

Walk, Dance, Chassé: An Invitational Score

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1. Score Notes

Taking the form of an invitational score, this paper responds to a question posed by the guest editors: What can dance do for law? (Moscati and Mulcahy 2025: 1) My contribution is to show how site dance can further develop movement as socio-legal method (Smith 2021). Site dance, as a choreographic practice that takes dance out of the parameters of formal performance venues (Hunter 2015) shares a key concern with movement as socio-legal method: what happens when we attend to law outside its formal, institutional confines.¹ Site dance offers tools for noticing law and justice differently and, I argue, cultivates an embodied attentiveness to space, orientation, and the everyday.

I focus on walking as a shared mode of inquiry to bring site dance and movement as socio-legal method into conversation. Movement as socio-legal method has illustrated the ways in which moving *with* the subject of law, as opposed to being with it or observing it, generates new insights into law's sensorial environment, power, and presence (e.g. Smith 2021). As socio-legal method, movement has been a useful way of expanding awareness of law in everyday spaces rather than institutional or formal confines. But across wider legal scholarship, walking has also emerged as a mobile method, with reflections on what we learn from

walking through city streets (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015), connecting with our legal footprints (Barr 2017), and pausing to reflect on affects that abound in the everyday space of law (Young 2019). These reflections on walking are set in a broader context of movement-infused engagements with law including line-making (Jacob and Macdonald 2019), journeying (Davies 2017), driving (Anthony et al. 2023), and seafaring (Rawani 2018).

The aim of this paper is to expand the discussion of movement as legal method into new modalities of mobility by considering how site dance brings a different awareness to law's spaces and places. In doing so, I draw from examples of site dancing that engage with the concept of walking as choreographic practice (Bannon 2011). My reasoning for this is that understanding walking choreographically, as site dance invites us to do, allows for a mode of disorientation. Site dance, in other words, has the potential to unsettle our relationship with space by making the familiar strange (Sheets-Johnstone 2011; Bingham 2019), and, in doing so, heightens our awareness of how bodies inhabit and are shaped by space. This, I suggest, is crucial for legal method, because it troubles the assumption of the body as a neutral vehicle for legal movement, and instead reveals how movement in law is embodied, situated, and contested. Whilst there are many ways in which movement as legal method could be expanded, walking as choreographic practice adds an important dimension through the attention it engenders to the micro gestures of the body in motion.

As a score, the paper is intended as 'a set of instructions, guidelines or tasks related to the creation of a performance that serves as the starting point for improvisation or as a communication tool for generating movement and action' (Franco and Cherneitch n.d.). The language of invitational score is, as we see from this definition, tautological. I want to emphasise, however, that one of the key contributions of movement as socio-legal method is its invitational aspect (e.g. Barr 2016). We are so often used to engaging with law and movement in ways that suppress invitation that there is resistance in dancing *with* law (Mulcahy 2021). We walk through streets being told how we can move, what vehicles we

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can use to support our movement, and how to regulate the speed of our bodies in motion. As choreographic practice, however, dancing offer ways of moving *with* the law and not simply *through* it. The concept of score is useful for developing the invitational capacities of movement as legal method because it captures the essence in which to notice law we must move with it. What do we notice differently about law when we dance with it?

The concept of *chassé*, in which I present the score, is intended as a framing device to support movement between disciplinary terrains and ways of knowing. Drawn from the genre of ballet dance, *chassé* can be interpreted literally as ‘a step in which one foot literally chases the other foot out of its position’ (Grant 1982: 44). The *chassé* is used as a transitory step and appears as a gliding motion. The concept of *chassé* is, I argue, useful as a material metaphor for the interdisciplinary work of dance and law given that it is a term imbued with movement capturing the sense in which dance and law converge through steps to meet one another. In their introduction to this special issue, the editors make connections to art/law in which ‘/’ signals ‘entropic movement of change and uncertainty’ (Finchett-Maddock 2023: 341 cited in Moscati and Mulcahy 2025: 2). The concept of *chassé* as a material metaphor for law and method is intended to contribute to this interdisciplinary ethos.

The paper unfolds in three parts which map onto the following frames of movement: walk, dance, and *chassé*. We begin with walking as a means of attunement to law, space and justice, turn to (site) dance as a mode of disorientation, and end with a score designed to generate movement as legal method.

2. Walk

Walking as legal methodology interrogates the relationship between the text of law and its inherent spatiality. Text is a dominant vehicle for the expression of law. Law speaks through its statutes, judgments, documents, and artefacts. But law is not solely text, it is also space. What does it mean for law to *be* space? How might this differ from law being *in* space? And how might it differ still from law being *seen, felt,*

grounded or otherwise *encountered* in space?

Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos's concept of the 'lawscape' allows us to explore the idea of law *being space*. Lawscape captures the sense in which law and space are totally inseparable, 'constantly conditioned by each other' (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015: 4), folded together in ways which, at times, make law or space more apparent. A bureaucratic office, for example, is a space in which law is entirely visible, with warnings against providing false information, signage compelling quiet for the official work in process, and documents which are produced (Smith 2023). At the same time, a library which appears open, accessible, and calm is still a deeply legal space – with its implicit speech act compelling silence and quiet (Constable 2005). Law is always present – the task is to recognise it, attending to the background as much as the foreground (Wall 2019).

Walking, as a legal methodology, offers one way of experiencing the lawscape. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2015: 95) describes, for example, a pedagogical task undertaken by his students in which they are instructed to take a long walk and, using all of their senses, be mindful of their body, movement and surroundings. Walking the lawscape, the students experience the presence of law and its enmeshment with space, encountering law's spatiality, corporeality, and materiality. Walking the lawscape unsettles the understanding of a self-contained body separate from its environment. Walking is a sensorial, atmospheric practice which reveals insights into law's conditioning of the body and its possibilities for space. Walking reveals how law defines physical boundaries for movement, allowing or denying entry, whilst conditioning atmospheres (e.g. of safety, risk, precarity). As Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos notes, 'law is carried in various bodies, themselves part of space' (103).

The concept of law being 'carried' in space has been expanded on by Olivia Barr to develop a 'jurisprudence of movement' (Barr 2016). Walking is a material practice of law which carries legal meaning, because 'when we walk, we also carry law' (5). As example, Barr draws from the observations of Blackstone, that 'if an English subject goes

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wandering in a place categorised as uninhabited land, it is deemed “they carry their laws with them” (ibid). As such, beyond the student or researcher observing their own movements within space, walking can be observed as a material practice by legal or state actors to bring law into being in everyday life. Barr’s work has been critical to the development of walking as a legal methodology. Through concepts of ‘legal footprints’ (Barr 2017) and ‘kaleidoscopic legal place’ (Barr 2019), Barr has highlighted how walking is a material, multi-layered, and textured technology, calling into question how we live ethically with the law that we carry through and with our bodies.

At the same time, criminologists have revealed how walking is a deeply affective methodology. Alison Young (2019), for example, reflects on the affective experience of encountering a tribute to a murder victim on her daily walk in the neighbourhood. Walking past the tribute means Young connects the site to her earlier reading of the violent incident in the news, describing her affective encounter with law and violence as ‘haunting’, given how the memory sticks with her. Walking, then, is a reflexive practice which brings to the foreground affects, resonances, and other hauntings that otherwise remain in the background.

Movement as legal method, then, provides a means of exploring the entanglement of law and space. Through movement, the legal scholar unearths, excavates, and makes visible that which is otherwise hidden, or at least, that which is known but not *felt*. Take, for example, the collaborative work of legal anthropologist, Marie-Andrée Jacob, and dance scholar, Anna MacDonald (2019), as they illustrate the affective and material forces at play in the legal technology of de-registration (or as they describe it, ‘strikethrough’: see, for discussion, Mulcahy 2021). Their collaboration sees MacDonald perform a walk in a straight line as a performative act – representing and embodying the affective processes at hand when the law strikes through a name on the register. As they demonstrate, dance can illustrate and make tangible that which law otherwise obfuscates.

3. Dance

Site dance is a genre of performance influenced and informed by a specific site or location (Hunter 2015:1). By taking the performance out of the theatre, location becomes an integral part of the artistic experience, necessitating adaptation to the wider sensory environment and bodily immersion in space (see, for discussion, Hunter 2015). Site dance can be traced back to the 1960s and 70s when artists such as Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, and the wider Judson Dance Theater collective experimented with the boundaries of dance. Trisha Brown's *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970) was first performed in the dance artist's home – an apartment in New York. A dancer walks down the side of the building, supported by harnesses and cable, towards the onlooking audience who stand below. The piece is not designed to be theatrical, but mundane and routine. The dancer wears casual clothing, and the choreographic instruction is simple: walk downward. It is the relationship between bodily act (walking) and site (rooftop and apartment exterior) that renders the performance a choreographic act. The act itself remains stable, yet the site transforms the motion into a performance, challenging our understanding of space, environment and the body in motion (see, for discussion, Finbow 2016). Dance, like law, cannot be tamed to particular spaces: it is everywhere. And in refusing to tame dance, Brown draws attention to the blurred lines of the mundane and the spectacular of the body in motion.

The heightened affect of the mundane is equally apparent in the most routine of sites or bodily acts, such as the commute to work. Fiona Bannon discusses urban walking as choreographic practice as she reflects on her commute as 'daily dance practice' (Bannon 2011: 97). As a choreographer, Bannon describes her commute as involving 'phenomenological moments' (98). During the daily walk, Bannon becomes 'an architect of the invisible choreography ... through spatial and temporal coincidences ... and the multiple nuances of planned and unplanned happenings that occur in this free play of city life' (100). Site dance, then, can involve choreographic practices of walking which challenge our assumptions of the body in motion.

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A useful way of reflecting further on the commonalities and distinctions of walking and dancing is offered by Robert Bingham, as he reflects on a project which involved ‘patterns of walking, photographing, and removing trash’ (Bingham 2019: 72). Struggling to articulate his project as dance, Bingham turned to what he describes as ‘superordinary’ movements such as ‘stamping, jumping, rolling, falling, melting, balancing, shape-shifting, and stillness’ (ibid), which re-orientated his perspective. Bingham describes the difference between dancing and walking as one of perception, describing how the ‘lifeworld’ (73) of his spatial environment became more vivid through dancing, compared to the everyday walking mode which orientated his perspective forward and directional. Dancing by ‘pausing and rotating to sense the space behind my body, or going upside-down, or balancing on one foot, or lying down on a rock to see the sky’ (72-73) changed Bingham’s perception of body in space, a shift which was instantaneous compared to daily walking.

Site dance, then, offers useful ways of considering what it means to move *with* space and not simply *through* it, and this invitational modality of movement, is, I argue, particularly useful for law. Take, for example, the work of Alana Gerecke, who asks: ‘Is it possible to be kinaesthetically attuned – with our differently contextualized and signifying bodies – to the ways in which the land is an active collaborator, a co-choreographer?’ (Gerecke 2019: 39) If we return these insights to law, we might see the lawscape not as a static backdrop but an active participant in legal life, shaping and being shaped by the body in motion. Much like the invisible workings of the lawscape (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015), dance similarly can take place beyond the visible plane but readily discovered if attuned to. Site dance offers a means of kinaesthetic attunement to the spatial environment, encouraging attention to the micro gestures of the body in motion and revealing how law’s presence in the everyday is not only observed in movement but also felt and reconfigured through it.

4. Chassé

I now turn to the score which invites movement with law. Before doing so, however, it is worth pausing to reflect further on *chassé* as a specific choreographic step and its relationship with theories of movement and space. During observations and interviews with ballet dancers, Susanne Ravn (2019) notes how ballet dancers are trained to normative concepts of alignment and placement which focus on balance, control, and the idealised bodily form. As she puts it, ‘ballet dancers aim at presenting the body and ballet positions correctly, and are constantly measuring their movements against the ideal moving ballet body’ (68-9). If *chassé* is derived from ballet, and ballet is such a constricted genre of dance, where does the potential for law as an invitational, resistant form arise? Ravn continues by noting, however, that ballet is not solely fixed on the mirror. Instead, dancing ballet ‘was about sensing the sequence of movement instead of positions. To move from A to B in a way where the path between became important [...] “positions” are never frozen or still’ (69). There are parallels here when critically engaging with law. Law is ultimately concerned with order, rule, and placement – ensuring people, places, concepts nearly align. Yet, it is in the transitory spaces that we find some resistance to order. To take this concept further – of structure and order, movement and stillness – I present an experimental score, a *chassé*. Take one step to dance, one step to law, and one step to glide dance/law.

1(a) Tilt. Pull the weight of your body to one side, and then to the other. How far do you go without the risk of falling? Experience the lift as one side of the body counteracts the other, a constant act of push and pull, of balance and order. Return.

1(b) Lean forward, feel the force of law. The law of gravity which orientates you in space. The law which holds you here, wherever here is. Return.

1(c). Lean back. Trust the law to catch you in its web.

I draw parallels here between Brown’s *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* and (1970) the jurist’s quest to reveal the paradox of law

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as both ordinary and extraordinary. Even the most supposedly routine engagements with the state, such as registering a birth, have affective potency (Smith 2020). These moments, though grounded in everyday administrative acts, become affective and transformative journeys through legal space, akin to pilgrimages that weave walking, place, and meaning into a single experience (Smith 2020). Brown's choreography offers an analogue. Taking walking as a routine act and placing it in an unfamiliar orientation, through tilting, leaning, and shifting weight, she unsettles perception and prompts renewed attention to what the body is doing. In this light, the forces of gravity, of push and pull, in Brown's work can be read as metaphors for law's own physical and conceptual pressures: law pressing down upon the body, and the body resisting, adapting, or moving with that force. What might we notice about law if we allowed its most everyday movements to become strange in this way?

2(a) Breathe. Shoulders back. Chest rise and fall. Notice the architecture of the body in motion, even in its stillest form.

2(b) Count. Breathe in. 1-2-3-4. Hold. 1-2-3-4. Breathe out. 1-2-3-4. Attend to the rhythms of the body in motion.

2(c) Breathe. Feel the laws of stability, continuity, and endurance.

If a simple choreographic instruction is needed to evoke the spectrality of the mundane, as Brown would suggest, there is no simpler instruction than to breathe. To notice the presence of law, to make and unmake it, simply breathe. Law is everywhere, after all – it is not solely found in text or speech but also in space, place, atmosphere and affect (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015: 1). What is stilled in the motion of breath? What atmospheres do we taste in the intake of air? What is expelled? As an aesthetic encounter (Tremblay 2022), breathwork focuses our attention on the multiple rhythms at play in the lawscape. To breathe in law is to draw space, time, and atmosphere into the body, registering how air is thickened or thinned by legal, social, and material arrangements. Breathing is to become attuned to the temperature, textures, and affects that law generates, noticing how these shift

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with each inhalation and exhalation. In this sense, breathing is both a measure of our embeddedness in the lawscape and a micro-gesture through which we might alter our relation to it.

3(a) Listen. Listen to the site itself, do not speak over it. Speak to it, but question whether listening would be more productive.

3(b) Listen with all the senses available to you. Turn off the music. Bring your hearing to the ground. Intake air and smell. Touch the boundaries.

3(c) Listen to the interior. The continual lawscape of the interior. The laws of what must be done, could be done, might be done.

There is a risk, when working with sites – be these places, spaces, or architectures – that we lose vital insights into the *where* of law. How does the site resonate? Given the vibrancy of material life (Bennett 2009), there is choreographic weight to listening to a site. Be conscious of whether law is being excavated, overlaid, or otherwise projected onto or with a site. Take note from the practice of dance scholars and receive your ‘spatial dictation’ (LeFevre 2005) from the site itself. Listen to the site itself, do not speak over it. Speak to it, but question whether listening would be more productive (Parker et al. 2020).

5. Moving Forward

This *chassé* does not end here. Like the step itself, it is a movement that carries momentum, gliding from one place to another while remaining open to shifts in direction. The score I have outlined is not fixed choreography, but an invitation that can be taken up, adapted, or reimagined in different legal and spatial contexts. Crossing between site dance, walking, and movement as legal method, my aim has not been to offer a singular route, but to propose a way of noticing: of attending to the body in space, and the grain of law as it moves beyond its institutional walls. If walking as a choreographic practice can unsettle our orientation to space, then perhaps it can also unsettle our orientation to law, prompting new questions about how we move with it, through it, or against it. What other scores might emerge if legal

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scholarship were to embrace disorientation as a method? How might we continue to expand our capacity to recognise law?

The score aligns with and expands practices such as legal walking tours (Bricker forthcoming), which centre cities and buildings to observe law's spatial and material presence. Where such tours often focus on architectural or historical markers, the *chassé* turns the gaze inward, towards the body's own shifting weight, breath, and sensory receptivity. This is not to replace existing approaches, but to offer another point of entry: one that moves with law at the scale of the body.

The score is a beginning. It is a starting point for thinking about how dance might be incorporated into legal method: a frame that could expand to include other directions attuned to the micro-body, or those that reach for the less familiar, like jumping or rolling. It begins, too, in offering ways of beginning to dance as simple, repeatable actions that can be taken up, reinterpreted, or transformed. As with the *chassé*, the movement carries forward, its direction shaped by each step that follows.

Endnotes

- 1 There are, of course, many uses of movement that focus on law in traditional or institutional spaces (e.g., Vos and Stolk 2020) where site dance could equally contribute.

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