This paper contextualises the framework and methodology for producing the video performance *Ballet*, by Szuper Gallery (Susanne Clausen & Pavlo Kerestey), which was initiated through an encounter with an archive of rural information and propaganda films from the Museum of English Rural Life [MERL] in Reading, UK. This project looked at ways of extrapolating filmed gestures from the MERL films to choreograph a large-scale performance film and to consider how this practice-led research could instigate a new way of engaging with and interpreting the MERL film collection. The resulting video was produced in 2009 and was first exhibited at MERL, where it became part of the archive. This was followed by a series of international screenings. I will set out the surrounding research in and around the archive propaganda films, focusing on the performances by rural extras (background actors) in these films, while looking at the way one could understand the relation between a future-past, or tradition and accident in these films (Massumi, 1993). I will pair this with a reflection on the cultural reading of the extras (Didi-Huberman, 2009) and the notion of social choreography (Hewitt, 2005) in this context. I will then lay out reflections on artistic methods for the final performance, a Crash Choreography, based on calculated, but spontaneous encounters.

**Rural Propaganda Films**

MERL is a national museum and houses the most comprehensive national collection in the UK of objects, books and archives relating to the history of food, farming and the countryside. It has a large archive of information and propaganda films, which present a collective image of "the rural". The films show machines, products and processes mainly from between the 1930s and 1980s. The films were made for local distribution to farmers’ organisations, for product promotion and dissemination of best practice. They are unique records of rural labour, technology and social organisation (few are held by other archives and no academic or artistic research has yet studied them), and they originate from different sources, mainly from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as well as the United States Department of Agriculture. They range from practical advice for farmers with regard to threats to the countryside, diseases or situations of war (for example 1950s information about Cold War era civil defense for the farmer and information about coping after a nuclear explosion), specific farming issues, and protection of the work force, to films and photographs documenting the efforts and engagement of The Women’s Land Army in the British Rural Countryside during the Second World War.

The audiences targeted by the films were the agents of change, and its beneficiaries and victims. The films were made by the suppliers of these workers’ machines, and government agencies responsible for their professional education and their inculcation into changing agricultural priorities. The films in question were sponsored by ICI, International Harvester, the Milk Marketing Board, the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the National Farmers Union, using documentary film as propaganda, cultural history and cultural geography.

These films illustrate how relationships between the rural and the urban were negotiated, and how agencies producing the films attempted to address, motivate, persuade and regulate their rural audiences (governmentality). As well as fulfilling these informational functions the films also present a conventional picture of British rural life. The cinematography and the style of direction vary from documentary or propagandistic delivery to staged documentary-fiction.
Still: ‘The Home Defence for the Farmer’ (1950-60s) issues advice on coping before and after a nuclear explosion. Precautions to take on the farm, e.g. protecting buildings, equipment, food storage. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food [excerpt]
Change in farming goes alongside social and political change. The technological advances in our food production carry new risks and dangers (motorisation, tractor accidents, fertilisers, etc). Technology is also an agent of protection of these risks. New chemicals prevent grain diseases. New fertilisers guarantee growth. The films’ messages, designed to teach, inform and convince their audiences by demonstrations of practices: how to protect people, farms and livestock from accidents and incidents, as caused by human failure or carelessness, machine failure or by force of nature or catastrophe, such as nuclear fallout. Notably a series of films made between the 1940s and the 1980s aims to reassure and appease the rural population, by offering sensible and reasonable measures of coping with, and protecting themselves from, a nuclear attack. In Home Defense for the Farmer (1950s-60s) we see the farmers quietly and calmly covering their sheds and machinery with tarpaulin, barricaging their barns with bales of hay, herding in their livestock, equipping themselves with food stock, shortly before the expected nuclear incident. We then see the farmers emerge from their houses after the incident, attending to practical measures, such as washing down the machinery and animals from the deadly dust.

What collectively affirms the vision of the rural, however, is the use of the role of rural extras, many of whom appear to be local farmers and their families, ‘enacting’ the rural way of life. They appear either as ethnographic subjects or as background extras, demonstrating, performing, gesturing. Their appearances inform what we perceive as “rural life styles”, performed representations of the rural. They demonstrate and enact images and figurations of labour, choreographed in these films to demonstrate procedure, but also to perform a sense of tradition and ‘normality’. The tradition carried by families involved working on and with the land and with animals. Some of these films negotiate the fact that traditions are forgotten or have been neglected. The farmer who disregards the traditional way of handling his cattle is caught in a fatal accident, stabbed by an enraged bull (Beware of the Bull, 1960s). Tractor Follies (1960s), a film on tractor safety, shows scenes of different accidents involving tractors, e.g. hitching and threshing. We see a farmer handling his tractor and threshing machine while wearing a suit and tie, until is tie is caught in the fast spinning thresher. The Danish film, Wild Oats (1955), shows how carelessness encourages grain disease. It follows a farming family through the harvest cycle, planting, threshing, and handling their oats. They have inherited the knowledge of their craft, but they make mistakes when dealing with the wild oats, which grow between the healthy grains and contaminate the whole harvest. This film propagates two moments, which are both related to time: on the one hand the tradition, the craft, the knowledge of the people of the land, and on the other hand the accident, the interruption. But, as Brian Massumi (1993) notes, “accident and tradition as two dimensions of time are not contradictory.” (p.3). In fact, they are both agents in the notion of fear, meaning the cultural and philosophical condition of fear, as a mass phenomenon, as a time-regulatory factor in late capitalism. Massumi describes this in the plot in a series of Timex watch ads, where different people wearing Timex watches are pictured having survived accidents caused by practicing extreme-sports, or other extreme physical activities. They carry the symbol of tradition and craft as represented in the valuable watch, while the accident happens. They are extraordinary people, not because they are more special than the rest of us but because something that happened to them. An event. They experienced danger, and lived to tell the story (Massumi, 1993: p.4). These people’s accidents have been commodified to sell their stories, to sell the tradition of the symbol.
Still: ‘Beware of the Bull’ (1950-60s) [Content: Shows live action; opening shot of warning sign; male voice-over children playing near field; toy plane flies over hedge; children go into cow field to retrieve plane, ignoring Beware of the Bull sign, they find a man hurt on the field. Man subsequently dies.]

Still: Fallout (1960s) [Content: Film shows the supposed effect of nuclear fallout on food stores through simulations of conditions]

Still: Home Defense for the Farmer (1950s-60s), [Summary: Information film about coping after a nuclear explosion.]
**Future-past**

The threat of the accident to happen, the expectation of it, is always set in the future and negotiates a relationship to the past. The accident is the model for thinking the recent past and the uncertainty of the future and its possible recurrence, the “future-past” (Massumi, 1993: p.5). We cannot avoid the future of its incidents, but if we, as Massumi says, follow the existential imperative of capitalism - don't crack under pressure (pick the right watch) (Massumi, 2005: p.1), or in the case of our farmer/performers follow the right procedure, then we don't have to worry about never having been, to be hailed into a future-past (Massumi, 2005: p.1). To avoid or to survive the accident means that time continues. The seemingly horizontal line of tradition is actually one of events, falls and accidents.

The rural information films give us a sense of the “governmentality” (Foucault, 1982) at stake, by visualising the workings of the government and the big agricultural trade agencies, trying to produce the citizen best suited to fulfil those governments’ policies. We identify those films as propaganda, because they show organised practices (mentalties, rationalities, and techniques) through which subjects are governed (Foucault, 1982). In his 1993 text Massumi introduces us to the imminent disaster as the dominant narrative of our late capitalist social reality. Since the end of the Cold War we have seen a plethora of threats: from Chernobyl, Aids, nuclear fallout, pollution, and more recently food shortages, avian flu, mad cow disease, swine flu, global warming. These words anticipate the mode of fear, which for Massumi is both an objective and symptom under late capitalism, the remedy to which is only to consume in order to return to a sense of normality. In relation to the rural films this means careless behaviour and avoidance of procedure will cause disaster and disease, low return and poverty. And yet, as we see in *Home Defense for the Farmer*, in these films everything is about to happen, but nothing seems to have changed.

The MERL films might also be useful for understanding our negotiation and social interactions with the natural world, with the land, with our food and our animals (Eco-governmentality). The workers of the land are the agents of the ecosystem. Of course today we question how much food production is still in farmers’ hands, and what their relationship to food production, which today is largely industrialised, actually looks like. This realisation creates new anxieties. Food and eating are part of lifestyle and culture; food is yet another commodity, closely linked into the chain of fear. Eating itself has become a productive activity, similar to the way culture produces social capital, as Massumi notes. But the food we eat, the bodies we move in, are equally in a state of emergency. Food and health are two other closely linked commodities, another “time-form’ struck with futurity” (Massumi, 1993: p.14). Increase your productivity and health now in order to avoid illness and save time!

In the sci-fi film *Time Machine* (1960, after H.G. Wells’ novel), the accident is programmed into the future of society. This future society has long outlived the practical effects of a nuclear incident, and has subsequently ritualised the disaster. Society has split into two human species. An underground cannibalist society rules and regulates life and feeds on the other species, an overground, pastoral, naïve, vegetarian tribe. They are a fruit eating human species, who are kept as cattle or livestock. The disaster has been ritualised and is exercised in a daily routine, which calls the young innocent tribe to the slaughter, with the sound of an air raid siren, dating from World War 2, that has survived into this future. The siren is the signal to which all those young people start to move. They walk steadily, entranced, through the grass and the idyllic rural landscape, towards a hole in the ground, where they will be eaten.
Stills: *Ballet*, 2009
The siren also signals the end of the apocalyptic dance in the final scene of the video *Ballet*. The siren is a well-known emergency alert system. In 2002 the US administration introduced a new, visual, synaesthetic, colour-coded alarm system. This system is based on green as "low"; blue as "guarded"; yellow as "elevated"; orange as "high"; red as "severe". So far the threat levels of green and blue have never been used and at present the national threat level is yellow (DHS website). Massumi (2005) uses this current phenomenon to illustrate the politics of institutionalised insecurity, which is based on the idea of trying to manage and to calibrate our sense of anxiety (Massumi, 2005: p.5) and therefore our perception of what constitutes normality. The colour spectrum indicates that insecurity in the new "normal". The propaganda of the colour alert system functions on an affective, physical level. The fear we would experience in the face of a dramatic crisis is at risk of getting out of control, the colour system is used to modulate feeling at the somatic level of the body. Fear strikes the body and compels it to action before it registers consciously. When it registers, it is as a realization growing from the bodily action already under way: we don’t run because we feel afraid, we feel afraid because we run (Massumi, 2005: p.6). A shift in color generates a shift in disposition towards action, and thus movement. The state of alert is thus a state of “activation”, a “durationless moment of suspense” (Massumi, 2005: p.6).

The farmers in the rural films appear “suspended” on different levels. Firstly they are performing an action before an anticipated accident (which in some of those films is real for the farmers at the time of making the film). Secondly we see them perform “suspended” by the presence of the camera. The performances appear slightly awkward. Perhaps this is caused by anxiety created through this situation of being filmed while performing one's own life. The farmers' movements are carefully measured, spaced and paced, self-consciously regulated by the unusual presence of a camera. Ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch was very aware of the fact that the presence of the camera altered the behavior of the subjects in his documentary films. He experimented with a new kind of documentary film about his own (French) society (*Chronicles of a Summer*, 1960), where he followed a group of people over the course of a summer. He introduced this film with a reflection on whether or not it is possible to act sincerely in front of a camera.

**Ballet Synopsis**

The first scene of the video performance, *Ballet* is located on the ground (the camera rests on the earth) in a stubble field, in which the barley has been cut, leaving short stubble. We follow through the camera eye as it starts moving upwards over the field, tracing a small airplane loop in the cloudless blue sky. The next scene cuts to a wider shot and we first meet a group of field workers, roaming the empty field, gleaning leftovers. The camera approaches the workers, young urban bodies dressed in brightly coloured work outfits (tunics and aprons), ranging from blue to yellow, orange, pink and red. They also wear bright, glowing caps in yellow-gold and orange.

Yellow-Orange is the colour of Uranium, a radioactive material, used as a colorant in uranium glass, producing orange-red to lemon yellow hues, also used for tinting and shading in early photography. Uranium was used to extract radium, which was used to make glow-in-the-dark paints for clock and aircraft dials. Uranium has also been used as the fissile explosive material to produce nuclear weapons (World Nuclear Association). Yellow and orange are also significant colours in the Azo food dyes, ranging in the yellow and red pallet (e.g. Sunset Yellow, E110 and Allura Red and, E129), which are commonly used for colouring sweets and are generally seen as potentially harmful to the organism (Wageningen University, 2010).
The nation dances between yellow and orange (Massumi, 2005: p.1)

Stills: Ballet (2009)
Ballet continues to follow the troupe of workers loading bails of straw, shoveling and collecting sheep shearings, rehearsing different farming actions. These actions gradually develop into a formalised rhythm. The work movements are followed by simple dance elements: the Can Can on the bales. The young farmer/performers rehearse a series of synchronised movements, a tractor appears, they move towards it, push it through the field, a collective effort. They walk through the field, silently. They attempt a synchronised fall, they plough through the field with a scythe. Animals appear and interfere with the action, briefly. One of the farmers then hangs onto the tractor shovel and is lifted into the air. Animals appear on the scene. Then all move, work-dance-action, the workers, the tractors and the animals. Ballet ends with an apocalyptic dance on the field, until an air raid siren calls the end of the performance.

Time machines
In Emergency Feeding (1939-45), a group of young women is instructed to build an outdoor makeshift oven to feed a large group people (who exactly we do not know; survivors of the incident?). They are Land Army Girls, young urban women, drafted to help on the land as farm hands. According to Donna Haraway (2009), the relationship between living species, humans and animals is highly politicised, where we cannot talk about labour relations or capitalism without considering it as a multi-species affair. Animals are integrated into labour traditions, and into family histories (both rural and urban). “What made sheep and goats and pigs so amazingly powerful as changers of the ecology of the west, is that they get on so well with humans” (Haraway, 2009). The relationship between people and animals living on the land is always a relationship between living and dying and killing and eating. Mass industrial deaths dominate our food production, and the terms of this death are that we have easiest and cheap access. “The Romans understood that cheap food was an imperialist policy and so does neo-liberal capital understand that cheap food, is the fictional and actual long shadow of animal agriculture” (Haraway, 2009). Thus animals are also agents of fear and part of the production of the narrative (animal garbage, swine flue, extermination of pigs, etc.). As food prices rise and the economic downturn bites, the concern for our food production and health has led to ways of reintegrating animal cultures into the cities. Urban agriculture (which includes for example keeping urban chicken) is a major happening currently in many cities of the world. And several green groups have come up with a hugely ambitious proposal called Feed the Olympics. They want to see 6,000 acres of land in the capital used to grow enough food for the 14 million meals that will be needed during the 2012 Olympic Games in London (Bone, 2008).

As cultural documents, these archival films may open up new histories of the land in post-War Britain, but Ballet does not aim to adopt a historical or anthropological perspective, or to look at the films’ historical qualities. Ballet tries to pull at the connective elements of the narratives that run throughout the films and to develop a way of performing a parallel narrative of the future-past, the layer emerging between the tradition and the accident.

Nevertheless, the installation Ballet, as it was exhibited at MERL, includes an edited loop of clips, excerpts from the historical material edited into a loop on a monitor (the video performance is projected in a darkened screening room). In this way Ballet includes a historical, fixed pointer within the presentation. It is not, however, a reenactment of these historical films, in the sense that actors are performing in front of a camera, or in the way that the camera eye would cast a certain dated view on things that are happening today. The camera does not perform “in a historical costume” (Leeb, 2009: p.43) as we can see in a
number of other recent projects. This historical view is created, for example, through certain camera angles, point of view, framing etc. In *Summer Camp* (2007), Yael Bartana films a peace camp in Israel, showing a group of young activists re-building houses in the occupied territories. Here everyday actions are examined in the light of the current geopolitical context. What makes this film political is not the subject but the way of linking it to a 1940s Israeli propaganda film, by shooting the film in 2007 using the same camera angles and movements as in the historic material, thereby re-codifying the historic labour movements into the present.

In *Ballet* the historical dimension is void. The historical material is neither dealt with as a medium of pure presence, neither is it viewed through a historical or nostalgic filter, nor is it factually correct. *Ballet* chooses certain historical pointers to develop a new and experimental relationship to the archive and new ways of exploring it, so that the archive here is rendered into a time machine. It becomes a time machine which spins around images and where it is no longer a problem of understanding what this gathering of information is all about, but a means of suggesting ways of experimenting with it to see what else can be retrieved from it. “What was next? What will be previous?”

In the archive films rural life is acted out by real farmers, but the archive films appear to have only limited ethnographic value, as their performances appear staged and choreographed and little is known about the aesthetic imperative, the conditions of production or the filmmakers involved. The films were intended to be viewed by rural audiences. The films would probably have been addressed and viewed differently by other audiences. The mode of pictorial address would have shifted from informational (the general public) to sentimental (the featured farming community), according to who would view them (Sekula, 2002: p.445). As most of the archive films are sponsored by government agencies and big agricultural corporations, one might expect a possible link to the British Documentary Film movement, which emerged throughout the Second World War. However, this is not immediately evident, although filmmakers who are regarded as central to this movement, such as John Grierson or Humphrey Jennings, also produced public information films, as “morale boosters and propaganda films” (Davidson, 2010,). *Listen to Britain* (1942) was sponsored by both the British and the Canadian Government and was one of the short films that flourished and reached a peak of expression in the 1930s and 40s. These films covered the whole of the Second World War and went on to express new ideas of making films. What differentiates them from the information films is that they are actually striking in their different approach to form, using “poetry, dramatic reconstruction, the techniques of modernism and explicit propaganda, thereby finding fresh, new ways to get a message across” (Davidson, 2010).

The rural films, by contrast, bear little innovative and/or creative treatment of their material. They demonstrate mainly pragmatic treatments. So what else is a stake in these films?

**Extras**

In his recent essay *People exposed, People as Extras* George Didi-Huberman introduces “Extras (Les Figurants)”, with Walter Benjamin’s challenge to historians “to give exposure to people, to the nameless” (Blaswick, 2009), and to put an individual’s experience in the centre of historical relations. Film, video and photography’s media qualities are indexical by nature, meaning that questions of time, duration, and representations of the past are always present. Whereas photography will always make claims on the past (Barthes, 1984), video has the

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1 Excerpt from a recent call for submission by BookWorks, publisher or Art Books, London.
capacity to simultaneously mirror and record traces of the present, creating even more ambiguous relations of time. Current historiographic approaches in art, however, are characterised by subjective access and interpretations and punctual interventions (e.g. Matthew Buckingham, Yael Bartana, Clemens von Wedemeyer). Clemens von Wedemeyer, in his 2009 project *The Fourth Wall*, traces the hype and controversy around 1970s National Geographic Article and featuring a series of ethnographic photographs of the Tasaday, an indigenous Philippine people. In the 1970s it was thought that the Tasaday were a remnant of stone age culture. Today that status is widely considered a hoax, although controversy remains. Wedemeyer present us with a subjective visual analysis of this hoax, by further doubling and re-working both the imagined and the factual images, and confronting real evidence with fictional characters in an array of photographic and time-based media. He presents found footage, fictional interviews, ethnographic photographs. He also commissioned a play, based on the records of first encounters with the tribe and staged in a theatre, creating the imaginary fourth screen conceived by actors as a means to imagine themselves alone and which, at the same time, enables the audience to believe the drama on stage is real.

Using a clip from the first film ever made, *Workers Leaving The Lumière Factory In Lyon (La Sortie des Usines Lumière à Lyon, 1895)* Didi-Huberman recounts how Auguste and Louis Lumière astonished and alarmed Parisian audiences with the spectacle of workers apparently invading their space. In this film, one the first moving images, the workers, producers of the photographic materials, become actors. The documented action in this short film clip (45 seconds) reveals itself as rehearsed and choreographed as the action is repeated. The workers are leaving the factory gate again and again, spilling over and seemingly entering the cinema space. Didi-Huber mann questions whether through this exposure, the extras are indeed exposed or rather made to disappear. The framing, montage, rhythm, narration, enclose these people, alienate them and thus expose them to make them disappear or, on the contrary, unleash them, liberate them by exposing them to comparison, and therefore gratify their appearance.²

An extra is a person who does not act individually nor is guided by his or her own authority. Extras act in mass, collectively, abstractly; they are choreographed. They are usually in the production to create a background picture. They fight in armies, form crowds, populate cafes or football stadiums. They do not usually receive detailed or individual direction, because they are meant to perform and to conform. “The extras are the everyman of the cinema” (Blaswick, 2009, p.31).

The medium of film sets everyman and everywoman (the masses) into motion. “Who are 'the masses', the word launched in the modern era as a term of contempt preceded by the notion of the mob, the unruly crowd occupying public space and threatening to destabilize the public order”? (Buck-Morss, 2006: p.1). Susan Buck-Morss describes mass society as a twentieth century phenomenon recorded through mass media technology (e.g. Lumière Brothers).

² Harun Farocki, in his filmic installation *Workers Leaving the Factory, 1995*, showed a series of representations of workers leaving the factory, from the original silent version by Louis Lumière to contemporary surveillance footage. He uses these as a metaphor for the filmic representation of the working masses to reflect on the relationship between workplace and cinema and on the relationship between work and camera.
Still: Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory, Workers Leaving The Lumière Factory In Lyon (La Sortie des Usines Lumière à Lyon, 1895)

Still: Night of the Living Dead, (1968)

The masses do not only create motion, but also inspire new technology to reach them, such as loudspeakers, megaphones or radio towers. Buck-Morss considers the differences between the observing and the observed masses in different theatrical forms, such as the carnival, the spectacle and the cinema. The theatricality of the carnival is spontaneous, indifferent to technologies, divisions between actors and audience is fluid and roles change constantly (Buck-Morss, 2006).

Whereas Hollywood movies generally use people, extras, like props to create a background, they propose a repeated spectacle of crowd scenes, exposing ordinary people. Directors have continued to propose this and expose these people in different ways. Didi-Hubermann asks whether cinema could create the sense of a collective being which transcended class, and whether it rather imposed a false construct of nationhood? The ways in which extras are represented is a measure of the disparity between who appears and who is an accessory, an actor of nothing, always in plural, but also a figure of the collective and common place.

Busby Berkeley choreographed and objectified the crowd to become a mass ornament (Kracauer, 1889-1966)) or a beautiful machine. Later in the century George Romero (1968). zombified his extras into the Living Dead Didi-Huberman unfolds an understanding of the Extra as becoming “the man without qualities, a consenting slave of the cinema” (Didi-Huberman, [2009], as cited by Blaswick, 2009). In cinema history different directors attempted to reassert the role of the mass as protagonist, “to construct the reign of visibility against the reign of the commonplace”, including Sergey Eisenstein or, more recently, Harun Farocki.

Eisenstein inverted the relationship between star and extras as ideological representation of the masses. In his epic films he managed to choreograph the masses to make them appear, to re-subjectify them. In Battleship Potemkin (Eisenstein, 1925) he pictures the masses less as a mass and more like a community, as an active rather than passive player in history. He achieved this by long framing shots of individual faces and bodies, which give a sense of how the movement spread from individual to community. In Strike (Eisenstein, 1925) he visualises the death of the masses, selecting and panning over individual faces. He follows the masses at work and at home, capturing them as private people by showing images and faces of their children in midst of the chaos.

Following the etymological origin of the French equivalent of “extras”, les figurants is always in plural. The extra in French is “un simple figurant” (a simple figure). Simple because he or she lacks the individual notion, the character and personality of the actor. The French notion dates back to the 1740s, describing a group of dancers, who at the start of a ballet performance would demonstrate the different dance figures in a performance through a collective arrangement. From about 1800 it was used in the context of the theatre for people with secondary roles, who are on stage as a mass, but have nothing to say. From around 1907 it was more commonly employed for groups of people, masses in both a social or historical context, referred to as the background of history or action, such as the military figure and the anonymous dying soldiers on the battlefield. How chilling it is to recognise that the Nazis referred to the people, bodies in the camps, as Figuren, Claude Lanzmann reveals in his film Shoah, 1985 (Didi-Hubermann, 2009, p.15)
**Collective movement**

Extras move as a crowd, groups of individual bodies that need to be instructed and choreographed on the sets. The process of instructing and organising these groups of individual bodies will inherently be an expression of one's vision, goals and expectations for the final picture. Susan Manning identified “the connections between the individual body and the collective body as the basis of choreography’s ideology” (Hewitt, 2005: p. 23). The coming together of the crowd produces a social environment. How it is framed gives views of the choreographies inherent ideology.

Andrew Hewitt in his recent book Social Choreography (2005) claims that choreography and movement not only reflect and represent ideology, but also create and generate ideological and social consciousness. In discussing notions and tropes of choreography in their inherent social context his social choreography describes a way of linking dance and the aesthetics of everyday movement to ideas about social order providing a dynamic framework to explore the critical potentials and inter-relations between social and individual movement. Hewitt takes choreography as something both social/political and aesthetic. Through reading the body and its movement not merely as a trope, he observes the double agenda in relation to movement whereby we could understand dance as both production and presentation of social order as well as dance as the articulation of bodies at work and play (Hewitt, 2005: p.19). (This adds another link to the relationship between the poetic and political.)

In the rural information films we experience a performance of “ideological work” (Hewitt, 2005: p. 22). The farming/working bodies are being moved, in a way that establishes a sense of insecurity as normality. What emerges throughout Didi-Huberman’s analysis is that the extra is a political term. It involves social relations involving authority and power. The extras are a community of “visible invisibles”. The individual extra, a pivotal figure, is hovering between objectification, alienation and incarnation, a living species, a re-subjectified human form (Didi-Hubermann, 2009).

In the 1920s, US dancer and choreographer Ted Shawn enquired through the dances performed by his all-male dance troupe whether to represent dance as hard work or to represent hard work as dance (Hewitt, 2005). In his *Symphony of Labour* (1920), he aesthetized labour movements and not only gendered and thereby sexualised, but also fetishised movements of men working together. Around the same time, the *Tiller Girls*, a British girl dance troupe, emerged as early commodity culture, energising their audiences with the Can Can and the Chorus Line. The rows of girls swirling their legs in the air, performing in synchronicity, were hugely successful. They generated a belief in the economic future of the time, while creating mass ornamental structures as show dances. At around the same time, the *Ballet Russe* started to emerge as a very different kind of dance. The dances were characterised by gauche movements, lapses, stumbling, disgraceful dancing, falling.

*Ballet* features an eclectic array of the movements and motions described. The Ballet extras try to perform the CanCan and the Falling Line on the field, combined with different working movements. *Ballet* also features a Nijinsky move: a young man lifts a pile of sheep shearings, throws it and jumps up and twists in the air.
Ted Shawn: Symphony of Labour (1934)

Still: Ballet (2009)
Performing the Extras
The video performance *Ballet* emerged through a series of previous live and filmed performances. *The Extras* (2006) presented a series of short stories written from the perspective of extras within a film set, describing incidents and chaos experienced on the set, and individual accounts of exploiting these situations for their own fantasies. *The Extras (Vancouver)* made reference to the 2000 Hollywood sci-fi feature *The Sixth Day*, in which the soaring atrium at Vancouver’s Library Square was transformed into the corporate headquarters of a bio-medical giant that, in addition to cloning organs and pets, was engaged in the illicit replication of humans. As a party scene played out in the over-arching promenade, a crowd demonstrated, carrying signs and chanting slogans. Szuper Gallery and a group of local extras revisited this location to re-enact the roles of The Sixth Day Extras. Through replicating the extravagant gestures of political protesters merged with clustered poses of the party guests this performance explored how extras “live in suggestion” in the background of Hollywood film, a foil for the Talent and standing in for The People. In cutting the principle players, the extras and the audience were left gathered within a loose reconstruction, suspended together in suggested activity.

*The Extras* (2008) was based and produced in Regina, Saskatchewan, another hotspot of both Canadian and Hollywood Film production, often chosen for its Western scenery and cheaper production costs. This large-scale event referenced an experimental live art tableau, a film shoot, and video event. In was staged in the courtyard in front of Regina’s City Hall, and revolved alternately around the action of a group of 23 extras, two cameras, video footage of these and other extras at the locations of local film productions (*The Tommy Douglas Story* and *The Englishman’s Boy*), and an actor, as she addressed a moving camera and read from a clipboard. The action began with a sort of controlled chaos as a team of extras spilled out of the foyer of City Hall, following a video camera that tracked their movements, and finally followed by the actor, and her authoritative prompt; “turn your camera on!” The camera that was trained on her then started up, and her image was simulcast onto a large video screen in front of City Hall. What followed was a kind of off-kilter, messy ballet, with seemingly confused extras being herded by the camera crews and the actor/director. There were different clusters of activity happening at the same time, while the actor read from a script-cum-manifesto. While working through these series of performances, cinematic staging, and choreographing groups of people, the sense of the “Crash Choreography” emerged. In a BBC interview, the producer of Elton John’s music video *I’m still standing* explained how this video was a result of rather spontaneous encounters, forced by production difficulties. The 1982 video was set to be produced in the South of France, when in the last minute the location fell through, and the producers had to improvise or risk losing the production. They decided to relocate the video shoot to the streets of Saint Tropez and hired a group of diverse acts and street performers on short notice. They then improvised these troupes’ individual performances into a simple and seemingly random set of performative carnivalesque street incidents. The dance erupts seemingly spontaneously, not unlike in a Bollywood dance scene, where a crowd spontaneously burst into a choreographed song and dance number.

The *Ballet* choreography was produced through a workshop/rehearsal with a group of 10 extras/performers together with actor and director Michele Sereda of the Canadian theatre company Curtain Razors. Before studio rehearsals we had extrapolated and selected filmed gestures and movements from the extras in the information films. We chose generic farming

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3 Thanks to John Russell for this note.
movements, such as bailing, picking, forking, gleaning, scything, walking, driving tractors or moving machinery. We focused on the specific way these movements were performed in the information films, focusing on the pace and spacing of these movements. We further rehearsed a set of simple of choreographic dance structures, by synchronising some farming movements and other short sequences, such as the Chorus line, a falling line, an arm dial movement (Shawn), a gauche jump (Nijinski). The performers were rehearsed and trained as a group of extras, performing collective group actions.

The video was shot on and around an abandoned farm in Berkshire in southern England. The movements and choreographic figures were rehearsed and then spontaneously performed on the setting. In the final sequence the extras collectively perform an individual sequence of combined work and dance movements, which results in a hysterical collective approach of seemingly uncontrolled movements. The practical premise of the project emerged as an experimental trial: what happens when you bring together a group of untrained extras, machines and animals and a choreographer and a camera?

_Ballet_ stages a subjective camera⁴. The camera performs a subjective and reflective eye, whereby the viewer is aware of subjective framing choices and of the camera movement. The viewer becomes a participant in the scene. The camera is seldom static, it moves in relation to the bodies, or against the flow of their movements, or cancels out their movement by moving with them, while at the same time trying to anchor and frame the bodies in the landscape. The interaction between the performers is not verbal, it happens through techniques of staging and a working practice that integrates movements, partly rehearsed, partly improvised. As a result they visibly struggle to cope with the tasks given to them: performing, acting and moving as a crowd, breaking into a dance, while the spectacle of crisis unfolds in a meandering chaos.

The sound performs a parallel motion, by using original audio from the video performance mixed with sound files found in the rural information films, as well as machine and animals sounds, sci-fi sound effects and 50s suspense music (which mainly originates from the information films). The sound comments on the action and provides conflicting emotional responses. It also introduces a further reflective level through moments of surprise, suspense, ambiguity and humour. The sounds performs an incongruity or discordance that goes beyond the evident meaning of the visuals and the actions. The music exaggerates and interprets the performance movements, through timing and reframing. However _Ballet_ is not a parody on the propaganda films, or a caricature and does not ironically mirror the rural actions. Instead it allows by allowing for lapses, gauche movements, shifts in situation and open endedness.

“However, as the mushroom cloud at the end of the video reminds us, catastrophes, nuclear or otherwise, threaten to disrupt our neat separation of rural and urban—the “ballet” on which the world food system depends. The genius of _Ballet_ is to make manifest through an apocalyptic “dance of the dead” the underlying threat to a fundamental aspect of our globalsocial organization” (Long, 2010)

(6707 words)

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⁴ See Babette Mangolte’s description of a subjective camera in Babette Mangolte _in conversation with Elena Filipovic_, Afterall, Antwerp-London- Seville, Spring 2010,
Bibliography


Films
Home Defense for the Farmer n.d (1950s-60s), 15 mins, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food), (UK) [Summary: Information film about coping after a nuclear explosion.]
Emergency Feeding, A Training Film for Caterers, (1939-1945), 24:30 mins, Imperial Chemical Industries Ltd, The ICI film unit, (UK)
[B Summary: Film shows how to build and use emergency ovens cooking equipment.]
Beware of the Bull n.d (1960s), 8 ,m, Central Office of Information Film for Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, (UK)
[Content: Shows live action; opening shot of warning sign; male voice-over children playing near field; toy plane flies over hedge; children go into cow field to retrieve plane, ignoring Beware of the Bull sign, they find a man hurt on the field. Man subsequently dies.]
Fallout, n.d (1960's), Colour, 6:55 mins, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
[Content: Film shows the supposed effect of nuclear fallout on food stores through simulations of conditions]

Further films
Bartana, Yael (2007) Summer Camp, Video (In this video the camera re-enacts and performs a historical documentary film, while documenting workers in a contemporary work camp).
Buckingham, Matthew (2006) Obscure Moorings (USA)
Romero, George, (1968) Night of the Living Dead(USA)
Rouch, Jean and Morin, Edgar (1960), Chronicles of a Summer (F),
Hardy, Robin (1973) The Wicker Man, (USA).

Dance choreography
Shawn, Ted (1934) Symphony of Labour.
Nijinsky, Vaslav (1912) L’apres-midi d’un faune