



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

IMPERCEPTIBLE BODIES: HAPTIC COUNTER-PLEASURES IN THE WORK OF MARCELO EVELIN

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Nosso tempo é especialista em criar ausências: do sentido de viver em sociedade, do próprio sentido da experiência da vida. Isso gera uma intolerância muito grande com relação a quem ainda é capaz de experimentar o prazer de estar vivo, de dançar, de cantar. E está cheio de pequenas constelações de gente espalhada pelo mundo que dança, canta, faz chover. O tipo de humanidade zumbi que estamos sendo convocados a integrar não tolera tanto prazer, tanta fruição de vida. Então, pregam o fim do mundo como uma possibilidade de fazer a gente desistir dos nossos próprios sonhos.¹ - Ailton Krenak.

Introduction

In a 1990 conversation with Antonio Negri and toward the end of his life, Gilles Deleuze replied to Negri's rather romantic question, 'what politics can carry into history the splendor of events and subjectivity?' by alluding to certain kinds of events that, for a brief duration, elude established forms of power without yet being assimilated into new ones. For Deleuze, such events 'can't be explained by the situations that give rise to them, or into which they lead.' Within their apparently unprecedented emergence, they 'engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume' (Deleuze 1995, 176).

This 'evental romanticism,' if I may call it so, was counterbalanced by his by now seminal *Postscript on Control Societies* published the same year, in which Deleuze ominously describes the ever more

fluid modes of control-power. According to Deleuze, control society more and more replaces the disciplinary model of power described by Foucault (1995 [1975]). Whereas disciplinary power depended on closed systems—i.e., institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and schools—in which concrete practices and behavioural training shape and normalize subjects, control societies render these enclosures obsolete. In contrast to the institutional ‘moulds,’ control mechanisms are open systems in constant *modulation* that do not need to target a *desiring subject* as such but can latch onto anyone at any time, like a ‘transmuting moulding continuously changing from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another’ (Deleuze 1995, 179). This is why Deleuze speaks of the shift from the individual to the *dividual*. As Frida Beckman explains, what ‘emerges in the place of the long-term training of the individual body in disciplinary society is, Deleuze suggests, the “dividual” of control society, that is parts of selves, affects, desires, which are identified, addressed and controlled by means of samples and data’ (2018, 14).

Deleuze’s writings on control seem to tell us two things about our contemporary era of algorithmic and logistical capitalism. First of all, in control societies it becomes impossible—or at least very difficult—to separate control and freedom. As André Lepecki writes, a key feature of control is the way it ‘preconditions freedom from within by subtly providing pathways for circulation that are introjected as the only ones imaginable, the only ones deemed appropriate’ (Lepecki 2013, 15). For example, when GPS technology ‘simultaneously serve[s] the interests of the individual who voluntarily consents to using them and the interests of the providers or other agencies who are thereby able to monitor the individual in the course of his or her daily activities’ (Patton 2018, 195), power-relations become *less concealed and less discernible* at the same time.

Second, when capitalist mechanisms begin to target ‘infra-individual’ (dividualized) affects and pleasures directly, long term processes of subjectification are replaced by short term algorithmic and logistical modulations of actions and movements. As Antoinette Rouvroy argues, in contrast to neoliberal governmental forms that produce ‘hyper-subjects’ endlessly realizing themselves, *algorithmic governmentality* ‘affects, without addressing them, people in [...] situations where they are not requested to “produce” anything, and certainly not subjectivation. Rather, algorithmic governmentality bypasses consciousness and reflexivity, and operates on the mode of alerts and reflexes’ (Rouvroy 2013, 153).

A pertinent example could be food-delivery companies such as Wolt. Wolt does not need to educate and monitor their ‘subjects’ to any significant extent; they only need to incite and activate certain opportunistic and conscientious affects in the bodies of their couriers in order to capture their movements for the company’s logistical operations and production of capital. (For a much more in-depth analysis of the relation between choreography and logistical capitalism, see Egert 2022 in this issue.) In such modulations, the dynamics of power are permeating ever more fully *the informality of social life*, interpellating not subjects as such, but the dividualized movements, interests, and performances comprising a social field. As Lepecki states, control society ‘does not hail. Instead, it choreographs’ (Lepecki 2013, 19).

Within this refinement of the microphysics of power, I would like to draw attention to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *becoming-imperceptible*. In my view, this notion performs the dual operation of both naming the conditions as well as locating new lines of resistance. Are the patterns of power outlined above not precisely rendering bodies *imperceptible*, as they go beyond turning them into obedient subjects or subjected objects, even beyond commodification, turning them instead into fleeting and fluid *carrier-bodies*—in other words, interpellated into and as logistical movements? And as such, is the Deleuzian 'snake'—the symbolic animal of control societies as opposed to the 'mole' of disciplinary formations (1995, 180)—not too crude an image? Are not the imperceptible aerial swarms of viral particles, the 'viro-spheres' that our bodies move with and within (see Döcker 2020), not the horrifyingly concrete symbolism disclosed by the Covid-19 pandemic? Did not Deleuze himself speak of society as a fluid or a gas? (Deleuze 2006, 280).

In opposition, and precisely on the same terms as the choreographic regime of the imperceptible, I am interested in modes of resistance that problematize the crippling effects of being reduced to an operative force within a complex modulatory exchange. What are the *other* ways of *disappearing into relationality* that refuse the algorithmic and logistical reduction of living-thinking bodies and by doing so, enact and enable the political persistence of the different and disparate, the interruptive and non-computational, the indisposed multitudes that neither negate nor submit to perfectly flowing worlds, but insist on existing *oppositionally* (Moten and Harney 2013) within them? What are the relational spaces and eventual configurations that, however transient, within their ephemeral shimmer of existence are capable of emitting a radiance that cannot be sustained but nevertheless lingers, endures as an afterglow and so infuses struggles to come?

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, becoming-imperceptible designates a process of desubjectification, in which any given entity becomes so much part of its organic or social fabric that it 'becomes everybody/everything' (*tout le monde*) (Deleuze and Guattari 2016, 325). In the words of Rosi Braidotti, 'becoming-imperceptible is the point of fusion between the self and his or her habitat, the cosmos as a whole. It marks the point of evanescence of the self and its replacement by a living nexus of multiple interconnections' (2006, 261). In this most affirmative sense, becoming-imperceptible may be another word for the Deleuzian *event*. Within such events, the locus of subjectivity shifts away from subject- and object-positions to the imperceptible texture that enfolds them, the always-already inseparable assemblages in which they are entangled and become otherwise. Such eventual configurations are not *perceived*; they are *perceiving*. They are lived from within themselves.² In this essay I want to contemplate one such transient, eventual unfolding: the practice and work of Brazilian choreographer Marcelo Evelin. It is my contention that Evelin's work problematizes the intensified interpellation of bodies in their interactive movements outlined above. As we shall see, this has to do with a convergence between informality, imperceptibility and hapticality.

Alongside the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, my analyses and contemplations draw on the black theory of Denise Ferreira da Silva, Fred Moten and Stephano Harney as well as the quantum physics-philosophy of Karen Barad. In dialogue with this divergent but refractive field of thinkers,

I address the ethico-political and onto-aesthetic aspects of Evelin's work in its modes of becoming-imperceptible.

My starting point is Evelin's haptic practice of *massa* (mass), in which a group of dancers move together in a sort of blob or bundle, striving for as much surface of touch as possible. Here, the participants are asked to move *from* and *through* their tactile sensations, as a sort of curious and constant feeling-into other bodies, and of feeling themselves through feeling others. In order to account for *massa* as a particular choreographic 'texture,' I will draw on my own experience of doing the practice as well as briefly touching upon Evelin's earlier work *De repente fica tudo preto de gente* (*Suddenly everywhere is black with people*, 2011). On that basis, I analyse *massa* as an embodied mode of co-existence, in which the activity of the implicated bodies become *supple and refractive*, to the extent that this activity can be called *prismatic*. However, I will argue that this becoming-prismatic is a function of the haptic density of the practice, its intensification of physical touch, which renders it an involuted phenomenon, an introversion of relationality. In other words, one has to take part in the practice in order to experience its altering mode of co-existence.

It therefore becomes interesting to analyse Evelin's most recent work, *A Invenção da Maldade* (*The Invention of Evilness*, 2019), which, in my view, enacts a haptic mode of becoming-imperceptible that directly implicates the audience in what I, following Deleuze and Guattari, call *haptic space*: a mode of collective spatialization that intensifies the social field in such a way that the very sensation of being distributed together in space embodies a 'touch-ness,' a haptical sensitivity evoked within the indeterminate transience of the social field. It is here that the ever more smooth and subtle modes of power outlined above are fully problematized.

As a final gesture, I cannot ignore that this article was written during the 2020–21 pandemic, in which societies have been forced to outlaw proximity and touch. Beyond the scientific and sociological studies on the detrimental effects of touch deprivation, I propose that the notion of haptic space poignantly names the loss, which occurs when not just the actuality but the *virtuality* of touch, its potentiality, is postponed indefinitely.

Part I: Prisms

The Dense Crowd

My first experience with the practice of *massa* took place in one of Marcelo Evelin's masterclasses during an afternoon in April 2017, in a loft studio in Utrecht. Besides being my introduction to the practice, it was also my initial encounter with Evelin, and the beginning of a friendship. Two years later, during the rehearsals for *A Invenção da Maldade*, I witnessed *massa* from the outside numerous times. Here are two accounts from my notebooks, one from the inside and one from the outside, respectively:

The inside of exteriority:

My upper body slides between two slabs of flesh wrapped in cotton or some other fabric. Smell of armpits, open pores. Someone's breath takes hold of my nostrils. Still sliding through the slabs, a face buried in the back of my head, legs wrapping around other legs, in circular movements, how we brace around each other; hands, chests, butts, heads. Moving senselessly, sensefully enfolded by each other in a mixture of attraction and repulsion. Gradually, inevitably, I lose myself in the fuzziness of never-ending touch, never-ending circulation, in a flat field of intensity that roams, grazes, glides, grabs, breathes, feels, saturates.

Nothing but surfaces. Nothing but living pulsing things.

The outside of interiority:

In an old storage facility seven naked bodies move in a strange deformed bundle. To the sound of a maraca they constantly seek the centre of the bundle, but the centre does not persist, it continually dislocates, and so does the whole group. It looks like a human swarm the way they blend into each other, but the fleshiness of their bodies and the occasional bumps and collisions give off another feel; like a playful fight, a wrestle, a sort of sensual, innocent cruelty. An odd amalgamation of fluidity and coagulation. A cluttered mass of flowing flesh.

Back in 2017, not long after experiencing *massa* myself, I attended Evelin's group piece *De repente fica tudo preto de gente* in Köln. It was during the research for this work six years earlier, inspired by Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* (*Masse und Macht*, 1960), that Evelin had started exploring the choreographic implications of mass-movements (Evelin, unpublished interview 2020). In an eloquent account of *De repente fica tudo preto de gente*, Lepecki describes its mass of five dancers in the following way:

Not a group, not a mound, not a pack, *it* slithers and glides and moshes and huddles as each one of its bodies moves on top of the other, or as one dives underneath the other, or as all try to climb on top of the other, or as all squeeze through one another, and as all pass through us, and in these anexact yet rigorous, indefinite yet determined motions they all make *it* keep going, while *it* makes them all keep going, as *it* does and undoes itself as form [...]. (Lepecki 2016, 74)

In the following, I will analyse the practice of *massa* by asking the following questions: How does the sense of subjectivity change within the mass? How does it change the perception of being embodied and in relation to other bodies?

In doing the practice of *massa* I find myself immersed for a long duration of time in the density of circling, sliding, grabbing, sensing bodies. Here, a space is opened where the sense of 'I' begins to disappear into the haptic totality of touching-moving-sensing-smelling-hearing. The persistence of full-body touch dilutes the sense of (my)self, the fixed and enclosed sensation of subjectivity. Canetti writes: 'Suddenly it is as though everything were [sic] happening in one and the same body' (1978, 16). However, there is a difference between dilution and dissolution. In contrast to Canetti's

descriptions of the crowd (Masse), in my experience of *massa* the sense of 'self' withdraws, but it also *continuously resurfaces*. It is as if there is an oscillation between (self-)differentiating awareness and group-subjectivity, between I/the others and 'it.'

In her writings on the haptics of cinema, Laura Marks notes that there is always a play between haptic and optic visibility. She links this to the erotic, arguing that what makes something erotic is the interplay between near and far, between maintaining control (giving, affecting), and relinquishing it (receiving, being affected). She further writes:

In a haptic relationship our self rushes up to the surface to interact with another surface. When this happens there is a concomitant loss of depth—we become amoeba like, lacking a center, changing as the surface to which we cling changes. We cannot help but be changed in the process of interacting. (Marks 2002, xvi)

This haptic immersion is central to the practice of *massa*. However, in my kinaesthetic experience, a minimal portion of 'distal' perception is still active, which ensures an attentiveness to perceptual differences: the difference between my torso and *this* arm, *this* scrotum and my leg, *this* lump of hair and *that* shoulder blade. It is an acute sense for details, changes, and encounters in physical space.

The oscillation between disappearance into totality and (re)appearance of minute detail is a consequence of *the intensification of touch in a turbulent proximal space*. Instead of producing a disintegrating desubjectification, the effect of this oscillation is a *diffused sense of agency*, or *fuzzy subjectivity*. It is not that 'I' have disappeared altogether into a cloud of moving body parts, nor am 'I' conserved as an intentional and willful doer. What one experiences in *massa* is a paradoxically fuzzy *and* acute sense of self and other. We could say that it is a desubjectified space, which retains just enough subjectivity in order to unfold its diffused but centred relational force.

What I would like to propose is that such agency can be understood as *prismatic*. Prismatic in the sense that the interplay of bodies, body parts, and movements, in all their details, are not so much *reactions* to each other, but *refractions* of one another. As a cluster of body-prisms, *massa* works as a differential generator, a conglomerate of active forces that, despite their active character, are not individually intended acts, but rise out of a multiplicity of microscopic encounters (as noted above, between *this* leg and *this* stomach, *this* turn and *this* slide, etc.). All movements and touches become refractions of each other, and it is within these 'prismatics' that the diffused agency is generated. This diffusion is not a consequence of inaccuracy but of *imperceptibility*. As *massa* enfolds its bodies, the forces that determine its direction, speed, temperament, and rhythm cannot be traced back to any of the (now diffused) subject-positions. The withdrawal of (frontal, self-transparent) subjectivity is not the dissolution of agencies, but the agencies become dispersed in a *field*.

In Karen Barad's take on quantum field theory, particles are always entangled within an indeterminate field, in which all 'physical' particles interact with and within a cloud of virtual particles. By doing so, every particle virtually touches and is touched by every other within the vibrancy of the quantum field (see Barad 2012). Taken not as scientific authority but rather as

'quantum physics-poetics,' this imagery helps to grasp how *massa* can be said to generate a *field effect* amongst its participants, a liminal mode of embodiment, where actions operate prismatically instead of intentionally, neither willful nor resistant, but supple and refractive.³ What I have attempted to describe here is how *massa* generates or discloses another kind of conjunction between subjectivity and relationality. Within the microcosm of *massa*, these are not separate affects nor do they dissolve completely into each other. Instead, the prismatic mode of co-existence that I propose here can be said to constitute a 'refractive milieu' where forces pass between and through bodies and is bent and shaped by their singularities, so that the collective movement becomes a multiplicity shaped by the accentuation of differences rather than their erasure.⁴

Haptic Bodies

Having analysed *massa* as a haptic practice that operates prismatically, the next step will be to examine the ethico-political implications of such a haptic mode of existence. I will do so in dialogue with Moten and Harney and da Silva, because Black Studies offer some crucial insights regarding the haptic and affective dimensions of power.

Moten and Harney have proposed the concept of *hapticality* in their poetic theorization of *the hold* (of the slave ship). In the terrible non-place of the hold, hapticality names a condition of physical togetherness that is simultaneously a consequence of colonial violence and a mode of resistance against it. They write:

Hapticality, the capacity to feel though others [sic], for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you [...] Thrown together touching each other we were denied all sentiment, denied all the things that were supposed to produce sentiment, family, nation, language, religion, place, home. Though forced to touch and be touched, to sense and be sensed in that space of no space, though refused sentiment, history and home, we feel (for) each other. (Moten and Harney 2013, 98)

Moten and Harney bring attention to an *affective space*, a state of entanglement in that non-place where 'the laws of (meta)physics break down in hapticality's terrible, beautiful intensities' (Moten 2018, 209). I do not wish to ignore the violence the hold presupposes nor the brokenness it entails. But what Moten and Harney show us in relation to touch is that in and against colonialism's deep, racial theft of livability, a haptic mode of sociality (entanglement) surges, which Moten characterizes as 'the refusal of what has been refused.' According to Moten, blackness entails having been drafted into the project of white, colonial, patriarchal subjectivity *as apparatus*, as a 'commodity that speaks,' such that the only appropriate response is that of nonperformance, of 'disavowing, of not wanting, of withholding consent to be a subject' (243). Hapticality, then, is the name for a radically informal (black) social space that does not run parallel to (white) majoritarian modes of subjectification, but instead obliquely and opaquely disrupts them as it insists on a refractive and affective milieu.

This space of haptic, fluid, fleshy informality is perhaps what *massa*, as a performative microcosm, proposes. In *massa*, the relations of power that make the mass operational is precisely what, in other constellations, could be perceived as in-operational, or powerless: the power to be affected. Whilst the bodies in *massa* no doubt affect as much as they are affected, it makes sense to highlight the latter, because of the way the practice operates below the threshold of intentionality and volition. In this regard, the term *affectability* deployed by black feminist scholar Denise Ferreira da Silva can help make tangible the political implications of a haptical mode of co-existence.

For da Silva, affectability denotes 'the conditions of being subjected to both natural (in the scientific and lay sense) conditions and to others' power' (2007, xv). Da Silva argues that since the 16th century, European political philosophy has defined the legal subject as a *self-determined and self-possessive mind* that alone is able to judge and act. Whoever or whatever is not included within this domain is relegated as *necessitas*, as that other which is not the actor, but the acted upon: an *outer-determined, affectable I*. Such bodies perceived as incapable of judging, acting, setting into motion or possessing oneself are treated as 'no-bodies' who can be killed in order to protect (real) citizens (da Silva 2014).

As da Silva, Moten and Harney seem to argue in their different but entangled ways, there is an ethico-political valence to claiming the affect-able space of 'no-bodies.' By insisting on non-determination (da Silva) and appositionality (Moten and Harney), these theorists may jointly articulate a strategy of affect-ability. As Spinoza said, any being is determined by its capacity to affect and to be affected. A strategy of affect-ability then perhaps encompasses all the practices of life, thought, and art, in which we increase our capacity for existing in entangled states, of being able to bear the affective intensities of others as we pass through each other. Such strategies operationalize modes of existence, which, despite remaining powerless to the crippling mechanisms of control-power, operate *on other frequencies* to make affective and responsive circulations between living bodies suppler and stronger. Within the constant modulations of our movements and the automatising of frontal subjectivity (the 'zoomification' of life), there are other lines of connection: anarchic intra-actions, unexpected encounters, friendships and alliances.

In this light, Evelin's practice of *massa* can be understood as a space of intensified affect-ability. As such, its dilution of agency *could be* seen as an abdication of power. In fact, from the perspective of self-determined subjectivity, *it is*. However, this is precisely its forcefulness. *Massa* softens the border control between bodies without eradicating sensitivity towards differences. It does not destroy subjectivity; rather, it makes it prismatic: The locus of perceptibility is shifted from enclosed subject-positions to the imperceptible and indeterminate field, in which these bodies materialize and become-other. The practice of *massa* is a collective mode of becoming-imperceptible, which is evoked by the multiple singular modes of affecting and being affected that populate its bodies and their 'intra-activities' (Barad 2007). As such, it is a momentary micropolitical field, in which relationality is redefined.

Part II: Haptic Space

The transient retexturing of relationality that *massa* enables is a consequence of its intensification of actual touch. That means that the radical hapticality, which conditions the practice, is its strength as much as its limitation. Because *massa* depends exclusively on physical touch, its mode of co-existence is only (fully) activated for those participating in the practice. Therefore, it becomes crucial to ask how the prismatic qualities of the practice spill into the artistic work and become available to an audience. How can the force of hapticality be activated beyond the dimension of physical touch?

In order to approach these questions I will now turn to Evelin's most recent group piece, *A Invenção da Maldade*, to examine how this work can be said to install what I, in resonance with Deleuze and Guattari, call *haptic space*; a mode of co-inhabitation where the intensities of touch are distributed to the space itself, implicating everyone in a shared haptical field.

The Invention of Evilness

The field, in this case, is CAMPO⁵ in Teresina, Brazil. We are in an old storage facility, a large room of grey concrete walls and floors. Four columns mark a square in the centre. Five unlit bonfires are distributed in the space. Six dancers are standing along the walls. A seventh dancer, Rosângela Sulidade, walks at a consistent, slow pace around the room, pointing ahead of her with a wooden stick. The dancers are all naked. It is April 2019 and we are attending the premiere of *A Invenção da Maldade*.⁶ As the audience enters the space, we hear the subtle sounds of seventy white ceramic bells hanging between the columns, activated by small fans. It gives off an ethereal, ominous feel. There are no chairs to sit on, no guidance as where to stand, sit, or look. Only Sulidade draws attention, but if one looks closely at the other dancers, something else is already happening. They are, each in their different way, moving slightly, minutely. A hand rattles, a leg jolts, a neck vibrates. These bodies are already in a process of *charging*, of being charged by something, of ceasing to be in-charge, nonetheless taking charge, but in relation to something intangible.

Meanwhile, Sulidade keeps walking, unrushed. She seems guided by the stick, as if it was a dowsing rod leading her, not to water, but something else of which we have no idea. Occasionally she slashes the stick through the air, always three times. Her gaze is firm but distant, her lips move in an inaudible murmur. She is here, but elsewhere. Finally, she stops at one of the bonfires. Incredibly slowly she raises the stick towards the ceiling. As she stands there, fully erect, the space is drenched in drum music. The other dancers, the 'chargers,' make their way to the chosen bonfire.

Now, a sort of rite, a terrible 'party,' starts to unfold. The seven dancers⁷ move around the bonfire, charging it with abnormal movements, with wild jerks, jumps, and twists. The rite, as a whole, unleashes an explosive outpouring of movements, an inexhaustive and asignifying uproar of corporeal signs. The movements are disturbing, forceful, unapologetic. But they also display a sort of innocence, a 'naive' mode of doing: actions upon actions, performed only for the sheer sake of their potentiality. Innocent cruelty reaches its maximum, as dancer Matteo Bifulco suddenly

trashes the bonfire, scattering its limbs across the floor. The 'maenads' come together, tentatively, in the ruins of the fire. Connected through the force field of their ritual charge they begin touching, grabbing, pursuing, and inciting each other. A sweaty, disorderly *massa* unfolds. It swirls and rotates through the space. Sometimes it disperses and the dancers run like energetic fairies through the cluster of spectators. The *massa* reassembles, flesh collides again, while the audience-body draws in and surrounds it.

Out of colliding, playful flesh, voices rise above the pulsating drums. A plethora of speech in five different languages bursts unexpectedly from the mouths of the *massa*. The words are not important, it is pure nonsense: language at the level of Artaudian incantation.⁸ Now the audience is not only pierced through by running fairies and exposed to a moving mass of sweat and touch, but also bathed in a profuse, incomprehensible clamour. As the clamour eventually dies down, we become aware that the drums have abated as well, leaving only the simple but incessant beat of a maraca lingering.

From here, various 'scenes' of a more recognizable character emerge. Scenes of domination and submission: Nonato performs a sacrificial killing of Moreno. Sulidade disciplines Dehaspe, guiding him around with her witch's stick. Bifulco crawls on top of the resurrected Moreno, riding and controlling him, but also carrying him gently on his shoulders, once again uttering a stream of words, this time more sensible and less intense. Everything is slowing down and dissipating, as the group enters its last metamorphosis.

In a way, they return to their initial state around the fire. Then again, not at all. What unfolds now is only possible as a residue of everything prior. Staying close but without touching, these residual bodies move as a unified but heterogeneous field. It is a strange procession, which follows a peripheral line along the audience clusters. Only the sound of the bells fills the space. The dancers drift among each other, poised within the field, following a common but unidentifiable rhythm. It is as if nothing is happening, but this *nothing* can only move, can only exist so potently, because *everything happened*. Touch happened. Violence happened. Ecstasy, misery, endurance, death, and joy happened—affectively and imaginatively. Now the field is alive with all (these) things, with fleshy eventfulness, whilst enfolding upon itself an opaque quality, a no-thing-ness. As the procession continues, the ones who stay attentive to its subtlety become aware of its near-imperceptible, haptical field, which radiates as an afterglow of evilness and a promise of its recurrence.

At last, the field arrives at the wrecked bonfire. Gathered around the ruins of celebration-destruction, it lingers for a moment, before its bare bodies turn around and leave. They don't return for applause. The final residues are us, the witnesses, thrown back upon ourselves and the proximities between us.

Being in/for Space

Laura Marks describes haptic criticism as the attempt to 'make the dry words retain a trace of the wetness of the encounter' (2002, x). With the description above I hope to have invited the reader

to feel, at least as minuscule droplets, the feel on the skin of *A Invenção da Maldade*. Before enfolding this feel into analysis, I will briefly sketch out Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *haptic space*.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, the haptic is discussed in relation to the distinction between striated and smooth space. Striated is that (relation to) space, which is measured, gridded, mapped, and thereby regulated and controlled. Smooth space, on the other hand, depends on *haptic perception*, which attends to the particularity of the immediate environment—as when a Bedouin crosses the desert, or a Sherpa navigates a snowy mountain range.

It seems to us that the Smooth is both the object of a close vision par excellence and the element of a haptic space (which may be as much visual or auditory as tactile). The Striated, on the contrary, relates to a more distant vision, and a more optical space. (Deleuze and Guattari 2016, 572)

However, the difference between smooth/haptic and striated/optical is not a matter of quantifiable spaces (the latter pertaining to longer and wider spaces, the former only to close-range ones). Neither is it a purely qualitative matter, as two distinct mentalities: 'what distinguishes the two kinds of voyages is neither a measurable quantity of movement, nor something that would be only in the mind, but *the mode of spatialization, the manner of being in space, of being for space*' (560. Emphasis added).

The claim that haptic space concerns a mode of spatialization, which is not only a manner of being *in* space, but also being *for* space, is crucial in understanding how hapticality can operate without physical touch. In the following analysis, I aim to show how *A Invenção da Maldade* creates a manner of being spatialized, in which we feel that we are touching and being touched—simply from the facticity of inhabiting *this* space together in *this* particular way. In a Foucauldian manner, I want to show how such a haptic space is able to invoke a *susceptibility to pleasure* beyond what we usually understand by that word (1996, 310), so that our relational spatialization is by itself an emanation of vital and pleasurable intensities.

In order to articulate *A Invenção da Maldade's* singular mode of haptic space, I want to draw attention to two aspects of the work. The first is what I will call *figurality of movement*, which concerns its kinaesthetic qualities. The second concerns its spatial dramaturgy or what I will call *choreographic spatialization*. These two aspects are intimately intertwined, but by treating them separately I hope to highlight more clearly the artistic dimensions of haptic space.

Figurality of Movement

The term *figural*, as opposed to *figurative*, is deployed by Deleuze to describe how the Figure can exist in Francis Bacon's paintings without its presence being illustrative or narrative (2004, 1–7). This is 'achieved' through *deformation*. For instance, in Bacon's series of 'heads' (self-portraits), Deleuze describes how the way in which the heads are deformed from each painting to the next looks like the head of a space traveller, 'immobile in his capsule,' coming physically into contact

with the forces of the cosmos. The forces themselves remain imperceptible to the viewer. For Deleuze, this means that Bacon paints forces, or what is *non-given* (56–9). As dance scholar Gerko Egert suggests, in the same way as painting make invisible forces visible, so too can choreography be said to make perceptible the forces of dance (2020, 2).

In light of this, what is it that the bodies in *A Invenção da Maldade* do? They charge and are charged. As they enter an altered perceptual and affective state, not a trance but something akin to it, their movements are neither signifying nor purely abstract. They are *figural* in the sense that we observe the dancers being almost attacked and possessed by hidden forces, but the bodies themselves are also, each of them, a minor swarm of forces acting on each other through their charge. This produces a seemingly inexhaustible invention of figures that through processes of deformation are constantly modulated from one to the next. The specific ‘style’ or vectorization of this figurality is that of *maldade*: evilness. Without attempting to exhaust what evilness alludes to in *Invenção*, or to offer any totalizing interpretation of it, we can perhaps locate it on the level of figurality.

The quality of movement in *Invenção* reveals a constant instability and displacement. The dancers never rest, as if in a constant process of moulding by outside forces. There is an almost defiant insistence on repetitious deformation, of constantly falling into a crack, which unleashes a ferocity of action, a vital outpouring. It is this insistence, I would argue, which presents evilness. However, it is a peculiar insistence, because it does not arise out of the dancers’ expressive intentions, but must be located in the state of affect-ability, which surrounds and interpellates these bodies; a state which they themselves have summoned into existence. The figurality of movement of *Invenção* can then be understood as the paradox of a *desiring acting-out of evilness as a consequence of existing in intense affect-ability*. In other words, there are no desiring subjects behind the acts, just the affective space generated by the charged and charging bodies, which in turn distributes agencies of affect-power: evilness. In unapologetic affectivity, we stay inside the diffuse struggles within and between bodies, in the constant negotiations for co-existence, of giving and taking space. In the figurality of movement specific to *Invenção*, evilness designates whatever falls outside the sphere of the acceptable and agreeable; the uncontainable ‘extra’ that drips off and pours out of bodies, that bumps into them, that rises like nonsensical speech and is left over like residues of a figure that was only there as a sudden, violent tear in the fabric of reality.

In doing so, the quality of movement can be said to operate *diagrammatically*. In the Deleuzian view on painting, the diagram is ‘the operative set of asignifying and nonrepresentative lines and zones,’ which embodies the procedures by which clichés or already signified figurations are avoided (2004, 101). In a more general sense, the diagram is the way *the outside*, the ‘abstract storm’ of composing forces, arrives strategically at composed forms (2013, 73).

In *Invenção*, the figurality of movement can be understood as a set of diagrammatic operations by which the uncontainable affective forces of the outside are made perceptible *in their imperceptibility*. Ontologically, it is important not to mistake ‘the outside’ for an immaterial, otherworldly reality that acts upon the material plane. Instead, the notion alludes to the chaotic mass of an absolutely immanent plane, which needs strategies, procedures, and practices in order

to invent-disclose the matter-flows, which *are yet to* and *will have* sustained and created the bodies we pass through.

Choreographic Spatialization

The other aspect of haptic space in a performative context has to do more directly with its sense of space, or its mode of *choreographic spatialization*. What I mean by this is first and foremost the spatial dramaturgy of *Invenção*. In the beginning, the rite around the fire is an almost touch-less but intensely charging sequence. There is a force in this centralization that binds the dancers in a heterogeneously oscillating field. The audience is, likewise, drawn towards its restless centre. As the centre deterritorializes and breaks with itself, it starts to swirl through the space in the form of *massa*. But the *massa* of *Invenção* already contains its own deterritorialization, as it disperses into the fairies and out through the incantatory voices. Throughout this sequence, the spectators are forced to move around, following the contractions and dilations of the mass. They are traversed, invaded, surrounded, whilst they themselves gradually become their own irregular form of mass, contracting around the whirling blob. Eventually, as the performers morph into the force field, as they hover along the periphery, the audience has also been turned into a field: a plurality of haptic gazes that cannot penetrate the subtlety of the dancers' field, but remain intensely exposed to its residual radiance. Blind, but 'touched.'

How, then, does this install a haptic space? First of all, through the unapologetic swallowing of the audience into spatial togetherness (insistence on mutual embeddedness). Within this, the piece enacts the quality of trespassing and of being trespassed, not on the level of intentional, subjective choice, but on the level of forces that oscillate between bodies. Here, a certain *pleasure of acting upon and being acted upon* is played out. In light of this, I will dare to put forth the claim that in *Invenção*, in each of the movements of the dancers in their singularities, in each of the sequences of the piece, and in each mutation of the topology of its unfolding, *evilness erupts as the desire to touch and be touched*. To enfold and be enfolded. To saturate and be saturated.

For this reason, the piece as an affective strategy does not need to touch, because its whole operability is the invocation of a feel of touching, of being touched, which fills the spaces within and between the bodies present. Although moments of actual touch do occur, these are embedded in a consistent virtual enactment of touch. The affectivity that the piece patiently constructs can thus be compared to Moten and Harney's poetic rendering of the bodies hurdled together in the hold: An 'adjacent' space to that of separated subjects. Here, the relational swirl takes precedence, and the implicated bodies are 'held' within the feel of/for each other, thrown into the touch-ability, which always-already oscillates in/as/between them. Within this, the almost defiant ethico-aesthetic impulse of *Invenção da Maldade* is to furiously enact *the desire to be here, the pleasure of being here*, with no apologies or reservations. Not uncritically, but in full affirmation. To keep moving through chaos, affirming suffering as well as joy, despair as well as splendour.

As we saw earlier, haptic space, as a mode of spatialization, is not just a manner of being *in* space, but a manner of being *for* space. The affect-ability, which is enacted in *Invenção*, embodies the

desire to generate another kind of space, or to inhabit space differently. The invention of haptic space is the evocation of a spatialization where we touch and are touched by the sheer facticity of our co-existence. As such, the particular haptic space generated by *A Invenção* embodies a trait of resistance that attends to the times we are currently living. Maybe what we need right now are modes of charging and hapticalizing spaces together, so that in them, critical and affirmative problematization can take place. Maybe what we need are simple, vibrant spaces that can hold differences and allow for a prismatic, haptic contemplation of the ways in which we are, always and in every situation, vulnerably exposed to the social and material forces that compose our modes of existence.

These spaces are perhaps what Deleuze and Guattari call *smooth*. But if we, as I have surely done here, venerate such spaces, we should also not forget that '[...] smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory. But the struggle is changed or displaced in them, and life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries. Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us' (2016, 581).

Micropolitics of Touch

A Invenção da Maldade displays a singular mode of becoming-imperceptible in and as performance. In its diffused and ferocious outpouring of corporeal signs, it can be read as an affirmation of co-existence in and against the brokenness of surrounding political systems. Its evocation of haptic space is an act of defiance. As such, its haptic spatialization is an insistence on the informality of social spaces in their imperceptible movements.

As the quote above stresses, it is crucial not to mistake such informality for an idea of always-already emancipated togetherness or unfiltered sensuous reality. As Deleuze argues, the interplay of forces that constitutes power-relations is precisely located in the informal, non-stratified dimensions of sociality (Deleuze 2013, 74). As an insistence on informality, haptic space is not a solution, but instead a fleeting, problematizing field in which the living forces that surge within and between bodies can be reactivated and redistributed, thus engendering new, asymmetrical alliances between disparate beings: Social configurations, where bodies oscillate together in their singularities of difference, as a counter-power to the controlled compositions of self-isolated subjects.

As a mode of resistant becoming-imperceptible, what haptic space makes apparent is that the forces of life, which are annulled or subdued within the controlling circuits of power, are never resuscitated as they were: how to feel and be touched by each other must always be reinvented and reaffirmed; how to take flight together and become entangled at that evanescent point, where nothing is no longer hidden but nothing is no longer comprehensible either.

Postscript on the Pandemic

As I have been writing this article during 2020–21, cooped up in my apartment (and sometimes, very fortunately, in a friend's cottage by the Danish seaside), I cannot help to notice the irony of writing about haptic spaces in a time where they—at least on a societal level—are deactivated or non-existent. Marcelo Evelin creates very intense and incomparable haptic spaces in his art, but haptic spaces exists all over the place, in many different formats and levels of intensity. Anyone who has been on a throbbing dance floor, in a lively bar, at a concert, on a basketball court, in sexual intimacy, in a gathering of friends, on a mountain hike, at a performance event, in a dance class etc., has experienced haptic space to some degree, even if just for an instant.

At the onset of the pandemic, Giorgio Agamben argued that the state-imposed measures of social distancing revealed a society that no longer believes in anything but survival (Agamben 2020). In a poignant critique of Agamben, Sergio Benvenuto wrote that he perceived it as a gesture of kindness when a younger friend kept three meters of distance between them. Benvenuto's observation was that, during the pandemic, 'I display my love for the other by keeping her or him at a distance [...]' This is why Agamben has failed to understand anything about what's happening in the *molecularity* of human relations' (Benvenuto 2020).

The question is, however, if we can locate a deeper or more intensive 'molecularity' inherent in our relational conditions. During the first lockdown of spring 2020, Paul B. Preciado wrote that the administration of life and death in the face of Covid-19 produces a subject that 'has no skin, is untouchable, who has no hands' (Preciado 2020, translation slightly modified). In a concurrent essay, Georg Döcker argued that if the self-isolated subject is barely a body, then the body that traverse public spaces is barely a subject (Döcker 2020). As an always potentially infected and infecting disease-carrier, nothing but vulnerable corporeal life walks to the store and back again, back into its ultra-connected home, its prison 'as soft as an artichoke heart' (Preciado 2020). Between incorporeally dividualized subjects and pathologically desingularized flesh, haptic space disintegrates.

What this means is that even the most trivial and self-evident haptic spaces—the ones that we inhabit by being in the bakery, at the office space, on the sidewalk, are gone as well—even if we still co-inhabit these spaces. This, I believe, and as I've argued throughout, is because haptic space is a *mode of spatialization, a manner of being in/for space*. Haptic space is eradicated, not just because we cannot go to the club or the swimming hall. It disappears, because in pandemic life we materialize differently.

In pandemic life, the decline of physical touch is a huge problem, particularly for those in risk groups forced to avoid it altogether. But the loss of haptic space is real too, as such spaces are sustained through the potentiality or the virtuality of touch, through 'a way of feeling through others, a feel for feeling others feeling you.' (Moten and Harney 2013, 98). Such subtle and vibrant virtuality is what has been paused and deferred. Deprived of it, despite inhabiting the same physical spaces, our bodies become like screens to one another. Self-isolation is not simply a

'homeized' phenomenon. Above a face mask, a pair of glassy eyes; beneath it, a body that, like my own, must be turned inwards and away from the chaotic and dangerous openness, which *the other* now entails. The pandemic produces, perhaps for the first time *in the flesh*, a Cartesian subject—so firmly lodged within his or her 'cell of biovigilance' that he or she forgets that such existence was an illusion to begin with. In a striking comment on Spinoza's *conatus* (the tendency in all beings to conserve their own being), philosopher Shaj Mohan writes: 'if there is a tendency in everything (in so far as things are) it is to prolong itself sufficiently in a "milieu" in order to enjoy being-other-than-oneseelf, and to be elsewhere' (Mohan 2020).

Notes

¹ The times we're living in are expert at creating absences: sapping the meaning of life from society and the meaning of experience from life. This absence of meaning generates stringent intolerance toward anyone still capable of taking pleasure from simply being alive, from dancing, from singing. There's still a whole constellation of little groups of people who dance, sing, make it rain. The kind of zombie humanity we're being asked to join can't bear so much pleasure, so much fruition in life. So they holler on about the end of the world in the hope of making us give up on our dreams' (Krenak 2020, 32–33).

² For a thorough study of the performative and ethico-aesthetic aspects of becoming-imperceptible, see Schnor (forthcoming thesis).

³ In referencing Barad in relation to my idea of the prismatic body, it is important to note that Barad, in her critique of reflexivity as a trope for knowledge, groups reflection and refraction together as metaphors of sameness. Here, she follows Donna Haraway's lead and proposes diffraction as an alternative metaphor and methodology through which thinkers can attend to phenomena in their finer detail and difference. See Barad 2007 and Haraway 2004. Without devaluing Barad's diffractive methodology or the critique of reflexivity in general, I disagree that refraction is a metaphor for sameness. Whilst diffraction denotes the way waves bend and spread around an object, refraction designates the way a wave bends as it passes from one medium to another. As such, I find refraction a more apt metaphor than diffraction for the way movements within a haptic dance practice change as they pass through and between its moving parts. In a performing arts context, I prefer to imagine bodies as prismatic figures that re-fract whatever passes through them back into their environment, which then transform with every refractory act.

⁴ Regarding the notion of refractive milieu, cp. Manning 2016, 51: 'In time, in the art of time, what is activated is not a subject or an object, but a field of expression through which a different quality of experience is crafted. What art can do is to bypass the object as such and make felt instead the dissonance, the dephasing, the complementarity of the between, of what Deleuze calls the "revelatory" or refracting milieu.'

⁵ As this article is being written, the beautiful space described here, which has hosted CAMPO Arte Contemporânea for the past five years, has disappeared. The owners decided to end Demolition Incorporada's lease, tear down the building and turn it into a supermarket. Luckily, Evelin and producer Regina Veloso have now found a new space for CAMPO to continue in Teresina.

⁶ In Portuguese there is a distinction between *mal* (evil) and *maldade* (evilness). Whereas *mal* is the word for evil in the metaphysical sense of good vs. evil, *maldade*, on the other hand, is a much more ambiguous word. It alludes to a certain 'innocent cruelty,' to fairy tales and the imagination. Whenever Evelin would stage theatre acts as a child, his grandmother would simultaneously caution and encourage him by saying: 'here begins the invention of evilness' (Evelin, unpublished interview 2020).

⁷ Bruno Moreno (BR), Elliot Dehaspe (BE), Maja Grzeczcka (PL), Márcio Nonato (BR), Matteo Bifulco (IT), Rosângela Sulidade (BR) and Sho Takiguchi (JP).

⁸ See Artaud (1981), particularly the essay titled 'Production and Metaphysics'.

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Biography

Jonas Schnor, M.A., born in 1985 in Copenhagen, Denmark, is a dramaturge, writer and performance researcher. He has collaborated with choreographers and performance collectives across Europe and Brazil, most recently with Marcelo Evelin/Demolition Incorporada (BR) and Catarina Vieira at Das Arts Graduate School Amsterdam (PT/NL). He is currently a PhD student at the Center for Performance Philosophy, University of Surrey, Guildford, and a recipient of PhD stipends from both University of Surrey and the TECHNE consortium.

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