Rethinking embodiment: processual bodies and the case of Judson Dance Theater

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Résumé :

Dans le domaine des études sur l'organisation, le corps, lorsqu'il est présent, est souvent perçu à travers un prisme dualiste, principalement comme une entité statique et fixe. Cet article vise à remettre en question la perspective traditionnelle sur le corps dans le contexte des organisations en proposant une vision plus fluide et processuelle qui s'aligne sur le concept évolutif des organisations en tant que « organizing ». En s'appuyant sur la philosophie d'Erin Manning, nous adoptons le concept relationnel de « bodying » pour explorer comment les corps relationnels et les aspects fluides et processuels de l'embodiment peuvent générer de nouvelles formes d'organisations. Notre étude de cas, le Judson Dance Theater, illustre cette proposition. En examinant ce collectif de chorégraphes et de danseurs, qui a été à l'avant-garde d'une révolution esthétique majeure dans l'art du XXe siècle, nous montrons comment le corps, les matérialités et l'affect sont déployés à différents niveaux, contribuant ainsi à l'émergence d'une nouvelle forme d'organisation collective. Notre analyse offre des perspectives nouvelles sur la manière dont les corps interagissent dans le contexte des études organisationnelles, ce faisant, nous remettons en question les limites des organisations traditionnelles et nous interrogeons leur capacité à être inclusives et à promouvoir l'égalité.

Mots-clés: Embodiment, Bodying, Manning, Affect

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Abstract

In the field of Organization Studies, the body, when present, is often viewed through a dualistic lens, predominantly as a static and fixed entity. This paper aims to challenge this perspective by proposing a more fluid and processual view of the body that aligns with the evolving concept of organizations as a dynamic process of "organizing". Drawing on the philosophy of Erin Manning, we adopt the relational concept of "bodying" and explore how relational bodies and the fluid and processual aspects of embodiment can generate new forms of organizations. Our case study, the Judson Dance Theater, illustrates this proposition. By examining this collective of choreographers and dancers, which was at the forefront of a major aesthetic revolution in 20th-century art, we demonstrate how the body, materialities, and affect are deployed at different levels, thereby contributing to the emergence of a new form of collective organization. Our analysis offers new perspectives on how bodies interact in the context of organizational studies, thereby challenging the limits of traditional organizations and questioning their capacity to be inclusive and promote equality.

Keywords: Embodiment, Bodying, Manning, Affect

INTRODUCTION

Much work has been done in Organization Studies on the question of embodiment, but regrettably, in these explorations, bodies and embodiment have traditionally been confined to a static and objectified understanding still informed by the cartesian dualism (Thanem, 2016) and very often situated in the dualism body/organization (Parker, 2000). This paper seeks to transcend these limitations and rethink embodiment by embracing a processual philosophy of the body inspired by the innovative work of Erin Manning. Manning's work, deeply rooted in dance and art, proposes a radical rethinking of bodies as fluid, sensory, and affective entities, always in becoming and in interrelation with the milieu they are emerging with — a concept that Manning terms "bodying". While there have been extensive applications of process metaphysics in the broader management literature (e.g.Dibben, 2008), research in Organization Studies has primarily concentrated on offering insights through the application of process-related themes and concepts drawn from process philosophy (Chia 1995, 1998; Chia & King, 1998; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) but very little to date has dealt with "bodying", the activities, practices and processes at work to think the body in processual manner and its implications for understanding organization.

We argue that this processual understanding challenging the entrenched views of bodies as preexisting fixed entities can significantly contribute to "produce the phenomena of organization" (Chia, 1995, p. 597) by disrupting the process by which human agents inscribe organization and order on their environment. In light of this perspective, our research inquiry centres on how relational bodies and processual aspects of embodiment can generate and transform new forms of organizations.

As an empirical setting, we analyze the case of the Judson Dance Theater, a world-famous avant-garde movement of the 1960s (Janevsky & Lax, 2018), composed of a collective of

choreographers and dancers that operated one of the most important revolutions of the 20th century in dance aesthetics (Burt, 2006; Johnston, 1962). Due to its emphasis on improvisation, collaborative experimentation, and the continual redefinition of movement vocabularies, Judson Dance Theater offers a dynamic and fluid ground for investigating how bodies interact with space, time, and each other, providing a nuanced understanding of processes at play their intricate relationship with organizational dynamics.

Through a rigorous methodological approach comprising different sources and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2011; King & Brooks, 2018), we identify, analyze, organize and describe the case around three central dimensions. Initially, we explore the artistic milieu that gave rise to Judson's dance. Subsequently, we investigate novel kinesthetic practices and their role in generating new embodied and experiential insights. Finally, we delve into the intersection of these practices with political and spatial dynamics, illuminating their impact on the reconfiguration of organizational boundaries.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we explore how organizing and embodiment have been conceptualized in OS. Secondly, we propose an analytical framework drawing from the concepts of Erin Manning's philosophy. Third, we detail our method and empirical results. Eventually, we discuss our main contributions to organizational studies.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

EMBODIMENT AND ORGANIZING

Since the 80s, social sciences argue increasingly that we cannot neglect how we are embodied (Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1984) and that we should stop treating the body as a fixed identity breaking with the ontological experience that contributes to the understanding of the body as a natural expression (Detrez, 1999). Even though embodied ontologies are not new to OS, the

heritage of Cartesian dualism is still very present in organizational theories (Thanem, 2016) and in the methodologies employed to research embodiment (Jääskeläinen & Helin 2021; Thanem & Knights 2019). This dualistic perspective extends even to the term "embodiment", which inherently poses challenges as it suggests the potential for a disembodied connection to the mind, actions, or agents, perpetuating dualistic thinking (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009, p. 215).

Thanks to the "body turn" initiated by the groundbreaking publications Body and Organization (Hassard et al., 2000) and Anatomising Embodiment and Organization Theory (Dale, 2000), there has been a diverse range of theoretical interests in the body aiming to challenge the notion of the body as separate from the mind. The mentioned interests encompass a wide range of investigated issues and involve a diverse selection of intellectual sources used to explore how the body is highly relevant for organizational matters across various research areas (Gärtner, 2013). There have been embodied reconsiderations of key areas such as ethics (Pullen & Rhodes, 2014, 2015), leadership (e.g. Pullen & Rhodes, 2010), learning (e.g. Kupers, 2008) and teamwork (e.g. Hindmarsh & Pilnick, 2007).

These studies, primarily focused on the techno-administrative utilization of bodies within organizations, often restrict their analysis of embodiment in organizations, taking for granted that bodies already conform to organizational norms (Thanem, 2016). Consequently, they tend to overemphasize human capacity while overlooking the need for a critical reevaluation of both the body and the organization itself. This imbalance poses a potential risk of succumbing to what Parker (2000) describes as "fetishize flesh" – a tendency in organizational studies to excessively focus on the physical body and to confine the body within the limits of a dualistic system and framework of body/organization, which attributes agency, responsibility, and causality exclusively to human actors while neglecting broader systems of relationality, embodiment, and movement. As a result, within the realm of organizational studies, there is a lack of exploration into the dynamic nature of the body as a process of organizing, capable of

profoundly altering its natural habitats, reshaping social scenarios and questioning organizational boundaries (Thanem, 2004, p. 2).

While the processual nature of organization has been extensively studied in OS, particularly by Chia and his colleagues (Chia 1995, 1998; Chia & King 1998; Tsoukas & Chia 2002).

According to Chia, an organization is not simply an already constituted entity but a dynamic process of heterogeneous engineering (Chia, 1995, p. 595). This process involves assembling and transforming various elements from the social, technical, conceptual, and textual realms into heterogeneous products or assemblages, such as organizations. According to Chia, to truly understand what an organization is, we must study the organizational processes that enable the emergence and temporary solidity of organizational entities. Yet, surprisingly, the body has been largely overlooked in this discourse, tending to sideline its significance. (Thanem, 2001). This gap represents a serious problem, as it fails to consider the crucial role of bodily experiences in shaping the processes and interactions of organizational dynamics within broader social contexts. Consequently, it diminishes our understanding of the intricate ways in which individuals engage with and navigate within organizational structures and practices.

Our paper aims to bridge this gap in process studies. It seeks to address the call for a more comprehensive theorization of the body in organizational studies, as articulated by Thanem (2016), by introducing Erin Manning's thought-provoking philosophy of the processual body. Manning's interdisciplinary background incorporates insights from the field of dance and challenges the traditional notions of individuality and subjectivity, emphasizing the interplay of forces, rhythms, and intensities that make up the ongoing becoming of the body. Her relational processual ontology is not concerned with the "body" but with the question of "how the body will persist" (Manning, 2013, p.22). It assumes that we should not presuppose a preconceived notion of what a body is but instead reorient our thinking to conceive bodies as an expression of a moving activity together with the other elements, taking into account the

entanglement between body and materiality in the "material world of great complexity". This processual nature of the body questions two main assumptions regarding organized bodies.

First, bodies are already organized as entities functioning systemically in a particular way according to certain expectations. Second, bodies cannot be fully assimilated into predetermined organizational structures. In the next section, we will examine this perspective in more detail.

MANNING'S RELATIONAL BODY'S PHILOSOPHY

"Consider this image: you are in the garden, your knees covered in mud, hands deep in the earth for an early spring planting. Instead of seeing the earth as a quality apart from the knee attached to a preexisting human form, see the knee-hand-earth as a worlding, a force of form, an operative ecology". (Manning, 2013, p.31)

This scenario introduces one of the fundamental points of Manning's body philosophy: we cannot define a body in time and space as a separate, individual entity detached from its milieu; rather, it exists within a complex assemblage of feelings, actively intertwined with its milieu. For this reason, Manning prefers the term "bodying", which better captures the dynamic and relational nature of embodiment. Thus, "bodying" reveals that the body is always in the process of becoming and is inherently connected to its surrounding milieu.

This relational perspective is a foundational dynamic for understanding the body. It emphasizes how bodies emerge within the very process of their encounter with the environment rather than preexisting in their manifestation. Bodying and milieu are always cogenerative.

In the gardening event described earlier, the body emerges through hand-knee-earth articulation and, at the same time, acts as a vector for the manifestation of the gardening event itself and the onset of the spring season. This demonstrates that the body cannot be viewed as a preexisting element of this event because, in a sense, it is created through its encounter with the event. So,

"bodying" challenges the widespread concept of embodiment, which, although implying a process, suggests the idea that there is a disembodied element (like my soul, spirit, or life) that ends up taking on a body (em-body) that it did not have previously.

Manning points out that becoming a body is a deeply perceptual and affective experience that moves toward the prelinguistic, to the felt experience, to the body as a resonant materiality (Manning, 2013, p.30). Bodying is always a relational event experienced in an ecology of practices that include but are not limited to humans. In the example of the garden, the body becomes populated by affective tones (the light, the air, the temperature of spring, and other factors) and matter, objects (the garden spade, the earth, the tulip bulb), and the human is not the ultimate unit of the event.

This perspective extends beyond the subjective body, beyond a specific category of affect as personal interiority, and encompasses the entire field of experience. So, if we go back to hand-knee-earth articulation in spring gardening, bodying is not just about sewing a seed. It is about reconstituting the relation "climate-body-environment" (Manning, 2013, p. 32). This processual and relational modality is activated by movement (Manning, 2014). For Manning, movement is not just something we do. It is something we are. It is a becoming that extends beyond the body, beyond the physical, to encompass the entire field of experience. Movement is a directional force that creates inflexions and allows for bodying and relation to wonders of the world directly. Movement is also a way of thinking and being in the world that is both embodied and embedded, grounded in the rhythms and flows of the body, yet open to the world and to the possibilities of change and transformation (Manning, 2009). Manning argues that it is impossible to separate the body from the movement because the body itself is a movement of becoming that is never completely formed and never stops moving.

By shifting our attention to the articulation of movement and the sensing body, we begin to discern how movement enacts what we can be and creates new socialities, as every movement

is, first and foremost, collective (Manning, 2013). In this sense, bodying is always attuned to the "more-than" just individual bodies, and it is a body "before the subject" (Manning, 2013, p.30) and always in the perspective of the collective.

Moreover, Manning's bodies in motion are ontogenetic bodies because they are characterized by a perpetual state of potential becoming, as she terms it, "pre-acceleration" (Manning, 2009), a process of anticipatory responsiveness to the world. Pre-acceleration allows bodies to navigate their environments creatively, improvising new movements, gestures, and relations as they encounter different situations. In so doing, bodies in motion create different spaces and temporalities that operate through the perception of the body, such as listening, seeing, smelling, and sensing gravity. This opens up the possibility for a sensory re-articulation of the limited conception of space-time proposed by norms and the nation-state (Manning, 2009). Therefore, sensory bodies in motion are political because they engage with and transform matter in a non-linear movement of connections towards the other.

In contemplating the boundless possibilities offered by the exploration of movement, Manning distinctly illustrates her point using dance as an example. Beyond the mere physical body, she elucidates how dance permeates the dynamic realm of thought (p.15), offering movement as a mode of thought and knowledge acquisition. It is precisely Manning's insights that led this study to adopt a qualitative historical case study analysis focused on the Judson Dance Theater, globally recognized as one of the most emblematic collectives in the history of contemporary dance (Janevsky & Lax, 2018). The primary objective is to explore how embodied practices within the Judson Dance Theater influence and transform organizational processes. Delving into the unique context of this pioneering collective, the study aims to shed light on how bodies, considered as processual entities, actively shape organizational dynamics. This offers a valuable

analysis of the potential of the moving body in organizational studies, an area hitherto underexplored (Biehl, 2017), to enrich our understanding of organizational processes.

Furthermore, organizational process studies understand the temporary solidity of the organization through the analysis of the processes that facilitate its emergence. We posit that only with the benefit of historical hindsight can we adequately evaluate how these processes have influenced organizational structure over time. Therefore, analyzing historical cases such as the Judson Dance Theater provides a valuable opportunity to retrospectively examine how the body has shaped organizational processes over time. This approach also enables exploring the intricate interactions and organizational dynamics within broader social contexts. In the upcoming section, we will provide a detailed overview of the methodology utilized in this study.

RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODOLOGY

To study the Judson Dance Theater, we draw on multiple performative narrative sources (Heller, 2023) mostly addressed in Anglo-Saxon dance studies and dance history fields. The seminal work "Democracy's Body", published in 1993 by the dance historian Sally Banes, is the most important collection of primary data: it includes interviews with dancers and critics and, in many cases, remains the only first-person account of the key events. A more contemporary primary data source stems from the MoMA Museum's 2018 exhibit, "Judson Church the Work is Never Done", providing access to photographs, videos, and interviews with with avant-garde protagonists and survivors.

Complementing these primary sources, we comprehensively analyzed dissertations, books, academic papers, media articles, and online content related to the Judson Dance Theater. The table below outlines our data collection efforts, categorizing primary (P) and secondary (S) data relevant to Judson Church's experiences from 1962 to 1964, a period spanning the original cooperative group's dance concerts to the eventual dissolution of the Judson group in 1964 (Banes, 1993).

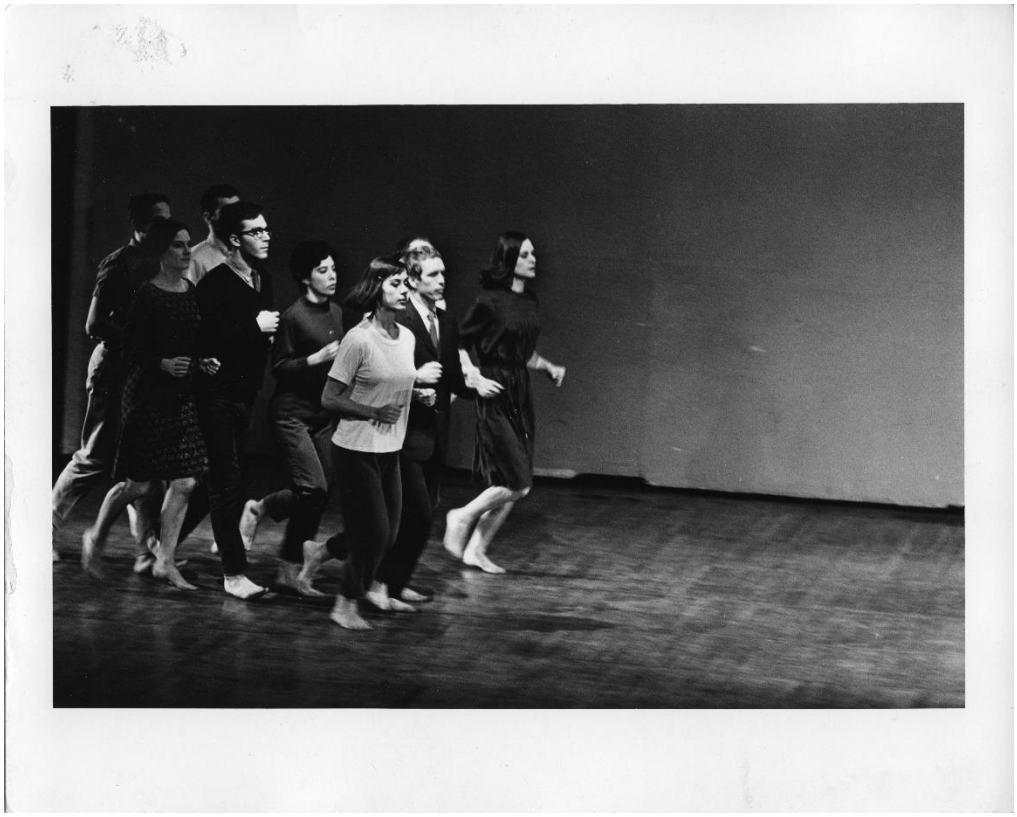
Source	Data	Count
Books	S/P	9
Web articles	S/P	17
Audio records	P	5 (3h28')
Academic Theses	S	3
Academic papers	S	10
Pictures	P	15
Videos	P/S	7 (3h59')

Table 1: List of sources used for our research on the Judson Dance Theater

As with the other historical avant-gardes at the dawn of 1960, Judson Dance Theater's experimentation emerges from a blend of hybrid events and conceptual dissemination. Methodologically, it poses the challenge of embracing the "whole" from fragmented historical sources. Some historiographers speak of the need to adopt a "spurious historiography" (Mazzaglia, 2010), a research approach that embraces the entanglements of different elements, often from diverse research fields. In this study, our approach involved interdisciplinary dialogues with history, dance studies and sociology.

Another challenge has been grappling with archival and historical data that often fixate the body within a disembodied narrative, distancing us from the corporeal experience envisioned by avant-garde artists. One way to attempt to solve the problem was by acknowledging that the methods of historical body-centre research engage the researcher's own bodily knowledge (Parker-Starbuck & Mock, 2011). We, therefore, also relied on the experience of the author, who studied dance with some of the representatives of the avant-garde and actively continued the practice and teaching of improvisational dance, which is in direct filiation with the practice of Judson Dance Theater. Another help came from the available photos and videos that document the body's materiality, its interaction with the installation, and the audience's presence within the space.

Due to the multiple data sources and forms, we used thematic analysis to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report themes within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King & Brooks, 2018). We first reviewed all the primary sources' material and noted keywords to identify sequences and themes about the case. Then, we cross-checked the audio and video material with our keywords. We then analyzed the secondary sources, articles, papers and theses. Additional sources were integrated during this process based on their relevance to specific themes. These new sources were either assimilated into existing categories or established as new ones. This iterative process continued until a consistent and comprehensive interpretation was achieved, signalling conceptual saturation. We finally engaged in a final thick presentation, where we included, when possible, some direct quotes from the participants. The testimonies of the dancers are featured alongside those of the critics of that time who played a significant role in the success and development of the avant-garde movement, as well as historians who contributed to a retrospective analysis placing it within its historical context and assessing its long-term significance. Including these multiple voices and perspectives provides a comprehensive understanding of the movement's artistic merit, aesthetic innovations, and societal impact. We organized our data around three major themes: firstly, examining how Judson Dance Theater deconstructs the traditional understanding of the body in kinaesthetic terms; secondly, exploring the impact of new compositional movement methods on the interplay between bodies, space, and objects; and thirdly, analyzing the characteristics of the political, material, and spatial environments in which Judson bodies evolve.



Judson Dancers. Credit Peter Moore Photography Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries. ©Northwestern University.

1.THE BIRTH OF JUDSON DANCE THEATER

While a complete history of Judson Dance Theater is beyond this article's scope, to fully comprehend the emergence of Judson's avant-garde movement, we must consider the highly institutionalized context in which Judson's avant-garde was born.

The original context was primarily defined by the aesthetic norms of modern American dance, which had rebelled against the prevailing ideals of ballet's delicate beauty in the early 1930s and 1940s (Michel & Ginot, 1998). Modern dance shifted its focus from ballet's upright, elongated posture to the individual's expressive abilities, emotions, and the presentation of exotic dance. However, modern dance retained certain traces of balletic influence even in this departure from ballet. Elements such as spatial organization, use of musicality, and formal

structures retained certain resemblances to ballet, albeit with modifications and reinterpretations. Dances continued to be performed in the theatrical form.

Moreover, modern dancers remained anchored to traditional organizational models by establishing their own schools and companies and creating an institutional framework that preserved the principles of modern dance. The new aesthetic principles of modern dance became codified, exemplified by renowned choreographers like Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey (Gignac, 2009). As scholars Ginot and Michel point out:

> "*Instead of liberating the body and making dance accessible even to a small child, instead of bringing about social and spiritual change, the institution of modern dance had developed into an esoteric art form reserved for the intelligentsia, even further removed from the masses than ballet."* (Michel & Ginot, 1998, p. 147).

The very foundation of the Judson Dance Theater, like many post-modernist avant-garde movements in America in the 1960s and 1970s, was born out of a harsh critique of these institutions.

The Judson Dance Theater refers to the group of choreographers who gathered and performed from 1962 to 1964 in a Baptist church in the vibrant Greenwich Village of New York. Its origins trace back to the fall of 1960, at Robert and Judith Dunn's compositional class with a small group of young choreographers. Yvonne Rainer, one of the founders, recalled in an interview with the journal Artforum: "*There were five of us in the workshop that first year, including Simone Forti and Steve Paxton"* (Velasco, 2012). The context was one of: *"marginality, intervention and adversative subculture, a confrontation with the complacent past, the art of resistance"* (Burt, 2006).

Dunn structured the workshop in an interdisciplinary manner, aligning it with the experimental methods of improvisation championed by the renowned composer John Cage. The idea was to get away from one's own clichés in generating movement and to destabilize old signifiers. The workshop welcomed participants irrespective of their background, encouraging them to break away from traditional techniques. During the classes, students enjoyed significant creative freedom regarding methods and materials. The workshop was a forum for dancers and choreographers (McDonagh, 1970), and the focus was on questioning the composition processes rather than adhering to technique and style, promoting experimentation with movement, objects, procedures, and participants.

This workshop, based on a conception of work that contrasts with the hierarchical structure of traditional dance companies, becomes a centre for a wide-open exploration of new possibilities for the body. Dancers engaged with the art in a novel manner, prioritizing presence over-representation effectively challenging the previous hierarchical order of meaning in dance. Yvonne Rainer offered insight into this shift:

> *"In that class, there was a space for all the strange structures we were making. Trisha Brown did a dance where the sounds from the street caused you to cross your legs or raise your arm…. pedestrian move was very much in the air" (MoMA, 2019a).*

1.1.1 BODYING THE ORDINARY

The transition to a new form of body expression was greatly shaped by the pioneering work of two influential figures, Merce Cunningham and Anna Halprin (Banes, 1987). Despite their distinct approaches, these dancers played pivotal roles in the evolution of the traditional form of the theatrical convention to performance. They placed a strong emphasis on movement and compositional techniques, highlighting them as central elements of artistic expression. They asserted that any movement, even walking, could be dance, that any part of the body could be

used, that any procedure could be a valid compositional method, that any space could be danced, and that anyone could be a soloist. The initial group of dancers who established Judson Dance Theater took these principles to the extreme. After witnessing their first performance in 1962, critic Allen Hughes of the New York Times commented:

> *"Unprejudiced followers of the conventional could easily judge the evening an exercise in madness, but it was not. Perhaps it would have been more accurate to call it a concert in movement rather than dance, but regardless of the name, it was an artful and stimulating provocation."* (Mazzaglia, 2010, p. 127).

Dance critic Jill Johnston, in her review for the Village Voice, observed that these "*young talents . . . could make the present of modern dance more exciting than it's been for twenty years*" (Johnston, 1962). Judson's dancers approached the body as an ordinary, tangible entity by rejecting conventional narratives and idealized representations of the human body. They presented it in its raw materiality, emphasizing its immediate presence, physicality, diversity, and direct perceptibility, as evident in Rainer's statement: "*The unadorned body as an art object- something to be considered in terms of its volume, mass, nature, spatial relation to other object-bodies*" (Jowitt, 1989, p. 321).

Avoiding the eccentric representation of previous modern dance, their dance transformed into a functional movement, a deliberate, task-oriented action. Judson dancers methodologically explored the kinaesthetic reality inherent in these functional gestures which characterize routine actions in our daily lives. They analyze their own impulse to move and explore the body as a malleable material that can be reshaped and reformed. This expanded the concept of choreography, suggesting that a choreographer could be not only a dancer but also a painter, sculptor, or any other type of artist. The group was indeed a diverse mix of dancers, choreographers, filmmakers, musicians, and visual artists, all of whom played with the body to redefine the boundary of dance, sharing the fidelity to experimentation and the commitment to

debate (Janevsky & Lax, 2018). Dance critic Jill Johnston, in The Village Voice in 1963, recalled how the group was opening the aesthetic possibilities: "*There is no way to create dance, but there is no type of movement that cannot be included in these dances there is no type of accompanying sound that is not appropriate.*" (Mazzaglia, date, p 128).

This approach broadened the scope of dance to encompass a wide range of body types and content, as highlighted by New York Times critic Allen Hughes, who noted, *"nonsense neighbouring seriousness, balletic movement mixed with buffoonery, virtuosity contrasted with staggering awkwardness, banality juxtaposed with beauty"* (Hughes, 1962). This heterogeneous body introduced a new facet of humanity, departing from the introspective and universal theatrical and sacred image of tradition, showing a more vulnerable side, as noted by scholar Burt:

> "*At Judson, the performers looked at each other and the audience, they breathed audibly, ran out of breath, sweated, talked things over. They began behaving more like human beings, revealing what was thought of as deficiencies as well as their skills."* (Burt, 2006, p. 13)

In this context, performativity emerges as a signifying multiplicity, as Yvonne Rainer recalled: "*talking, shouting, barking, watching, jumping, dancing. One or all of these things could appear in a single dance. Therefore, no single dance is about a single idea or story, but rather a variety of things that come together*" (Banes, 1993, p. 14).

Within the context of these pioneering advancements in dance, the novel explorations of the body were structured around the use of improvisation as a compositional practice. In dance, improvisation involves the simultaneous creation and execution of movements (Blom & Chaplin, 1998). It embraces intuitive, spontaneous, preverbal, non-reflective movements that reflect an individual's inner thoughts and emotions.

Improvisation is rooted in the kinaesthetic sense and the development of an embodied subjective internal awareness process. Dancers engage without predefined notions of movement, allowing them to create dances by following and listening to their intuitions and primal instincts. This embodied experience relies on a proprioceptive understanding of the body, as dancer Trisha Brown eloquently put it: *"My inside comes all the way to the edge of my body, through the columns of my limbs, my neck, my torso, and the bulb of my head"* (Livet, 1978, p. 44). This perception of the body challenges traditional notions of the body as a controlled, Cartesian body.

Indeed, improvisation demands a state of vigilant openness (Foster, 2003), enabling a focus on embodied presence rather than representation. It involves a continuous process of invention in real-time interaction with other bodies, space, and objects, as dancer Trisha Brown explained:

> *"There is a performance quality that appears in improvisation that did not in memorized dance as it was known up to that date. If you are improvising your senses are heightened; you are using your wits, thinking, and everything is working at once to find the best solution to a given problem under pressure of a viewing audience."* (Livet, 1978).

As a result, movement doesn't stem solely from cognitive processes; instead, it emerges from a heightened awareness of how immediate actions contribute to the overall choreography. The use of improvisation and the focus on the body's presence in Judson Dance Theater also played a pivotal role in redefining the relationship with the audience. By disrupting the spectator's expectations, the improvised dance stimulated kinaesthetic empathy as articulated by dancer Lucinda Childs (Livet, 1978, p. 63): "*The spectator was called upon to envision the range of his perception".* This prompted the audience to actively engage in the creative process, challenging conventional notions about the social significance of being a spectator and reshaping the concept of choreography. Improvisation shattered the cognitive, rational,

structural, and discursive boundaries of traditional theatrical dance. As Burt (2006) observed, "*Improvisation itself suggested that intelligence wasn't confined solely to mental faculties but was an attribute of the body-mind continuum*." (p. 15).

Charles Ross and Susan Kaufman "Qui a mangé le baboon?" performed simultaneously with group free play. From "A Collaborative Event." Judson Dance Theater, New York, 1963 Credit: Philip Corner's Intermission, 1963.Judson Memorial Church, New York.Peter Moore Photography Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries ©Northwestern University.

1.1.2. EMBODYING SPACES

From the beginning of their exploration, the Judson Dance Theater challenged the conventional boundaries between the body and the surrounding spaces, rethinking ideas that were initially separated. Artists increasingly began to explore their dance movements in connection with the surrounding environment, as clearly stated by Caroline Schneemann, who was the first plastic artist involved in the Judson Dance Theater:

> *"1) The primary experience is the body as your own environment. 2) The body within the actual, particular environment 3) The materials of that environment – soft, responsive, tactile, active, malleable 4) The active environment of one another 5) The visual structure of the bodies and materials defining space."* (Banes, 1993, p. 96).

This corporeal dimension of dance was modelling the relationship to space:

> *"a dance where a body moves as part of the environment; where dancers say YES to environment incorporating or say NO transforming it… a dance where dancers can fall, can crash into a wall, aim movement beyond their line of spine into space, into materials, into each other- projective, connective."* (Banes, 1993, p. 93).

The exploration of movement in space went hand in hand with the use of ordinary, everyday objects, such as chairs and tables, which became essential elements of choreography. These objects were not tools of representation but were considered living entities that exerted the power of presence during the performances. The use of ordinary objects allowed the dancers to alter the overall spatial dynamic of the dance and affected the perception of time as well. As Steve Paxton, one of the founding dancers, put it, the action of manipulating these objects was "*taking time in the stage as it takes time in real life. And dance is related to work*." (Artforum, 2018b; Paxton, 2019). As a result, the duration of each performance was not predetermined; rather, it lasted as long as it took for the body to perform its actions. Without the constraints of a fixed time frame, the dancers enjoyed the freedom to engage with the performance space in an improvisational manner, making full use of the available objects and the surrounding space. In Judson's performances, the space was neutral and did not conform to traditional theatrical polarities. The audience was also conceived as part of the performance space, blurring the traditional boundaries between the audience and the dancers. Both dancers and spectators occupied fluid positions, challenging established norms of audience-performer relationships. The entire stage was open for action, and unlike traditional theatres, there was no backstage, highlighting the rejection of traditional theatrical conventions.

Furthermore, in their performances, the border between the self and the city became fluid, reflecting a critical engagement with the urban environment. As Schneemann noted: "*We looked out the window for possible movement ideas, people walking in the streets."* (MoMA,

2019b). This mutual shaping of dance and space was deeply intertwined with the social complexity of Greenwich Village. This neighbourhood, distinguished from other urban areas in the mid-century, was the symbolic and natural crossroads between wealthy Manhattan and Fifth Avenue, a melting pot of different cultures, with not always peaceful coexistence in which artists played a cohesive role (Mazzaglia, 2010).

The Village fostered a unique sense of belonging, a particular state of mind, confirming the idea that the link between artistic growth and social fabric was fundamental. Since the 1950s, a net of important collaboration sites flourished in the Village. This was composed of a set of places that resonated with the collectivist spirit of Judson (Janevsky & Lax, 2018, p. 117). The contours of these spaces were malleable as artists, people and critics were circulating within this materiality, extending the boundaries of Judson's spatiality and creating a unique atmosphere. Some of these places were art places like the Reuben Gallery, or a loft rented by artist Yoko Ono where performances and concerts took place; cafés such as the San Remo, the Minetta, or the Cedar Tavern; headquarter civil association like the Joint Committee dedicated to the preservation of the Village, or The Floating Bear a literally club, or newspaper like the Village Voice. This weekly magazine acted as a sounding board for the way of conceiving life and art in the Village. Since its foundation in 1955, the Village Voice has shared the main political campaigns for the preservation of the neighbourhood and played a very important role in developing the artistic scene (Movement Research Writings, 2022). In the centre of the Village stood the Judson Memorial Church, commonly referred to as "The Judson" by the young immigrant children of Italian families who frequented the neighbourhood. The Judson Memorial Church was a liberal Protestant church, an important place of political engagement for the civil rights struggle (Banes, 1993). The church, envisioned by the young Baptist minister Edward Judson, was located in the southern part of Washington Square Park. His will was to build a church that could be turned toward the domestic communities of immigrants and offer

various services. With the help of John Rockefeller's seed money, the Judson Memorial Church was built in 1890 and designed by the famous architect Stanford White, the designer of the arch at Washington Square Park (Daughtry, 2018). By the 1950s, as the community demographics began to shift significantly, a new group of artists settled in Greenwich Village. Pastor Moody, who was leading the church then, responded to it by opening the Judson Gallery in the basement of the building. In 1961, Al Carmines Judson's associate pastor ran the church's art program and created the first "community theatre", later known as Judson Poets' Theater, intending to regularly host novice playwrights from the avant-garde seeking spaces to perform poetic texts. From that moment, the church, known as the "Judson" by the Bohemians, gave hospitality to various artistic initiatives. The gradual replacement of the pulpit, normally used for preaching, with a small stage and benches with folding chairs, and the presence of pieces invading the space of the Sunday services participated in hybridizing its real identity (Mazzaglia, 2010). When Yvonne Rainer performed a duet nude with Robert Morris, a scandal arose that prompted many clergies to call for Judson's expulsion from the congregation of Baptist churches. In defense of the church, Carmines responded by recalling that the church's mission was to "*make its way through the sticky, glutinous syrup known as religion and deal with real people in situations that have real feelings and real bodies"* (Mazzaglia, 2010, p. 48). The determination to embrace the real by confronting the institutions nourished both the spirit of the artists and the church. It also created a common ground for fertilization of ideas. Pastor Carmine reports how the absence of interpretative footholds of this dance inspired him in his ability to silence the church's rationalizing tendency and change several aspects of the service: "*And after a year, we changed our worship service radically because of the insights of a lot of these artists. We began to use dance in the service. We began to use drama in the service. We began to structure our ritual, somewhat influenced by improvisation techniques*" (Colby, 1974, p. 11).

1.1.3. POLITICAL BODIES

Judson Dance Theater developed amid the turbulent context of the social and political upheaval of the 1960s. This was a time when "*The promise of unlimited abundance, political stability, and the new technological frontiers of the Kennedy years was shattered fast, and social conflict emerged." (Burt, 2006, p. 50).* Many of the Judson dancers actively engaged in various social movements and espoused left-leaning ideologies, aligning their art with the era's civil rights and anti-war movements. Their performances were a striking departure from established norms, resonating profoundly with the socio-political climate of the times.

At the heart of the Judson Dance Theater's innovative approach was the formal dehierarchisation of dance, which mirrored the progressive democratization of society itself. This ethos was not only evident in the way the audience was invited into the dance creation processes but also in the democratic instances and inclusive aesthetics that defined their performances. The documentation by Sally Banes (1993) reveals that participants enjoyed the freedom to present their own work without choreographic restrictions, resulting in a celebration of diverse contributions. Diverse bodies, both trained and untrained, shared the stage, illustrating the inclusive principles that Judson championed. Deborah Hay recalled: "*Judson really made me see dance in another way, especially in terms of working with untrained dancers*." (Artforum, 2018a).

The selection process for performances at Judson exemplified its commitment to democratic ideals. All participants in the weekly sessions were allowed to present their pieces, with selections made through a consensual, non-majority vote. Some historians bore parallels between the Judson Dance Theater's commitment to action and its egalitarian direction and the organizational and discussion methods employed by the New Left political movement of that era, which condemned existing American society as "corporate liberalism" and aspired to establish "participatory democracy" (Mazzaglia, 2010).

Moreover, by engaging with other art forms, Judson's interdisciplinary approach actively engaged with the cultural fabric of Greenwich Village, expanding the artistic boundaries and creating opportunities for cross-pollination of ideas. This inclusive approach extended beyond their artistic practice and encompassed the local community.

However, in this regard, the opinions of prominent avant-garde experts are far from unanimous. While historian Sally Banes viewed the Judson avant-garde as embodying freedom, equality, and the vibrant, rejuvenated American society of the 1960s, critic Jill Johnston saw these new choreographers as "*outrageously invalidating the very nature of authority. The thinking behind the work goes beyond democracy into anarchy…. Nobody is necessarily more beautiful than any other body. No movement necessarily more important or more beautiful than any other movement.*" (Burt, 2006, p. 11). The diverse interpretations of Judson's work and its political undercurrents further underscored the complexity of their contribution.

Furthermore, critic Hal Foster underscored that Judson's postmodernism:

> *"was concerned with a critical deconstruction of tradition, not an instrumental pastiche of pop-or -pseudo-historical forms, with a critique of origins, not a return to them. In short, it seeks to question rather than exploit cultural codes, to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliation."* (Foster, 1985).

Additionally, Mazzaglia's (2010) perspective reinforces that the Judson Dance Theater served as a hub for micro-liberation politics, distinct from major ideological doctrines, a place to find unprecedented creative sociality and a redefinition of the human being in everyday life. This viewpoint gains support from the historical dating of the *No Manifesto*, written by the choreographer Yvonne Rainer, which formalized the avant-garde's rejection of conventional aesthetics and emphasized distancing and non-conformity with previously dominant aesthetic norms. Remarkably, the manifesto emerged in 1965, toward the movement's conclusion,

underscoring that their innovation was rooted primarily in bodily practice rather than preconceived ideals.

To sum up, these various perspectives collectively highlight that the Judson Dance Theater was not a monolithic 'movement' but rather a dynamic assembly of individuals driven by a shared need for innovation, unified in their revolutionary spirit.

DISCUSSION

The Judson Dance Theater presents a form of collective organizing in which body, materialities, and affect become deployed at different levels. While situated within a dance organization in the 60's, the case holds insights that could be applied to reframe our understanding of bodies in OS, integrating a dynamic, process-orientated perspective that aligns with the concept of "organizing". Above all, it shows how bodies can generate new forms of organizing. In what follows, we distinguish some major contributions of the case for the field of organizing and embodiment.

Judson's case provides the possibility for thinking about the embodied dimension of organizing bodies, starting from bodies' experiences, sensory explorations and affect, and not from meaning and representation. Through the practice of improvisation, Judson's performances challenge the traditional representation of bodies and immerse the dancer and the audience in the creative process and the unique and immediate environment they inhabit. Within this context, bodies do not preexist in the performance but dynamically come into being through the spontaneous act of performing as a malleable material that can be reshaped and reformed. In this creative interaction, bodies are constantly generated and "affected by" other dancers, the audience, the objects and the surrounding environment. Therefore, bodies are generated through the intricate web of relations that are immanent to the body itself and produce different forms of attunement or "affecting rhythms" (McCormack, 2008). Echoing Manning's concept of an

"ecology of practices", the Judson dancer body can only be thought of as intertwined in the "dance- body- milieu" where there is no foreground individuality or embodiment prior to the dancing body. The concept of bodying through movement, or "becoming-body-through-movement", thus outlines a decentralized idea of embodiment in which the body is defined as affective tonality and intensity, as an extension that transcends the conventional boundaries of subjectivity. This dynamic process blurs and surpasses individualistic limits. The body is never the subject-body. The emergence of its meaning and identity occurs only through other bodies, through interaction with others' bodies and in entanglement with other materialities. Manning thus opens the door to a scenario that challenges not only the Cartesian subjectivist interpretation of the 'ego cogito' and the mind/body dualism but also the phenomenological approach, which focuses on the direct and immediate experience of reality and seeks to stabilize lived bodily experience as a kind of residual reference point of the subjectivity paradigm that has dominated the Western tradition of the body. In Manning's work, there is never a coincidence between body and ego.

In Judson's case, this allows for the emergence of multiple heterogeneous bodies. Despite their diverse backgrounds and experiences, they forged a collective identity that transcended the notion of a singular identity grounded in the concept of the subject. Judson's persistence and collective identity are irreducible to the eccentric representation of subjectivity of the previous traditional dance. By embracing movement differences, Judson's dancers stage the ordinary and the impersonal. What endures in Judson's legacy is precisely the idea of "bodying" that does not claim a specific aesthetic form and, therefore, cannot be reduced to a single personality. This proposition invites us to consider that if we view organizing as a process of becoming, and therefore as a dynamic movement, we must acknowledge this paradox of the "incorporeal dimension of the body" (Massumi, 2021, p. 5), which highlights that embodiment is a continual emergence of different bodies instead of the activity or reorganizing existing bodies.

This perspective transcends the dichotomies present in previous organizational perspectives on embodiment, which focus on issues such as heterogeneity (Vachhani, 2014; Thanem, 2006) and heterogeneous bodies that defy organizational logic (Thanem, 2016). Unlike these perspectives, bodying suggests that the production of subjectivity is inherently relational rather than being determined and produced by something outside itself, i.e., outside the organization.

Moreover, bodying emphasizes the critical capacity of relational bodies to interrogate social contexts through dynamic perceptual interactions that are always rooted primarily in movement and sensory perception and that can open alternative pathways for inventing new forms of organization. Bodying, therefore, is always political. Its politics are based on the body's capacity to elude the spatiotemporal representation of the nation-state (Manning, 2006) and to create new and multiple configurations that do not stem from the transformation of previous representations because they do not simply perpetuate existing social and organizational structures. We have seen this in the experience of Judson, which, starting from the exploration of new kinaesthetic and affective abilities of the body, created an inclusive collective becoming driven by democratic values that challenge previous dance traditions and question the very nature of authority and expand the artistic boundaries, creating opportunities for cross-pollination of ideas in the local community.

This highlights the experiential and political work of the concept of bodying. In Judson's case, we have shown how this work takes place in a broader upheaval in the socio-political climate of the 1960s, animated by movements like civil rights and anti-war protests. These events carry an intensity that cannot be reduced to a person or to a single event. There is a complex interplay in which Judson's bodying occurs. Therefore, Judson cannot be separated from this context, and it is the expression of the affective tonality of a historical moment. This prompts us to further take into consideration what kind of socio-political conditions may endure or hinder the ability of "bodying" to reorient and redefine organizational practices, in other words, which socio-

political situation influences the possibility for an organization to become a collective becoming. In the current historical moment, where political polarization undermines social cohesion and trust in democratic institutions, the consideration of the body through the concept of bodying explores new modes of thought and action that promote a sense of collaboration and the construction of communities beyond individual subjects. It arises not from determined and finite individuals but emerges from a coming-together and belonging together in the world. By recognizing the interconnectedness of bodies within organizational contexts, bodying emphasizes the ethical imperative of fostering inclusive and collaborative organizations. It suggests that organizational practices rooted in a deep understanding of embodied experiences can contribute to creating more resilient and ethically grounded communities.

Following this thread, the affective rhythms in which "bodying" is embedded can further enhance our understanding of processes of organizing as the meeting of bodies engaging in a *temporal and localized* process of creating alternative ways of being in the world. This process is sometimes ephemeral, as seen in the case of the Judson collective, which spanned over two years and left an indelible legacy. This would open to the study of more ephemeral alternative, emancipatory and liminal organizing (Rindova et al., 2009), liminal entrepreneuring (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018) and activist entrepreneuring (Dey & Mason, 2018).

Finally, we have shown how the concept of bodying is inherently entangled in the notion of milieu, suggesting that the body is continually shaped and influenced by its environment and vice versa. Judson's bodies emerge in multiple sites: Dunn's classes, the Judson Memorial Church, the Village and the body itself as a place of inquiry. These spaces are to be considered a proliferation of bodily sites, which means that there are no meaningful places outside and separated from the experience of the body. These places are not "already out there", but they are dynamically shaped and experienced through the manifestations of bodily presence. Expanding on the notion of "spacing" (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012), which apprehends the complex

assemblage of material, embodied and affective elements of everyday materiality and calls for the notion of space as a configuration of several spaces, bodying opens up to a concept of space that is never discernible as a specific site, that has no boundaries and encompasses a multitude of possibilities and interconnections. Bodying generates a space that is more than the imbrication of several spaces. Through bodying, space is generated simultaneously with the process of organizing as a complex entanglement of physical spaces with shared affective states that are reorientated, reorganized and have no clear boundaries. Considering this approach when inquiring into the process of organizing implies that we need to focus on the flexible boundaries of organization and the zone where these boundaries are negotiated in the intimacy of the experiences.

On a methodological level, bodying can be adopted as a theoretical cross-cutting construction capable of transcending disciplinary boundaries and opening up to interconnections between seemingly disparate fields, as well as different possibilities in inquiry and intervention practices in OS. This could lead to a more post-qualitative style of performative research (St. Pierre, 2011) positioned in the entanglement of the social, the material and the affective, such as affective ethnography (Gherardi, 2019), research-creation (McCormack, 2008a) and participative methodology (McCormack, 2008).

CONCLUSION

Although interest in the body has become increasingly important in recent years in OS, its theorization remains very often fragmented and constrained in a binary view. Drawing inspiration from the processual philosophy of Erin Manning, we propose a theorization of the body as "bodying" and operate an ontological movement to understand the body as a non-fixed and ontogenetic entity. This aligns perfectly with the processual understanding of organizing. Through this lens, we analyze the emblematic case of the Judson Dance Theater, a revolutionary

dance avant-garde of the 1960s. The processual concept of "bodying" finds its most profound manifestation within the Judson dancer's experience. Here, the body becomes a site of inquiry into new capacities and aesthetic possibilities, challenging the boundaries of traditional dance organizations and allowing the birth of a new form of organizing.

Judson's case enables us to consider what a body can do to organization. Indeed, there is a difference between thinking of the "body in the organization" and thinking of "the body as emerging in organizing". From this bodying perspective, organizations are always "bodying with", which means that the body is immanent to the organization, and we can't think of one without the other.

The concept of bodying has much to offer organizations. What is significant is that bodying is not just a philosophical concept. Erin Manning's concepts activate existence and make living practices possible, as in her art and social project, the Sense Lab and the Three Ecologies.

Further empirical studies should be developed to better understand how bodies are constructed and construct organization. These studies could approach the body from a more inclusive perspective and consider the ethico-political potentialities they have. Indeed, by acknowledging the consideration of pre-cognitive aspects of embodiment, we'd like to highlight how organizing is a process that also occurs at a level below or prior to conscious thought. This might open up further study of embodied affective, pre-reflexive aspects of organizing.

Finally, it should be noted that Judson's study presented here is not exhaustive and only considers some aspects of this complex artistic phenomenon. The use of this case does not aim to assimilate Judson Dance Theater into the organized liberal and capitalist system that the movement sought to avoid. Instead, we approach this case with the utmost respect for dance as an art form and aim to give back to dance by recognizing its profound agency, impact, and relevance. We want to underscore that dance is not merely entertainment; it is a powerful medium for exploration, questioning, and co-creating the world we inhabit.

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