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**A theoretical exploration departing from the performance *Delayed Movements for an Obstinate Joy***

***Uma exploração teórica a partir da performance Movimentos Demorados para uma Alegria Obstinate***

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**Abstract**

This article reflects on a practice initiated by Inês Zinho Pinheiro and Massimo Milella following their 2023 performance *Delayed Movements for an Obstinate Joy*, created with an informal group of performer-researchers in sound, dance, and visual dramaturgy. The practice is guided by a developing methodology introduced by Inês, called *dancepting*, which merges choreography, dance, and theoretical inquiry. The article unfolds three key questions drawn from their performance: ‘How can we imagine a choice?’ explores the potential of movement yet to occur, highlighting the tension between the visible and invisible; ‘How do we concretize something intangible?’ addresses the challenge of making abstract ideas visible and tangible, while preserving their intangibility; ‘How do we go through it together?’ considers the balance between autonomy and collectivity in their performance. The article concludes with a *dancepting* conversation blending narratives and readings, and marked by a *slight ingenuity* essential to pursuing *an obstinate joy*.

Keywords: Practice as research – Transdisciplinarity – Choreography – Visible/invisible – Collective research – Dancepting

## Resumo

Este artigo reflete sobre uma prática iniciada por Inês Zinho Pinheiro e Massimo Milella após a sua performance de 2023, *Movimentos Demorados para uma Alegria Obstinada*, criada com um grupo informal de *performers*-investigadores em som, dança e dramaturgia visual. A prática é orientada por uma metodologia em desenvolvimento introduzida por Inês, intitulada *dancepting*, que combina coreografia, dança e investigação teórica. O artigo desdobra-se em três questões-chave extraídas desta prática: ‘Como podemos imaginar uma escolha?’ explora o potencial de movimentos ainda por realizar, destacando a tensão entre o visível e o invisível; ‘Como concretizamos algo intangível?’ aborda o desafio de tornar ideias abstratas visíveis e tangíveis, preservando a sua intangibilidade; ‘Como passamos por isso juntos?’ considera o equilíbrio entre autonomia e coletividade nesta *performance*. O artigo conclui com uma conversa *danceituada* que funde narrativas e leituras, sendo marcada por uma *leve ingenuidade* essencial à procura de uma *alegria obstinada*.

Palavras-chave: Prática como investigação – Transdisciplinaridade – Coreografia – Visível/invisível – Investigação coletiva – *Danceituar*

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## **A theoretical exploration departing from the performance *Delayed Movements for an Obstinate Joy* (2023)**

### **Introduction: Dancepting a performance**

*Delayed Movements for an Obstinate Joy* is a performance conceptualised and executed by Connor Scott, Inês Zinho Pinheiro, Massimo Milella and Moss Dean. This proposition intertwines dance, musical composition and a dramaturgical-visual *pastiche* within a common space, operating on planes that, at times, run parallel, and at others, intersect. Despite maintaining a strict independence, these elements inexplicably and indissolubly become interconnected. The organic nature of each performer's journey converges on a shared pattern where dance, music and visual-dramaturgy align, from what is the only possible starting point for us in that (and in this) moment: being and doing together in a common place, which is definitely not a 'commonplace' – as in ordinary or unremarkable – but a shared place that has a communal resonance.

From this point and through the gradual addition of individual movements, sounds and text-images, a rhizomatic composition is activated and generated, theoretically infinite, but performatively confined to a predetermined time frame. For this creative process we decided to explore the simple idea of accumulation as our main tool informed by methodological aspects inherent to practice as research (Spatz, 2015). This methodological approach allowed us to generate material – be it sound, movement, still images or text – involving a type of repetition that always implies changes and differences each time it is experienced.

The performance arises from a need to share our personal creative processes and sensibilities already in constant dialogue and potentially oriented towards common research (more than a *mise-en-scène*, we could see it as a sort of *mise-en-questionnement*)<sup>1</sup>. This seems to have no other objective than to activate a score of possible questions (the delayed movements) capable of delineating a space-time to adhere to a horizontal, playful, non-

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<sup>1</sup> See Henk Borgdorff about his concept of "Experimental reflexivity": "In this context, experimenting means mobilizing 'methods that allow indecision or uncertainty, doubt or questioning to emerge, in action, within a creative process.'", quoted in Collet-Letorneau (2019, 30) – All titles of the mentioned works and all quotations extracted from them, originally written in other languages, have been translated to English by the article's authors to facilitate greater clarity for the readers. For any further details, see References.

hierarchical posture of a continuous proposition, i.e., *an obstinate joy* – an intensity, rather than a form; an inhibition, rather than a context; a questioning, rather than a doing.

This work has been presented in Lisbon in two distinct versions, firstly in ZDB (May 2023) and, afterwards, in *Partícula do Açúcar* (June 2023). These two versions were particularly contrasting from each other regarding duration and use of space.

The first edition lasted two hours, which attributed a durational quality to the performance, allowing a sense that people could come in and out as they pleased, without losing the work's essence. In fact, this durational characteristic also informed our use of spacial implications. The two dancers (Inês and Connor) occupied the whole space, which included two rooms divided by a wall with two doors on each side, allowing them to play with where each repetition/accumulation started and ended within that space. Massimo also moved freely through space, but had a more static station with a desk, a laptop, a projector and a collection of books that he placed in various locations throughout the performance. This use of space permitted him to compose a text made entirely from a montage of quotations, forming a textual pastiche that, once projected, also became visual through its accumulation. Moss (the musician) was in a static station from where he had an ample perspective of the overall space, as well as the other performers' location, while playing his electronic musical instruments to create the same kind of accumulation composition common to all elements.

The second version lasted merely twenty minutes and was presented in a dance studio context for an event that billed various other performances. This configuration altered much of our initial proposal and it was challenging to adapt the work to such a short period of time and to a space that did not allow us to play with its potential as much as the initial experiment. However, musically the second performance was even more attuned with the format of accumulation we chose to follow, perhaps because Moss played the guitar instead of the electronic instruments, which gave a more immediate and literal quality to the buildup of sound.

Since this intervention can be regarded as an active and integral part of the performance, an invisible trace in motion, aiming to share it with the reader – who, evidently, only in exceptional cases could coincide with those who have actually witnessed these performances – it is important to mention that, in order to read it, having attended the performances is both, crucial and irrelevant.

In March 2024 – almost a year after the performance – we, Inês Zinho Pinheiro and Massimo Milella (two of the artists involved in this artistic project), worked for thirty days on a shared text file, creating a constant dialogue where the themes, motifs, and issues of our respective doctoral research<sup>2</sup> naturally and fluidly intersected with our practice of *Delayed Movements for an Obstinate Joy*. More concretely, we have recovered the *still images which are integral to* Massimo’s research, and confronted them with Inês’ research, which always involves *moving bodies*. Finally, we identified a series of three questions that represented a partial cartography of our research relationship – a territory of shared problems and issues in which we moved, just as in the performance, with *Obstinate Joy*: 1. How can we *image* a choice? 2. How do I find ways of concretising something intangible? 3. How do we go through it together? (How do we practice it together?)

This article is not a montage of things we have done together, but rather the (temporary) result of a practice Inês has named *dancepting*. In her proposal, this syllogism arose from the conjunction of ‘dancing concepts’ alongside Inês’ constant concern for finding ways of merging the processes that occur while writing and reading with the ones that happen while dancing. This osmosis of ‘dancing-concepting’ is shared as an audio proposal entitled ‘ways of *dancepting*’<sup>3</sup>, which is part of a solo performance, a further personal step starting from our collective investigation. What kinds of problems does this proposition raise? We wondered: how does dance relate to the concept? In order to think and experiment while departing from this question it was necessary to consider the supposed ephemeral quality of dance. Deleuze’s (1995) aid became a pillar to find a connection between the ephemeral event – movement – and the sensation that sustains in time, space and bodies. There were three terms that helped create that link: concepts, percepts and affects. Firstly, but without a hierarchical organisation, concepts arise from philosophy. Secondly, percepts belong to the artistic sphere, as a blend of sensations and perceptions that go beyond those who feel them. Thirdly, for Deleuze, affects are the ‘becomings’ that surpass those who experience them.

We have realised that our conversation in March and all the small developments that sprouted from that occasion, including those that led to this article, can be considered phases of this broader research practice of *dancepting*. So, through this specific practice that we are

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<sup>2</sup> Inês focuses on ways of proposing movement that may be experienced by whoever is interested, while Massimo explores aesthetic links between still life painting and contemporary theatre.

<sup>3</sup> Presented within the context of the event *Glow Papers* held at *Galeria Zé dos Bois*, September 2024, Lisbon.

experimenting with, in the present text we propose a selection, a deepening, a posture, a state of stillness, a reflection on a whole creation process – like a close-up detail of a painting for which one consciously chooses to perceive the overall dynamics.

## Prelude



I. Willem Kalf *Still Life with Fruit, Glassware, and a Wanli Bowl* (1659), detail of the peeled lemon.

You write *all that exists, including you and me, is both contained and external* – Is this what we are doing?

(Inês to Massimo, during the process)

The flaying of objects invented by still life in human painting, submit to the human laws of optics, a gaze that is not divine and all-seeing but a gaze beyond, a human gaze carried beyond the visible envelope [...]. In this way it conquers the object from its form to its matter. Right down to its flesh

(Wajcman, 2022: 61).

## 1. How can we *image* a choice?



II. Velasquez, *El Aguardador de Sevilla*.

Choices have gained relevance to us, recently. How do we continue? How do we create? – We make endless choices. These are *slippery* subjects to put into writing – to appropriate Jonathan Burrows (2022) adjective. Still with Burrows’ words in mind, even though we wanted to write a text together that could be shared somewhere, we realised we should not conceive it by imagining its success. If we would do this, we would be implicitly ignoring all the little delayed adjustments, movements, writings, thoughts that we must go through to do this together. We might need a slight ingenuity towards the adjustments, movements, writings, thoughts that are necessary to achieve this, allowing ourselves to accept all the ones which are unnecessary. None of this is obvious (*Excerpt from the dancing process of the performance: Inês to Massimo*).

This movement/question was a starting point also in the beginning of our conversation and, in fact, it keeps questioning us. It was an opening door for multiple choices. Now, and for the purpose of this article, it is a going/passing-through corridor. This way, we can imagine choice in the form of a movement ‘trace’. Therefore, we imagine the certainty of a condition of presence in its invisibility.

In movement, we visualise/capture moments of decision that lead to the following one. This is articulated by João Fiadeiro and Fernanda Eugenio (2012) in the methodological tool *Real Time Composition*, underlining the infinity of choice possibilities by acknowledging a single choice. From here, we contemplated types of choices. Firstly, we acknowledged ethical choices, which led us to wonder what other kinds there are. Aesthetic ones? Are those

simultaneously ethical? – it might be pertinent to remind that Fred Moten, analysing Adrian Piper’s performances, clearly points out a way to re-frame this aspect: “you don’t have to privilege the ethical over the aesthetic in art if the aesthetic remains the condition of possibility of the ethical in art” (Moten, 2003, 249). And are all choices visible? We are aware that they are not, but which kind of invisibility can they have? How can we imagine a choice? How can we choose an image? Are choices endless? If so, are their images infinite?

All these questions become even more relevant when thinking about the idea of ‘diagnosis’ proposed by Foucault, specifically with his proposal of saying “what can be seen in what we see every day” (Foucault 2024, 15). Here, diagnosing allows “a knowledge that crosses and distinguishes” (id., 16), which we believe also grants ways of noticing what seemed to be there, by realising its foundation. This kind of awareness enables us to detach ourselves from restraining norms that, because they have been around us for a long time, seem inevitable. However, they are not, and by simply acknowledging this, we might encounter new ways of freedom in contexts that initially suggested oppressions. We could clearly word it as a ‘reflective practice of freedom’.

The choreographer and dancer Meg Stuart in her creation *Soft Wear* (2004) – we love this title (*but why?* see epilogue of the present article) – is literally a body immersed in darkness and her first and most important movement is just a posture, or rather, we should say an orientation: her body *is* frontality. She is a two-dimensional figure, cut by a yellow light like a faded photograph, but framed only as a chromatic discontinuity. The dance scholar Jeroen Fabius (2009) observes:

Meg Stuart starts from the body, the kinaesthetic experience, as she is interested in ‘physical states’. This has led her to a process of elimination of physical activity to heighten kinaesthetic experience of the performer as well as intensity of the attention of the spectator. She provides a *microscopic approach* to theatre, a visuality that is infused with bodily sensation.

(Fabius 2009, 340, italic is ours)

Still with this kind of ‘microscopic approach’ and with this aesthetical feeling of a ‘bodily visuality’ in mind, it is possible to work on the questions about the (in)visibility of a choice – as we asked some lines above, ‘are all choices visible?’ and ‘how invisible can they be?’ – taking the example of something different from a performance: a very well-known painting, Diego Velasquez’s *El Aguador de Sevilla* (1623) – cf. image I. Here, we will not dwell on the personal form of the Spanish painter of articulating the chiaroscuro lessons of the caravaggism



that significantly influenced his visuality – in a constant dialogue with the Flemish painting heritage and its connections. We prefer to focus on two specific details, simultaneously opaque and transparent, that could take a consistent role in our practice and research.

On the terracotta amphora, our gaze, even in the simultaneity of the event, can follow the irrational yet natural path water droplets that are not part of the vessel (cf. image III). We can consider it as water that will not be drunk, a limited waste. We could also imagine that some drops have already slipped out of the context of the image – one might say at the feet of the observer – others are still there, motionless, gathered, reflecting a tiny and invisible world in which all that exists, including us (looking at this painting, for example), is both contained and external.

But then, what are these drops for? They are localised in a time-space of a bodily visuality in which the drop becomes so liquid that the surface loses its (in)consistency. They are no longer towards the viewer, who loses any real physicality when the whole world is enclosed in each of those drops on the amphora. It is in the dark, in the obscurity, in the depths of a condition that we cannot identify exactly as *realism* without taking in consideration the risk related to the complexity of this word. The strategy of the choice (of the artist, of the spectator) calls to go further.

In the liquid and volumetric transparency of the drop, a sort of detail in excess, that drips out of the amphora, exactly as it does outside of the painting, evokes the second detail (which is both contained and external at the same time): an opaque figure of human being in the background of the image. It is a vertex of an imaginary triangle in which sight requires a pupil opening and a more dilated time: there is a face, synchronously evident and hidden (cf. image IV), of a person who participates in the action – an apparent, modest, everyday action, anything but heroic, somewhat more related to the aesthetic of still life painting, than to historical/mythological subjects. More specifically, it seems to evoke the expression of a double action: that of bringing the large cup to one's mouth, and thus of drinking – an action that exerts exactly the opposite pole to the wasted drop, to the micro-world that escapes its container and, in becoming other (margin, extra) does nothing but reflecting the same world from which it is not a part of; the other (more enigmatic) is that of turning one's eyes towards us – and now, if you are looking at it, towards you. Right here, the suspension counts more than the gaze, the stain of colour more than the flesh that justifies it, and the invisibility, more than the presence.

For us, the invisibility of this Velasquez's work seems to be the result of the relation between these two details: the drop before us and the face in the dark. The world, closed by our gaze that touches the delicate fragile limit of this water in excess, *continues* in depth, in the freedom of endless choices.

When the dance scholar Helmut Ploebst talks about Meg Stuart, he uses words that seem to be extremely relevant also for our analysis of *Aguador de Sevilla*. He writes:

she appears as an alternately opaque or transparent figure between calculated appearance and retreat. She functions either as the centre in a focus of red threads or as periphery, but always as a discursive entity, as it were, controlling her own presence meta-choreographically

(Ploebst 1991, 19).

This is, for us, a key to access the dynamic between the opaque (the human figure) and the transparency (the drop) of this specific Velazquez's work.

The space of this scene develops three-dimensionally by tracing an infinite ideal line toward the dark background and another, diametrically opposed, that crosses the territory of our gaze as spectators. It not only includes us, but concerns us, triggering a choreography in stillness in action (dance becomes immobility and immobility dances): to present – as a verb, as a performance – matters more than presence – as a condition.

*So, How to image a choice?*

Bodily, first and foremost. What does this mean? At least three fundamental steps emerge: 1. following a movement trace, because what is invisible leaves a trace of a presence (and vice versa); 2. experiencing and sharing with all participants in the *dancepting* process the exact terms of the condition (the conditioning act – so to say, how the situation or specific context conditions the work); 3. managing theoretical tools (Foucault's conception of diagnosis) and practical ones (the specific role of decisions in João Fiadeiro's Real Time Composition), as Inês' development of her *dancepting* practice always works on affective connections (a connection in/through the body) between theory and practice, facilitating a 'reflective practice of freedom'. In the second part of the answer to this question, we provide an example of our analysis of different artistic contexts – Meg Stuart's choreography *Soft Wear* and a work by Velasquez, *Aguador de Sevilla* – to align, in both practice and research, on an aesthetic (and ethical, after reading Fred Moten's reflections) tool to work with: in this specific

case, a microscopic approach, focused on identifying a performative channel between the visible and the invisible. Within our practice, this process led us to move beyond a simple field of frontal visibility and, once these reflections are applied in the body, as well as through the body – that is, in action – they are translated into an activation of both, dance in stillness and stillness in dance.



III. Diego Velasquez, *El Aguador de Sevilla*, 1623 (detail).



IV. Diego Velasquez, *El Aguador de Sevilla*, 1623 (detail).

## 2. How do we find ways of concretising something intangible?

Supposing that a microscopic approach and a bodily visuality could be two very different, but both strategic tools to *image a choice*, the research-question that title this paragraph expands an intimately related concept, inversely based on the dynamic of *choosing an image* (in composing music, dance, writing, performance, etc.). The research-action of concretising something intangible needs primarily to be clarified: is it possible to maintain the intangibility of an image when trying to make it concrete? If so, how?

A first movement arises from a trace followed by Gilles Deleuze, in his course on painting given in Saint-Denis in the first eighties, that is in the very first academic year after the end of the Vincennes experience – recently collected in a volume, “On Painting” (2023). Here, Deleuze reconstructs Paul Cezanne’s definition of his own act of painting – a very interesting process of intangible concretisation. The discourse verges on a complex passage from the condition of *abyme* to the *catastrophe*. Resuming it (even if running the risk of simplifying Deleuze’s concepts), *abyme* corresponds to the preparatory phase – as Cezanne interestingly calls it, *geometric* or *geologic* – of a painting realisation, until the *catastrophe*, that is fragile and delicate moment of the effective act, in which the colour is the decisive element that emerges from the image. What we suggest keeping in all the reading of Cezanne’s process made by Deleuze is a specific observation emphasised by the French philosopher: if the *catastrophe* of the work of art (i.e., the concrete act of painting) can be seen as a ‘genesis of the eye’, where the painter “acts as he is seeing for the first time” (Deleuze 2023, 31), the previous phase – the pre-pictorial moment – is a very delicate and painful process for the painter’s eyes: “he cannot see anything” (id., 28).

But what does he not see?

When reflecting on our performance, we started to understand that something visible may also contain invisibility. This process has been supported by Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) conceptions about the sensitive world, containing what is visible and the universe of thought, containing the invisible world. These worlds and universes coexist as continuous – no tight borders here. The invisible world implies a kind of space creation between what is visible and temporal.

Nietzsche (2024) also introduces us to the world of appearances, as phenomenal and empirical – the things themselves – in opposition to the world of will, metaphysical. But these

appearances – that consist in intangibility – also constitute a world that *acts on us*, as performers, as researchers, as spectators. Georges Didi-Huberman (1992) and Horst Bredekamp (2015), from different, but not so divergent points of view, help us to frame the question in a more specific and clear perspective.

In his fundamental work “What We See Looks Back at Us” (1992), Didi-Huberman introduces an element that expands and refines a practice of research pioneered by Aby Warburg, considering the specific relations between our gaze and the object of our observation. He explicitly elaborates on a concept of *separation*, remarking that “what we see is worth – lives – to our eyes only by *what sees us*. Yet, inevitably, it is the split that separates in us what we see from *what sees us*” (Didi-Huberman 1992, 1, italics are ours). Engaging James Joyce’s Ulysses perspective, he reprises his ‘obsessive’ question: “[...] when we see what is in front of us, why does something else always gaze at us, imposing an inside, an interior? ‘Why inside?’ wonders Joyce” (id., 11). Didi-Huberman finds an answer to this question in a paradoxical act, suggested by the same Joyce: “shut your eyes and see” (id., 14). He expands the discourse as follows: “Joyce’s conclusion teaches us that seeing is ultimately conceived and experienced only through an experience of touch” (id., 12). Then, the scholar reprises the same sentence, but inverting it and giving it yet another meaning: “let us open our eyes to experience what we do not see, what we will no longer see – or rather to experience that what we do not see, the visible evidence, nevertheless gazes at us like a work (a visual work) of loss” (id., 14).

But what is truly at stake in this act of loss?

It seems to be in this precise territory that the brilliant “Theory of the Act of the Image” (2015), by the German art historian Horst Bredekamp, actually takes root. This rich and complex reflection on the aesthetical relations between image and human beings, with a predominantly synchronic approach to historical processes, builds his suggestive discourse basically extending and mirroring a short line written by Leonardo da Vinci on a piece of paper, apparently with no particular importance. This note, according to the common practice during the Renaissance of covering works of art destined to great events, hiding them until just before the right moment, was actually a simple ‘do not touch, please’ sign. However, for Bredekamp, it is a very significant advice: “do not unveil me if freedom / is dear to you, for my face / is a prison of love” (Bredekamp, 2015, 12).<sup>4</sup> So, the image has an irresistible power in itself and

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<sup>4</sup> The code cited by Bredekamp is: Leonardo Da Vinci, *I manoscritti e i disegni di Leonardo da Vinci pubblicati dalla Reale Commissione Vinciana*, 5 v. ill (Roma: Danesi - later La Libreria dello Stato): vol. 3, fol. 10v, p.16.

who accepts to be exposed to it, “draws a line under any form of self-determination” (id., 13). According to the scholar, until the Enlightenment, almost all philosophical theories on images used terms that were always related to natural forces, such as *vis*, *virtus*, *facultas*, *dynamis* (id., 15). Later on, the emergence of disciplines related to ethnology and anthropology highlighted the undeniable paradox between the inorganic, ‘dead’ dimension of the medium and the invincible power of the living action inherent in the image itself. When Bredekamp defines this intensity with the term ‘energy’, he recalls the sense that Aristotle had given to this word both in *Poetics* and in *Rhetoric*, an expression that can literally be rendered as ‘putting-under-the-eyes:

Here we encounter *enargeia* as developed in the ancient theory of language, a concept Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, saw arising from the vivid act of ‘putting-under-the-eyes’: a representation, he tells us, only gained approval if it gave the impression of an incarnate presence. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle connects this ‘putting-under-the-eyes’ to *enargeia*, which ‘designates a being in action’ (id., 17).

It is not the case of following the whole vast and exhaustive recognition of different typologies of actions that constitute the organisation of Bredekamp’s work, but what is really pertinent in our discourse does not fall too far from that deep heart of his work – that small marginal note written by da Vinci – because it provides the key that undoubtedly links all variations of power that an image holds: the *enargeia*, on those who undergo the action of the image, of irreversibly losing something crucial, that is, our freedom.

If we thus accept the hypothesis of an image as an act of loss of freedom, we can certainly remember with Merleau-Ponty that “all vision takes place somewhere in tactile space” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 164).<sup>5</sup> It allows us to suppose that this specific kind of loss is also reflected in the (in)tangible world, a world that “gazes at us, concerns us, haunts us” (Didi-Huberman, 1992, 13) – and that, therefore, possibly, even if in its intangibility, touches us too, through its *enargeia*.

In the ongoing *dancepting* process around the performance *Delayed Movements for an Obstinate Joy*, we, therefore, recognise a very strong connection between the attempt to give a tangible form to the intangible and the willingness to ‘be gazed at/haunted/touched’. And the fundamental matrix of this sensitivity to the *enargeia* that surrounds us, perhaps lies in

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<sup>5</sup> A reference explicitly stated by Didi-Huberman himself in the section of his work cited thus far (1992, 14).

presenting us with the problematic question: which freedom has been lost through this process of creation? Maybe we could never concretise the intangibility if, following the *abyss* – the Cézanne’s pre-pictorial phase of not seeing (and not touching) – we were not able to explore the intensity of the specific and ineluctable condition of loss in the collective exercise of our choreographic *catastrophe*. With Joyce’s lesson (according to Didi-Huberman) still in mind and in the body, we can say that it is our personal ‘shut your eyes and see’ practice.

*So, how do we find ways of concretising something intangible?*

Regarding the process of imagining a choice, choosing an image implies the need to concretise. Among all the terms related to ‘giving shape’ (we could have used composing, constructing, materialising, etc.), concretising particularly suggests, to us, an action of practice within a concrete, tactile space. Since the operational question focuses on how to concretise something intangible, this paragraph provides some theoretical coordinates that emerged from the *dancepting* practice linked to our performative-discursive work. The reconstruction of the painter Cézanne’s creative process, as developed by Gilles Deleuze, introduced us to a dynamic between a condition of abyss (not seeing anything) and one of catastrophe (the concrete image painted, precipitated onto the canvas from the world, one could say, in a way where awareness does not fully identify with the subjectivity of the artist). This act of the world upon us is further explored through Didi-Huberman’s research, regarding how what we look at, in fact, looks back at us, and particularly how this relationship is concentrated on a loss. Through Horst Bredekamp, who, starting from a mysterious note written by Leonardo da Vinci on the image described as a ‘prison of love’, frames, expands, extends, and amplifies Didi-Huberman’s intuition into a comprehensive picture of how many ways an image can act directly upon us. We discover that the loss Didi-Huberman spoke of, was, possibly, the loss of freedom. We thus return our focus to the question that originated this second paragraph, observing how, by reflecting on the performance *Delayed Movements for an Obstinate Joy*, what acts upon our bodies through *enargeia* (Aristotelian definition, as recalled by Bredekamp), i.e., the image itself that we suppose we are choosing, actually constructs, shapes, and haunts our willingness to let ourselves be touched. To concretize something intangible, we thus first question our own intangibility, revolving around a deep inquiry into how much we are willing to lose of our freedom in the creation of our performance.

### 3. How do we go through it together? (How do we practice it together?)

To think about this, we would like to evoke Jacques Rancière's thoughts, specifically what he conveys throughout his book titled "The Ignorant Schoolmaster" (2002), where he narrates the story of Joseph Jacotot<sup>6</sup>. To start, it is key that we are already thinking about this as something we do/practice/go-through together, while approaching our conjoined research and while reading that text. As a teacher, Jacotot realised that he did not have to explain anything to his students. In fact, they could learn without him taking that kind of role. However, we became aware that his presence within their learning practice was still determining in the ways that process developed. Jacotot suggested certain reading materials, while giving them possibilities of emancipation through knowledge. Perhaps, our *Delayed Movements for an Obstinate Joy* also guided us two – Inês and Massimo – through ways that seem similar to that kind of autonomy, while simultaneously depending on others to continue this creative and performative research process. For instance, the way we have worked throughout the development of this paper has taught us a lot. We were able to find new ways of connecting various things that have happened through the tasks we set for the project, pushing/pulling each other to work within various methodological approaches. In short, attempting to answer this question became a reflection on what and where we have moved together during this writing process – and what is still moving.

Here, we also consider types of discourse, their overlapping characteristics, as well as what differentiate them. We are thinking about philosophical, scientific, literary/fiction and everyday discourses the way Foucault (2024) guides us through them, in such a manner that makes us feel transported to and through moments when we read or heard these kinds of speeches. This has allowed us to experience a sense of openness in which we are able to identify many of the things Foucault is generously decoding. What we want to underline here is the ways these discourses approach the 'now', the 'where' and the subjectivity of who is delivering it.

We will start by thinking about the way philosophical discourse manages to indicate "the today in which it finds itself, through which system, emerging from its own internal development, it points to this 'now' during which it speaks" (Foucault 2024, 22). Moreover, and according to Foucault's conception, there are "two types of discourse that currently have

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Jacotot was a French teacher whose 'intellectual adventure' led him to conceive the method of 'intellectual emancipation'.



no relation to such a now” (id., 23). The first would be the scientific discourse, because “it never refers through an ‘I-here-now’ [allowing it] to circulate indefinitely and to be taken up again with the same truth value by any speaking subject, under any sky” (ibid). For its part, literary, or fictional discourse, is “not free from this moment [...] it is not linked to the act of a speaking subject [...]. However, this independence is not the same as that of scientific discourse” (id., 24). This type of “figureless voice is neither sovereign [...] nor neutral [...]; it can change places and travel through time, masquerade and enter a character” (id., 25). Simultaneously, the voice that speaks within fiction “has no other time or place than the one it wants to give itself” (id., 38).

In fact, what intrigued and inspired us, at this point of our communal research, was how literary/fictional discourse multiplies its ‘nows’, while also conceding us the option of attributing times and places we desire for our research. So, in a way, our discourse *here and now* is multiplied by its hybrid nature, through its plural ‘I[s]’ – that are already there when writing in a collaborative way – the numerous ‘nows’ of working (together and separate) – be it thinking, writing, researching, reading and editing, as well as the various ‘wheres’ we have been during this process. Suddenly, it seemed possible to insert our text in a ‘space without geography’ – an inherent characteristic to literary/fictional discourse – and within “a time without beginning or end, an ‘I’ [or us, in our case] without ‘identity’” (ibid.) – singularities that allow us to form analogies with philosophical discourse.

It has been essential to notice that the inevitable tendency of “philosophical discourse to its now concerns not the face or the heart of the speaker, but the pure point of its emergence in the universe of discourse” (id., 28). In a way, this common concern in the discourse and not a specific person made sense within this ‘we’ who writes/speaks throughout the article, which is not a type of ‘majestic plural’ – common within the academic discourse – but a literal plural ‘we’ of two people who are experimenting to converge in the ‘here’ and ‘now’ of this text. For philosophical discourse to start unfolding, it is necessary to wait for that specific day, in that specific space, for its truth to manifest itself in discourse (id., 30).

The unrestrained ‘now’ of philosophical discourse shows up in “the form of a subjectivity that is both discrete and sovereign, invisible but insistent – a subjectivity that is constantly disappearing and remaking itself anew” (id., 32). These two pairs of apparently binary oppositions encourage the continuation of our *delayed*, but *obstinate* manner of aiming to reach *joy*. This balancing of equally weighty forces is a play on how we find ways of doing that,

when formalising this article, all the while trying to maintain that freedom so dear to us, in the tension of the image we concretise and that concretises us – as we have seen in the previous questions.

Furthermore, “everyday language refers to a mute now – to a point in space, to an instant in time, to an individual, to an individual while speaking – that remains obstinately exterior to discourse” (id., 37). Somehow, this characteristic of our daily language is also an element of our discourse throughout this research. Many of the elements that find their place in our work emerged in voice messages, and while the shape of a certain idea might remain exterior to this discourse, it still creates a mute reference, not to mention to the *obstinate* quality present in both. Let us also consider how

Philosophy is to the non-philosophical that forms the murmur of its actuality: what everyday language is to space and time, to the things and people among whom it circulates. Philosophy is the everyday language of what is actual to it

(id., 52).

It also amuses us to consider that “philosophical discourse is [...] in a position of everyday language in relation to the rest of the world, but it is to make the rest of the world appear as naive everyday prose” (id., 57). Perhaps we are trying to play with these types of philosophical/everyday languages and their own kind of attempt at naivety, relating it back to the *slight ingenuity* we mentioned within our first question, which might be necessary throughout this kind of communal moving, writing and thinking.

All of these oscillations became important for our research once we imagined the moment when Da Vinci wrote and placed that, apparently insignificant, note on his work. This way, we became aware that “the ‘moment’ should be understood in a broad sense: not only the instant of time, but (also) the region of space and the subject who speaks” (id., 22). Even Though that gesture seems to have been habitual – as a way of protecting one’s work – it also unveils that importance of maintaining one’s freedom, mentioned earlier, as well as the play between image and its organic/inorganic and alive/dead.

*So, how do we go through it together? How do we practice it together?*

After revisiting several possible approaches to the creative process in general (such as how to imagine one’s own choices and how to choose and materialise one’s imagination), we thought a third question could address the collective aspect of our work. The goal was to

capture, within the act of research itself, the defining elements of what we can describe as ‘going through it together’ – where ‘it’ refers to the ongoing process of *dancepting*. Specifically, starting from the example of emancipation through knowledge, drawn from Jacques Rancière’s thought, we propose a concept of performance autonomy in a horizontal form, characterised by, for example, the absence of a guide/master. The absence of an external eye in the composition and the subsequent and constant flow of reflections led us to reinterpret the performative ‘here and now’ through Foucault’s lens, particularly concerning the overlapping characteristics in plurality (as opposed to the different aspects of the ‘now’ in scientific and literary/fiction discourses). The hybrid nature of our collaborative work results, on one hand, in a simultaneous process of disappearance/reconstruction (and thus, elusiveness) of subjectivity, and on the other hand, a recovery of literalness, where ‘we’ becomes not an academic generalisation, but a specific reference to a conversation between two performers-researchers, in their respective ‘here and now’, in the daily practice of philosophy, illuminated by an approach that, during our dialogues about *Delayed movements for an obstinate joy*, we characterised as *slightly ingenuous*. This ingenuity does not take the form of modesty, but rather an awareness of the spatial-temporal limits of the ephemeral creation of a performance and the language that inhabits it, while at the same time embracing the lightness necessary to fully assume the responsibility – both individual and collective – that comes with it.

**Epilogue – “We love it, but why?” An excerpt from our *dancepting* conversation.**



V. Patti Smith’s instagram post - “Trying to understand why.”.



VI. Panagia Kavouradena, an orthodox church in Xirocambos, Leros.

I love it. But why?’ – Your affirmation, followed by your question reminded me of a photo Patti Smith shared yesterday on her Instagram account with the caption *trying to understand why*. I also love this photo, particularly because she wrote that her expression rose from trying to understand why.

I also would like to understand why I like a photo of Patti Smith as a child in tears. Even though this may seem like a silly question, we believe it’s a very important one  
(Inês to Massimo, during the process).

Paronomasia proposes to subjectivity alternative modalities of being *in time*. Paronomasia, through its insistence on reiterating what is forever not quite the same, through its slow yet uncertain, teetering pirouetting, triggers the possibility for the secretion of a temporality which allows the body to appear under a different regime of attention and stand on a different, less firm (ontological) ground  
(Lepecki 2006, 63).

This final section of our text maintains its original conversational format, while, in the previous three answers to our questions, the textual dialogue was adapted into a more unison voice. We ventured into an amalgamation of our dialogical findings as monological discourse, all the while maintaining the kind of thought sequence that could only arise from a dialogical discourse. This experiment we proposed to ourselves was also motivated by acknowledging that

no utterance taken in isolation [...] can fulfil the meaning of adverbs like ‘today’, ‘tomorrow’, ‘here’, pronouns like ‘I’ and ‘you’, forms like the present tense or a verb in the first two persons.

Only the act of speaking can give meaning to these words or forms, and even then, only the extralinguistic side of this act has this power – that is, the individual in the flesh, actually articulating words, or depositing, on some surface, signs of writing, and this at a given time and in a given place.

(Foucault 2024, 22).

### **Inês**

I am getting more and more convinced that whenever *we* say that *we* are going to explain something, or *we* do it and it becomes flat and loses all magic, or *we* do not – at all – leading us to a feeling of frustration. My approach tries to repudiate explanations, such as, trying to avoid our tendency – almost pathological – of finding relationships of cause-effect (causality). Nietzsche, talking about the loss of the mythical through our forever attempt of explaining things, warns us: “myth in no way finds objective adequacy in the spoken word” (Nietzsche 2024, 202). It is possible to register this incongruence between myth and word in connection with an excerpt from Clarice Lispector’s book “The Passion According to G. H.” (2020). There, she confesses to us: “I am trying to tell you how I came to be neutral and inexpressive. I do not know if I understand what I am saying, I am feeling – and I am very afraid of feeling, because feeling is just one of the styles of being” (Lispector 2020, 98). Is a feeling just that? A style of being? How can an incongruence allow our bodies to stand on a different (ontological) ground? Is Lepecki’s concept of *Paronomasia* a strategy for a ‘different regime of attention’ also for us? I feel like this is going to help us. But why?

### **Massimo**

Our is not a letting go, it is a going, precisely destined to one *place* – neither to one idea, nor to one performance. Rather to one *place*, a place where doing, thinking, living, *dancepting* is possible for a while. It is always possible to deviate elsewhere, but the place probably deviates with us. I value this point very much because the practice – ours, at least – must be ‘as practical as possible’, as you say. And so, if that is the case, our being, within the practice, could possibly put aside physics and biology in the very moment of dance, but it is not possible to ignore geography. Geography exposes us to everyday issues that we must relate to. I come to your map, then. To the Burrows’ citation you mention, when he uses the expression ‘what to avoid’, which struck me particularly.

The *what-to-avoid* is on our way. And here, I would like to try to share it with you in a story that I would like you to consider as destined for a dramaturgy of dance, a choreography

that produces problems, with which to relate in a non-visual way, as Bojana Cvejć (2013) writes. The starting point is the following: I can't think of any maps (in tourist offices, in national parks, inside a university campus), where I could explicitly read an indication of something to avoid. Does Burrows talk about this – as you read it? The map seems to me explicitly only positive, as it indicates possibilities, thus, omitting impossibilities.

Still, once I searched on Google Earth, the most virtual map that I can experience, for a place I visited by mistake, a *what-to-avoid* place.

I actually found what I considered the correct spot, but the Google application did not furnish a clear image for this place: the spot was completely opaque, inaccessible, even if it certainly existed. This is the case of the former asylum that I visited on the island of Leros, in Greece.

We are swimming in the blue sea, with Sophia, a greek friend who's with us.

Along that island's slopes, wherever we look, we notice a giant and ghostly building on the horizon. Our friend explains to us that political prisoners have been locked up there for years during the dictatorship, and then, in times of democracy, it's been the turn of patients from psychiatric hospitals, sent from overcrowded institutions on the mainland. Over all those years, most of the inhabitants of Leros had recycled their workforce, depending on the use of this place.

'We can visit it', says Sophia, even if she seems to be uncertain. She is not actually from Leros. She comes from the north of Greece, from the countryside, small villages that she evokes with a smile and a melancholic air, in which you can feel the freezing winter, the escape, but also the dances, the love, the impossible return. She never goes to the former asylum, but with us it's different, maybe she's curious, such as we are. It seems nothing else than a western culture old-fashioned obsession: tourism of ruins.

We get in the car and go to the other side of the island, towards the former asylum. Although it remains haunted and devastated, we discover that flesh-and-blood figures inhabit it. Greek army soldiers, armed and apathetic, scrutinize us, ask us why we are *there* and what we want. 'To visit the former asylum', we reply. They let us in, but 'no photographs'. We realize, too late, that we have entered a detention camp, one of many on the outskirts of so-said-civilized Europe.

We notice a stretch of sheet metal blocks under the heat. Our car moves very slowly, while guard soldiers follow us. We see garbage everywhere, abandoned waste, empty cans, clothes, traces of fires, we must be careful not to take out the phone, because as soon as it happens, other soldiers approach us, ask us the same questions. They are tense, we are too. We finally can see people inside the sheet metal houses: they are refugees. Almost invisibly, they move slowly, or are completely still, in their micro-actions, as the temperature of the afternoon sun rises.

The former asylum now interests us very little. The postures of the soldiers who didn't see us yet are bored and inactive, as absent bodies, but who notices us seems to be crossed by an unexpected tension: they did not expect our visit and as our movements are not clear, not precise, our bodies create suspicion. In other words, we look around too much. We must get back in the car and head towards the exit, because we are no longer welcome.

Suddenly, as we try to leave, again very slowly, a soldier shouts something at us, makes us stop, asks to lower the window, with the same questions as the others, we – Sophia is our voice – give the same answers. Then, he literally *orders* us to get out because he wants to show us something. We feel the urgency of not having choices. We get out of the car, he makes us walk down a small street, climb a staircase, leading to an old building, with a large balcony. 'From there', says the soldier, 'Benito Mussolini made his speeches, when he came here to Leros'. The building from which Mussolini made his speeches, even the stairs, the whole path, as literally everything, in this camp, was littered with piles of garbage.

Our silence, our perplexity, surprises the soldier: 'Aren't you Italian? Mussolini was Italian. He liked to come here in Leros', Sophia feels to be forced to translate his words for us. In his opinion, then, our silence is strange. Maybe he feels that we should thank him because he's not like the other soldiers: he's really offering us an experience of *fascism tourism*. I suddenly think that maybe there could be other people, fascism-enthusiastic people, coming from Italy or wherever, that sometimes come here to visit this monstrous Mussolini's place, inscribed in a contemporary camp of detention. Maybe that's for this reason that soldiers let us pass: is there a tourism that wants to see the ghosts (alive and disappeared) of fascism in the border of Europe?

We do not say anything and just go back to the car. We leave, without talking too much, with the sun now setting, Sophia stops the car in front of a small church that she wants to watch

again with us, right now: inside there is an Orthodox Christian icon, a *Panagia Kavouradena*, a Madonna with child painted inside a large crab shell. What matters to me about this image is, not so much the devotional legend connected to it, but the very strong feeling that, although the sacred figures are inside the body of the animal – who is captured, who is imprisoned – and seems to be the animal itself. This animal is a prison by nature and so, imprisoned by condition. If I am entirely able to replace the two sacred figures with others from other religions, other beliefs, other cultural traditions (I would like to insert the crying-baby-Patty Smith inside), I cannot replace the image of the crab – its specific nature, as a walking shell, carrying the metaphor into everyday life, its action of containing and protecting, the danger it faces animates its entire structure. I cannot do without that crab.

On Google Earth, the area of the former asylum (but is it actually there?), today a European concentration camp – they are building an even larger one, ‘for when Erdogan gets angry’, says a soldier pointing to the Turkish border over the horizon – is not visible, it is opaque, inaccessible, it is the *what-to-avoid* on the map. To see it, one must get inside, into the empty space of the crab’s body, of which the sacred is foliage, a hiding place, a cover. The sacred is opaque. The crab is transparent, instead. Micro-movements of refugees. Ghosts. What are we avoiding?

### **Inês**

We need to think about that prison/psychiatric hospital/detention camp to conceive the things we must avoid in this text and how this map will map itself out as something we might share with people whose future eyes might read it.

Once, during the practice related to my PhD research, we talked about a kinesthetic situation mentioning a specific word, *distraction*, as a tool to free our thoughts during an action. On my notes I found a note of our conversation: *distraction helps a lot in this type of exercise [...] because it's as if you say: okay... the body is there... I'm free [...] if I stopped the body... the thought would already come back to say: no, you have to go [...] so the body goes and the thought leaves....* Maybe as we write this dancing text, we could ask ourselves how we can keep the distraction going.

Those descriptions of moments of evasion and distraction to stay within the movement brought me back to the following comment made by Ulrich in Musil's novel “The man without qualities”:



that other force pulls and turns, it does not want to stay anywhere and unleashes a storm of bewildered escape movements [...] all this means nothing but escape movements. Basically, they only express that nothing that the young man undertakes seems necessary and unequivocal, born from within, although they manifest it as if everything they are now rushing into were absolutely unavoidable and necessary (Musil 2018, 150).

I quite like these escape movements for us, especially after visiting that detention camp with you and realising how trapped a crab is in itself.

I really appreciate your written body awareness and I want to imitate you. I am sitting on a chair at the far back of the library of the Education Institute here in Lisbon. If it is free, I always come to this spot. It is the closest to the window and furthest from the entrance door. I have had a huge pimple near my nose for a few days now. It is something I would like to avoid, but it is on my map right now. At least it is not on my pain map anymore...

Something else I would like to share with you – I have started to adjust the way I approach reading you and writing to you. I have started – initially in a shy manner – to take notes as I read you. It is becoming a new way of trying to not forget those first thoughts that arise as I move with your words.

I had to copy and paste the following long section you wrote: *I do not hide that I am trying in every way – consciously, therefore, and with great joy – to dance with writing, in the rigorous and open way that I have seen in you and Connor: the sentences I write – as those you and Connor dance – do not follow a stream of consciousness, as they were forgetful of oneself and subject to the world and its variables, but rather they construct a memory, describe a precise territory, in which everything thinkable is visible (but not necessarily vice versa)*. It is really this, it is not a stream of consciousness.

We construct something that becomes part of a memory and that we keep on trying to evoke, while allowing change to happen. Burrows brings the ‘lived’, ‘repeated’ and ‘mapped’ into the movement map. We do that so much and so frequently that it becomes intrinsically connected to memory and anticipation, until it actually becomes a feeling, an emotion.

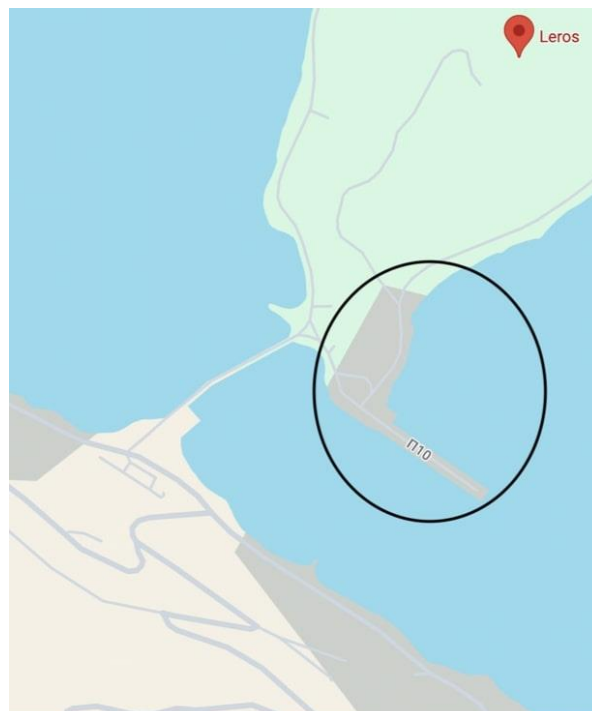
A segment from this story that I need to put here: *Refugees. Almost invisible, they move slowly, or are completely still, in their micro-actions* – could we think more about this together?

Another one: *we do not move clearly* – this seems to be dangerous to the kinesthetic certainty necessary to enter a camp.

Next: *we should then thank him for offering us an experience of fascism tourism* – this made me think you did not (hopefully).

*Encore une fois: The sacred is opaque. The crab is transparent, instead. Micro-movements of refugees. Ghosts. What are we avoiding?* – I started thinking about the petrification and the separation of the sacred and how to desecrate/profane it through Agamben's (2007) contagion of profanations. For that, maybe we need to use it, live it, allowing the appearance of change. Maybe it is really through dancing, using dance as a tool to disturb the opaque sacred.

Also, I think we are starting to forget ourselves as individuals, morphing into an intertextual/intermovement little monster. Maybe we should really edit baby Patti into that crab. Somehow it is that. *A slight ingenuity*, that I can imagine, it could be our last movement before closing our dancing time – let us keep this in mind for our coda!



Is it there?

VII. "Is it there?" Inês is searching for the right spot of the ex-asylum in the map.



VIII. Patty Smith's instagram page "Kavouradena".

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**Performances**

Scott, Connor, e Inês Zinho Pinheiro, Moss Dean, Massimo Milella. 2023. *Delayed Movements For An Obstinate Joy*. [Lisbon].

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**Painting**

Velasquez, Diego. 1623. *El Aguador de Sevilla*. Oil on canvas, 107,7 x 81,3 cm. Wellington Museum, London.

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