencing what Palestinians experienced. Zaides states that the lack of resistance was itself complicit in human rights violations and enabled the continuing structure of violence (Archive Interview with Arkadi Zaides, 2014).[6]

By constructing a physical space in the theater and using dance movements to convey aggressive behavior, Zaides lets the audience temporarily shares physical space with those Palestinian recorders and gets immersed in structural violence and harassment languages. Archive transcends the boundaries between perpetrators and victims that allow institutions of dominance and violence to persist. The work demonstrates that viewers may all be aggressors. Meanwhile, it draws the audience closer together in discourse with people who endure daily violence and tyranny. The art gives viewers the impression that they are all victims of human rights breaches and that these atrocities serve no purpose. It generates a moment of shared embodiment that permits the presentation of blurred self-other boundaries (Dana Mills, 2017).[7] The display of choreographic elements that are not aesthetically beautiful is politically potent because it creates a shared embodied space between two individuals who cannot engage in discussion in the real world.

Archive involves real politics locally and globally, challenging the public opinion about the dance, which becomes a creative opposition and serves as a medium to deconstruct social orders. Zaides was awarded a prize by the Emile Zola Human Rights Cathedral for his efforts, which drew substantial attention from several organizations. In addition, the piece was debated outside of the realm of dance audiences. In June 2015, shortly after the election of a majority Likud government in Israel, which signaled a further shift to the right, newly elected Minister of Culture Miri Regev declared that she would remove the Ministry of Culture insignia from any items promoting this choreographic piece (Ruthie Abeliovich, 2016).[8] This prompted objections from protestors from the left-wing. During the summer of 2014, right-wing activists asked the Petach Tikva Museum of Art in Tel Aviv, which was hosting the installation version of Archive (installation with two screens entitled Capture Practice), to shut down the exhibition. "Though the activists say that they succeeded in shutting it down, a spokeswoman for the museum said that Zaides' show continued without interruption until its prescheduled closing (Naomi Zeveloff, 2015)."[9] Regev has previously described the work as "a national shame (עדכון שי גליק ', 2015)". "סמל משרד התרבות הוסר ממופע בהשראת 'בצלם' אחרון: 02.06.15, The resistance exhibited by Zaides is far from theoretical; it entered the political systems it intended to challenge. This is the epitome of a conflict between weak and powerful interpretations of political dancing. The audience of this dance performance perceives a permeation of state systems through embodied opposition. Indeed, the Israeli government has been disrupted by the Palestinians who gave the material for the article's archives. This interruption happened as a result of the shared physical space they inhabited with the Israeli audience members who were disturbed by this

work. Martha Graham's famous quote demonstrates that the body not only expresses what words cannot but also confronts and questions the limitations that words impose (Martha Graham Quotes, n.d.). Therefore, understanding human rights as realized through dance is global in its capacity to unsettle, disrupt, and inject other languages into symbolic webs of meaning. People are capable of global interruption; in this instance, it is the absence of the body that interrupts and produces feeling. The understanding of human rights through Archive is only possible inside the theater, rooted in the embodied interplay between the audience filling the hole in this choreographic performance and Zaides' repetition of recorded movement onstage. Some people may be missing from delineated political areas due to checkpoints and barriers, but dancing may transcend these limitations and make such people extremely present and able to assert their human rights.

In the dance Archive, the shared space breakthroughs the absence of shared spaces created by formal political and legal systems. In this work, Zaides asserts his human rights via physical movement. The duality of the *Archive*, namely the recording of real events and the vague interpretation of them, enables audiences to experience and reflect on human rights issues firsthand. At the same time, the reaction of Israeli society reveals the influence of dance in the political sphere. The *Archive* provides the opportunity to construct a universe through motion. The interlocutors in the embodied dialogue continually re-enact two worlds, Israel and Palestine, which are never permanent or bound. Human rights as being part of two worlds are incorporated into dance, which continually enacts via bodies and constructs the new reality in which people from two worlds are equal subjects.

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