

CHOREOLOGICA

Choreodromocracy: (to)dance like a slow fight
zone in the face of speed's war

by Thiago Alixandre

December 2024



Choreodromocracy: (to)dance like a slow fight zone in the face of speed's war.

By Thiago Alixandre

Abstract:

There is such an explicit relationship between movement and war that, for this very reason, sometimes it becomes implicit: this extreme exposure numbs us to the point that we fail to realize the relationship between movement and war, speed and power. War depends on movements. More than that: war depends on fast movements. Perhaps the relationship between war and speed is still not as visible as it should be even though the human body is the battlefield in which this relationship takes place, 'detonating' processes, 'exploding' symptoms, 'targeting' cognition and 'annihilating' subjectivity.

This paper proposes the hypothesis that the body, and specially a dancing one, can contribute to the expansion of this visibility. We will also try to demonstrate how choreographers have experimented with certain procedures as antidotes to this problem throughout dance history.

Introduction:

What is now considered slowness of bodies, vehicles, processes, connections, and everything around us turned into a demerit, while swiftness happens to be praised as a moral value, essential for the survival of the neoliberal reason. Slow became "bad", and nimble became "good". Moreover, the time of the motile autonomy of the human body is now considered slow before the ultravelocity of the automation processes of non-human bodies, mainly those fitted with screens. Currently, the movement of bodies with skin is slow if compared to the speed of action of bodies with the screen. On screens, whenever we can, we accelerate the time of bodies made of fur. The body became sluggish before fast machines. Slowness is a synonym for retardation. And what dawdles may *fail*. But what *failure* are we talking about? Which criterion is used to consider that the body time became bad and *faulty*? Is the swift time of capitalism a *good deal* for the human body?

There is a very explicit relationship between movement and war, and it is so explicit that turns out to be implicit. War relies on movement. More than that: war relies on swift movement. Statements like that may not be able to reveal the hidden within the obvious due to its obviousness. Therefore, hereby we develop some ideas that seem to contribute to the elucidation of those phenomena.

Maybe the relationship between war and speed is not as visible as it should be, even though the battlefield in which this relationship occurs is the body, where processes are triggered, symptoms are exploded, cognition is hit, and subjectivity is devastated. Due

to this overexposure, we cease to see the relationship between movement and war, speed and power. Therefore, instead of considering it under the light of the concept exposed here, we suggest walking under its shadow. We will try to let the usual lighting that overshadows this subject go, working in the shadow of Dromocracy (VIRILIO, 1977), an idea that indicates the relationship between velocity and power. The hypothesis developed hereby is that the body, and even more, the dancing body, may collaborate to expand such visibility, creating antidotes for this problem.

Body:

When we talk about the body, we hereby refer to *Corpusmedia Theory*, a concept developed by the researchers Helena Katz and Christine Greiner, both professors of the Communication and Semiotics Program from the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP). The authors created the Corpusmedia Theory, a complex theory used to deal with human and non-human bodies, intending to escape from frequent dualisms surrounding the body definitions found in Philosophy history. Intending to escape from the traps that engage the body in binomials like body/mind, body/soul, body/spirit, feeling/thought, nature/culture, subject/object, among others, the Corpusmedia Theory proposes the idea that bodies are biocultural¹, therefore, not detached from their environment, i.e., within this Theory, we do not consider the body *within* an environment, or an environment *outside* a body, but we consider a *body-environment*, inseparable just like that, because everything that surrounds the body becomes body, or the environment *tobodies*, as it is stated on the present stage of the research (KATZ, 2021). "*Tobody*" (*corpar*, in Portuguese) is the verb chosen by Helena Katz to indicate that the body is subject to interact with the environment, therefore there are no partition, barriers or borders defining what is *inside* and what is *outside*. In this meaning, the body is an inside that outsides itself, and/or an outside that insides itself. There are no barricades neither boundaries between the body and the environment.

Each system that relationally involves the body is considered an environment. In the present text, the environment is not only about turfy soil, but it refers to the sign of epistemic, cultural, socioeconomic, and political environment, among others.

Using the Corpusmedia Theory, we have a strong theoretical apparatus to address the body without mutilating what seems to be its quality: the fact that it is always in relationship with and constantly exchanging with the environment. In this sense, the body can never to be, but only to be present, depending on the contexts that regulate it.

¹ This idea also finds theoretical consent in the research developed by the biologist Samantha Frost, in: *Biocultural creatures: Toward a new theory of the human*. Duke University Press, 2016.

² To not use "Embodied" or any of its synonyms, avoiding the permeated dualism in it, our proposal is to use the word "*tobody*", according to the paper: "*Corpar: Porque corpo também é verbo*" (*Tobody, because body is also a verb*), published by Helena Katz in the e-book *Coisas Vivas, Fluxos que Informam*, edited by Laboratório de Dramaturgia do Corpo - LADCOR (Body Dramaturgy Laboratory) of the Post-Graduate Studies Program of ECA-USP, December 2021.

In this sense the body is a communicational phenomenon, i.e., it is always communicating what happens with it, with the environment, with the context, and with its history. It is always a temporary collection of information that configure it at each moment. That being said, we may assert that if our political environment is capitalist, for example, and the body is inside capitalism, which at this current neoliberal stage praises the speed, so, according to the *Corpusmedia Theory*, if the body is not able to refuse contamination from its environment, probably the body starts to **tobody**, that is, to reveal vestiges of such environment; in this case, we highlight the velocity as an ingredient to be identified in the body. Then, the body starts to emanate the spices of the speedy ingredient in its materiality, gesture, behaviour, subjectivity, cognition, ideologies, ethical conduct, moral values, political positions, leisure methods, ways of composing affections, etc. Our interest here is to explore the way this body moves and/or dances now.

Dance as communication:

At PUC-SP, the Body Arts Graduation Program still includes the word “communication” in its name. Officially the Program is called *Communication of Body Arts*, drawing our attention to the fact that dance, for instance, resides in the knowledge field of Communication Sciences. This proposal clearly indicates not only that each body is *Corpusmedia*, that is, a communicational phenomenon, but also that the body arts occupy areas of communicational situations that amplify what we traditionally know as communication. Keeping this in mind, I invite the reader, when reading the words “body” and “communication” in the present text, to remember that we are not dealing with body and communication from their classical understanding, but differently, always considering *Corpusmedia* as communication and communicational phenomenon that go beyond communication vehicles and verbal communication, and always dealing with body and communication as a communication that goes further.

Communication and war, speed and violence:

When studying History, we will notice that there is no historical segregation between the development of communication and war. In other words, there is no separation between communication and war. Most of our communication apparatus was developed in warlike contexts or at their service.

It is important to remember that it was during the early part of the twentieth century, during World War I (1914 – 1918), that several machines were developed, such as the electric telegraph, the press, the telephone, and the radio. It was between the 1930s and the 1940s, during the World War II (1939 – 1945), that we saw the industrial scaling of communicational technology, bringing to life industries such as the radio, phonographic, cinematographic, and journalistic industries (print and radio). The television industry flourished between the 1950s and 1960s, during the Cold War, and it was mainly from the 1960s to the 1990s that the internet, virtual reality, robotics, and communication automation emerge. From the 1990s to 2020, we saw the

miniaturization (*downsizing*) of communication technologies with the invention of mobile telephony, the web, the so-called “social media”, algorithmisation, artificial intelligence, networked robotics, platformisation, etc. These last communication technologies were developed in face of more than 28³ conflicts occurring simultaneously in the world, i.e., in a world that moves in a belligerent state. But what is the relationship between communication, movement, speed, and war after all? And how do body and dance historically relate to this context?

To understand this historical tangle, we need to review the concepts of Dromocracy and Dromoskill, so we can use them to create our key hypothesis: the one that the movement belonging to the body and the dance was expropriated by the capitalism of war, and the way that it kidnaps body movement is a sparkling the reality through the fast movement of machines.

Dromocracy and Dromoskill:

The Greek word *dromos* meant movement at first, but in Latin languages, it was transliterated as celerity and/or speed. The suffix *cracy* comes from *kratos* and means power. Therefore, Dromocracy is the relationship within the power of speed or speed as power. Hence, Dromocracy is an idea that reveals the relations between speed and war, showing the extension these relations have in our lives.

In *Speed and Politics*, Virilio (1977) gives clues to the historic dimension of the dromological process, presenting the *dromos of logos*, i.e., the laws that regulate a swift life and that found the speed regime, the Dromocracy, to which we succumb and to which we are now subjected.

At first, the author relates this concept with geographic coordinates, linking it to the urban context. Then he expands this understanding, exploring the Dromocracy concept in other territories besides the geographic one, drawing our attention to the simultaneity, ubiquity, and utilitarianism of the logistic time as a way of life with social, political, and psychic implications, among others.

In Brazil, Prof. Eugênio Trivinho, Ph.D., expands this concept comprehension and explores it in the communication field. In his article *Introdução à dromocracia cibercultural: contextualização sociodromológica da violência invisível da técnica e da civilização mediática avançada*⁴, Trivinho draws our attention to the fact that the Dromocracy proposed by Paul Virilio in 1977 is always a sociodromocracy, and its exacerbation may be recognized on the cybercultural sphere. He also warns us of the fact that the global understanding that considers speed as logistic efficiency relates itself with a tactical vision, coming from a belligerent subjectivity and subjectifying us

³ At this moment, besides the Ukrainian crisis, the world has 28 active conflicts and fears new wars, as revealed by Patricia Pamplona's article published on February 16th, 2022, at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2022/02/alem-de-crise-na-ucrania-mundo-tem-28-conflitos-ativos-e-teme-novas-guerras.shtml>

⁴ Available in: *Revista FAMECOS*, No. 28, Porto Alegre, December 2005.

in a warlike way, i.e., "speed cannot be conceived in disjunction from violence, both concrete and symbolic" (TRIVINHO, 2005, p. 63). The researcher reminds us that the social and cultural history of Dromocracy still needs to be properly composed, hence there is a need to develop it in several knowledge areas. That is why we have this demand to explore the relationship between Dromocracy and dance, because maybe we may enlarge even more the understanding of this system that choreographs, disciplines, and tames us within the scope of social choreographies (HEWITT, 2005).

In order to understand the meaningful relation between body and Dromocracy, we need to remember what Paul Virilio highlights in his text from 1977, when he says that, during the tribal nomadism of primeval people, the body was one of the first logistic transportation devices, more specifically the female body, where trinkets and miscellanea were hung on their backs to be carried from one place to another, helping the men that fought for food, territory, etc.

In the context of a fight, it is easy to notice the importance of speed to grant success and victory, because a human body moves slower than a horse, for example, so, if a soldier relies on supply for his wounds and they come by horse or by a bipedal human, the transportation vehicle and its speed may define if he is going to survive or not. Moreover, during a war action, tactical and logistic efficacy is a synonym for failure without speed.

"To the elevated slowness of the body motive performance, extremely chained to the ground, the dromocratic future would clearly wave to with a fatal and irreversible dissolution in face of the arrival of vectors more and more effective" (TRIVINHO, 2005, p. 66).

The logistic history of speed begins with the body, and it is in the body that the effects of Dromocracy emerge. During the Industrial Revolution, the assembly line belts demand the acceleration of body motility, but in a cybercultural context with 5G velocity, the body is subject to other implications.

Now it seems to exist seasonal dromopathologies, such as anxiety, depression, F.O.M.O. (Fear Of Missing OUT), burnout, etc. In this sense, it is worthy to observe the body when reflecting on Dromocracy, because if this system has its origin in a belligerent subjectivity that values speed in the name of logistic and tactic efficiency, apparently such conflicts occur in the body. The body becomes a war zone where the process that sickens it is blown up and dynamited.

In this context speed and agility become synonyms for competence and efficiency, and society honours the dromoskilled individual. Dromoskill turns into a moral value that is very important to neoliberalism. The most agile experts are traded on the market while society depreciates slowness, the ones considered slow will face prejudice in the dromophilia world. When in love with speed, the subject does not notice that the same *pathos* in which he is in love is also the pathological excess that makes him ill. Even

though neoliberal capitalism has enchanted the body under the dromophilia spell, the symptoms experienced by most of society reveal the dromoinability of the body. The work *The Burnout Society* (HAN, 2010) reminds us about the effects of speed in the body that, in conflict with itself, fights to defeat in a battle fought on the belief of having a war to win.

Time as a body enemy: speed is violence!

If a vehicle crashes in an accident, it may not kill depending on the velocity, but it may be fatal if at high speed. A high-performance and quick athlete will face many lesions, harming his joints and muscle fibres. Speed has its own circumstantial advantages, but in the mid- and long-term, it implies risks and has undesirable effects. Truth is that speed has won as a hegemonic value, and we live the speed as if it were a system. In this world, slowness means vulnerability to a presumed attack, while speed means the chance to escape from a predator, even though we are not properly living in the savannah. But the speed that promises to save us, to honour us, and to glory us is the same that violates the motor processes of the body, it is the same speed that makes us sick, puts us in danger, and eventually even kills us. Hence the speed that promises to save us from the predator in fact is an agile predator, and we do not notice its quick sting until we perish from pouring its poison off.

We know that inertia kills too. That is, a stationary body is also in danger, as well as the speedy one. Therefore, the question we face relates to movement: How should we move? We should not forget that we are always talking about movement when discussing speed.

There is a false dichotomy opposing speed and slowness, which is supported by the binarism that tames us. Within this false polarity, something slow is almost something inert, and in Dromocracy something inert becomes a synonym for unarmed. In Dromocracy, not being agile is like the absence of the weapons and munitions needed to win the war against time, which is the fiercest enemy of the body.

If we want to acknowledge that speed increases violence potential, we just need to remind the close relationship between speed and accident. It is in an F1 autodrome that the speed glory merges awe and fatal risk, for instance. Circumstance and accident mediated by speed intrinsically carry the power of violence and death.

If the time of body movement became inappropriate, slow, and unsuitable for the dromocratic value, the body starts to suffer from dromologic inability. To reach the desired speed and rhythm, the body stresses its motive temporality using moral orthopaedics,⁵ a system where the body is always fallible and a debtor. To attend to this presumed failure, capitalism offers a solution with devices now fitted with 5G speed. As people in love with the screens that quickly follow orders with only one touch, we are enchanted by the dromocratic *logos* and start to act more within the screen than out of

⁵ Reference to the term “Moral Orthopedics” presented in George Vigarello’s work *O sentimento de Si – História da percepção do corpo – Séculos XVI-XX*, 2016.

it. Outside the screen the body rhythm feels like melted lead running in a heavy and torrential way, while inside the screen our body becomes light, weightless, and agile; we become projectiles running for the dromocratic glory promised by neoliberalism, even though the targeted object is ourselves.

But that is something convenient even in face of the brutal pain caused by speed because speed turns reality into a scintillation. Reality becomes furtive and refracts the subjects' dromologic fantasy reflections. That is, when facing reality, the subject melts into shiny fantasies that spark the neoliberal fetish of dromoskilled subjectivities. Analogic time becomes an enemy, and the subject creates a war against it, in which the weapons used to exterminate it are strategies from the cybercultural environment. Without even realizing it, the body becomes a conflict zone where there are no barriers nor walls between the Online and the Offline world. And such a body was produced by capitalism between wars - a body sickened by speed and thirsty for power.

Choreodromocracy:

In a simple way, choreography may be defined as the composition of a displacement within time and space; thus, this activity has the critical impulse to resist the dromocratic logos. A good composer explores time with rhythmic nuances and would not be happy with fast decisions only. In fact, in composition, the fast movement stands out when presented in a relationship with a slow one and vice-versa. Velocity, rhythm, and time-space distribution are elements characteristic of the music composition process. Therefore, as dance is the art of choreography, composing with movement, it seems right to assign the epistemic discussion about speed to it.

Andrew Hewitt in his *Social Choreography* (2005)⁶ makes an interesting proposal when considering the choreographic logos in the social and political fields. By Hewitt, we may notice that the hegemonically instituted powers reclaimed the choreographic *logos* by performing choreographic determinations, instead of compositional experiences. To have a perspective of the social choreography that rules us, we just need to observe a city and notice the colour of the people living in the suburbs, how and what body types may walk, populate, and move in certain places. Another author that also contributes to this philosophical perspective of dance is André Lepecki. He warns us of the fact that the body movements, which imply social movements, were choreopoliced⁷ by power institutions.

If the present text was a ball until now the following ideas would be present: Corpusmedia (KATZ and GREINER), Dromocracy (VIRILIO, TRIVINHO), Social Choreography (HEWITT), and Choreoplice (LEPECKI). But they still are sitting in their places facing each other, waiting for some bold flirtation and a call for a dance. So now

⁶ HEWITT, Andrew. *Social choreography: Ideology as performance in dance and everyday movement*. Duke University Press, 2005.

⁷ LEPECKI, André. *Coreo-política e coreo-polícia*. *Ilha Revista de Antropologia*, v. 13, No. 1, 2, p. 041-060, 2011.

we are going to propose this dance where such ideas, holding hands, dance and reveal to the reader the antidote against the dromocratic poison in the form of choreography.

Dance(ing) as a slow battle before the war of speed:

If speed won and became a neoliberal moral value, if it has established a system that submits us to Dromocracy, requiring a dromoskill from the bodies which, in turn, spark the reality, if all of this has redesigned social choreographies and choreopoliced them, and if the body, in fact, is a Corpusmedia whose experience *tobodies* and materializes itself in a cognitive, subjective and motile way, then we may conclude that capitalism has fought a war against the body and that, in order to tame its rhythm variability nature, the system needed to bewitch movement through speed, turning itself into a choreodromologic tool that tries to remove the judgemental ability inherent to the dance, the body, and the choreography, instances able to move slowly in the middle of a war that fights using the weapon of speed.

Hence, in this context, it makes sense to re-enchanted dance using dance itself, just like capitalism bewitched movement using the movement itself. It is important to remember that movement can mobilise, set free, and emancipate, but it is also used to tame the wildest animals. Therefore, the movement has a powerful ambivalence that dynamites the binarism that tries to tame it. It is not about moving fast or slow, but it is about knowing how to dance and how to compose the rhythmic nuances according to what we desire to strengthen or weaken.

For instance, in the *sambódromo*⁸ we have dance, choreography, and speed, but all these things are mediated by the syncopated samba's culture, which resists the belligerent violence of Brazilian suburbs. That means that *dromos* does not always seize the body, because it jumps during the syncopation of time intervals when dancing the samba, proposing a back-beat dance, gracefully and delightfully wiggling, and shaking life in face of the brutal violence that kills it.

If dromocratic dynamites undermine a temporal field, samba teaches us the strategy of non-stepping in the times determined by the rhythm that tries to lead us, we should revolt against it instead, stepping during time breaks in a syncopated way, in the cracks of time, escaping from deterministic and easily presumable traps of what is now an enemy of the body: the invariable, linear, and regular time of the Choreodromocracy that polices us. The Choreodromocracy proposed in the present article nominates and makes visible the process of kidnapped movement that has an enchanting power of emancipation and freedom through dances, but that was wickedly mesmerized by the speed servient to dominant powers.

We need to learn again the slowness of dancing gestures with Kazuo Ohno⁹, gestures that reveal the debris of war, we need to slowly walk down the New Yorker skyscrapers

⁸ Place where the Carnival School's Parade takes place in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil.

⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0L4pKT_Ae4

with Trisha Brown¹⁰, displacing gravity and verticality, we need to make a crowd march in a slow and choreographed way, turning an ordinary body gesture in an extraordinary and unique event as Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker¹¹ does in Brussels, we need to dance a stop motion like Vera Sala¹², and insist on the motive time of the urban walker, just like Felipe Alduina¹³. Artists like them pulsate their body power as a slow war zone, facing the speed war that tries to knock down body, dance, choreography, and life.

If Dromocracy is a neoliberal belligerent tactic against the revolutionary pulse of the erotic rhythm of life, a tactic that kidnapped movement, reducing it to speed and establishing a Choreodromocracy that dominates us, maybe dance and choreography, as fertile movement composition areas, are the devices able to teach us the antidote receipt against the deadly speed poison. The art of moving with the body must demand the return of the expropriated movement and time domain because those elements belong to a powerful fight field: the body that dances its own time.

Bibliography:

FROST, Samantha: **Biocultural creatures: Toward a new theory of the human**. Duke University Press, 2016.

HEWITT, Andrew. **Social choreography: Ideology as performance in dance and everyday movement**. Duke University Press, 2005.

KATZ, Helena: Coisas Vivas, Fluxos que Informam, LADCOR (Body Dramaturgy Laboratory) of the Post-Graduate Studies Program of ECA-USP, December 2021.

LEPECKI, André. Coreo-política e coreo-polícia. **Ilha Revista de Antropologia**, v. 13, No. 1, 2, p. 041-060, 2011.

TRIVINHO, Eugênio: *Introdução à dromocracia cibercultural: contextualização sociodromológica da violência invisível da técnica e da civilização mediática avançada*, Revista FAMECOS, No. 28, Porto Alegre, December 2005.

VIGARELLO, George, **O sentimento de Si – História da percepção do corpo – Séculos XVI-XX** (2016)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoL4pKT_Ae4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKkBXZSljHk>,

<https://trishabrowncompany.org/repertory/man-walking-down-the-side-of-a-building.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKudkRM8rMA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgFgVogh6As>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YddhKRDpTIY>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKkBXZSljHk>, <https://trishabrowncompany.org/repertory/man-walking-down-the-side-of-a-building.html>

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKudkRM8rMA>

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgFgVogh6As>

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YddhKRDpTIY>