

**Notes on Spitting:
Part 1, The Texture of Time**

by Dani Blanga Gubbay

Through dance descriptions, reflections on sexual drives (kinks and unproductive pleasures), and the image of a volcano, *Notes on Spitting* is a column that explores the disruptive force of dance and its ability to plastically undo—*corrode*—perceptions of time and the body.

For some time, I have been obsessed (I'll explain in a moment why) with a few notes that dance theorist André Lepecki wrote in 2017 for a never-published article, "Choreography and Pornography." In it he starts with Frances Ferguson's definition of pornography as "a technology designed to capture actions and render them with extreme perceptibility." Pornography makes sexual pleasure legible by breaking it down into comprehensible—often categorizable—actions. Lepecki observes how this same definition could just as easily describe choreography too, and from there he traces a fascinating parallel history of the two disciplines—their writing the actions of the body at a distance, their reinforcement of the viewer as a solid subject, and their evolution in the eighteenth century within a larger biopolitical project aimed at regulating the body and its untamed potential. And yet, Lepecki notes, both are constantly living in the possibility of being subverted by the very forces they seek to regulate. Sex is to pornography what dance is to choreography: they inherently possess the potential to overflow, *corrode*, the structure that tries to regulate them. (Well, what fascinated me was that the notes seemed to do the same: a living thought resisting being formatted into an article, corroding its very form.)

"Even our most frivolous actions can perpetuate *corrosive* dynamics," writes Aïda Camprubí Hinojosa in a short text on the transformative power of a dance floor. It is precisely this corrosive capacity of dance that I desire to explore in this (soft) column: a journey into dance's ability to corrode choreography and, with it, the rigid categories that shape my perception of reality. Four issues, dancing between fiction and theory, four counter-choreographies to explore how performance performs. I've titled them *Notes on Spitting*: like *notes* escaping the form, like *spitting* to soften, lubricate, dissolve something hard using saliva, which is more readily available to me than blood, semen, urine, or tears. The most reliable friend among my body fluids.

I spat on the ground. It was a way to get rid of the taste in my mouth, which I didn't dislike but didn't want to carry elsewhere. I wanted to leave it there, at the edge of the bushes I'd just emerged from. Or perhaps the spit was just a way to certify my return to the surface, as if after holding my breath underwater. How much time had passed? I didn't know. I started to walk around; going home wasn't an option. I loved this side of the volcano, its base teeming with vegetation like a pubis, the abandoned industries, the ground curving up before suddenly pitching toward the crater—if only one dared to follow it with their gaze. The gaze: I thought now about the lips I had glimpsed in the darkness, their plumpness. I had a crush. How much time had passed? I didn't want to pull out my phone; its glowing information would shatter both the night's darkness and the fragile disorientation I was desperate to prolong. I remember I had finished reading Susan Sontag's *The Volcano Lover* (1992) just a few weeks earlier—her surprising novel about an eighteenth-century Englishman at the height of Enlightenment rationality and his uncontrollable passion for the volcano, and a feminist critique of possessive rationality. Fragments of lines and scenes were now flooding my mind, perhaps because of where I was, or maybe because of the lips I had left behind, and I feverishly latched onto Sontag's words describing "the mouth of a volcano. Yes, mouth; and lava tongue" with an almost tactile presence. The raw sensation of a sexual crush.

"For me, having a crush is about texture, like crushed velvet or crushed foil. My surface gets all uneven, my underneath shows through, things shine up suddenly. It's like *being* crushed material, but also like wearing it, alternately slithery and itchy." In "Outing Texture" (1997), an incredibly sensitive article investigating descriptions of textures in literature, Renu Bora begins with this quote by queer studies scholar Elizabeth Freeman to explore the relationship between textures and the sensual connections they produce. Defined as "the surface resonance or quality of an object or material, . . . its qualities if touched, brushed, stroked, or mapped," texture not only produces pleasure, but announces it through "certain properties and sensations that can usually be anticipated by looking." Texture absorbs the gaze in a haptic relation with the surface, dissolving the distance. Just an hour before, my gaze was on the lips, their porosity sparking the pleasure of contact.

I took out my phone as I walked and scrolled through a few reels. I stopped, hypnotized, on the third: a tube squeezed by a press, spraying material—a mousse that overflowed. The texture at the start of the reels, sparkling the pleasure of contact, pulling me in before I swiped away—clever. I began walking again, my shoes heavy with mud, the silence wonderful. I was convinced Sontag had written a passage where she imaginatively guides the reader through a similar night walk, up Vesuvius. "Watch out. Cover your mouth with a cloth. Duck! A nighttime ascent of a moderately, punctually active volcano is one of the great excursions. After the trudge up the side of the cone, we stand on the crater's lip (yes, lip) and peer down, waiting for the burning innermost core to disport itself. Not too close! It's starting." Wow, it sounds like the announcement of a performance beginning. The protagonist indeed compared the volcano to a dancer defying gravity, untamable. It is a dance, however, that does not keep its distance. Not too close! It's starting.

2. I remember exactly where I was sitting, eyes wide, mouth open, when I first saw Maria Hassabi's *STAGED?* (2016). The space was covered by a vast red carpet, the audience encircling it. At the center, lying on the ground in a single composition, four entangled bodies wearing colorful, vaguely harlequin-patterned bodysuits. Their movements unfolded in micro-movements, imperceptibly transitioning from one pose to another—lying down, reclining—like a slow-moving magma ready to erupt with limbs mingling in a single body. In “Pregón del diversorium” (2024), writer and activist Brigitte Vasallo reflects on how dance can sometimes become “a place where the body becomes flesh to bear the unbearable weight of being a body.” Dance corroded their presence as graspable individual bodies: my gaze fetishistically roamed the uninterrupted surface of a collective flesh, compelling me to sink into its texture, which held more presence than its contours. The lack of clear legibility made things sticky—a kaleidoscopic, hypnotic effect. They seemed like tectonic plates, slowly dancing at a geological pace. And yet, in thinking about it right now, I have the feeling that my crush in front of them was tied not only to the body's corrosion into texture but also, somehow, to the emergence of another texture—that of time.

For Bora, texture is inherently tied to time. In anticipating with the gaze, the rubbing of a hand on smooth surfaces or hairy ones (which is always a movement through time), fetishism allows to “expresses how temporality is intrinsic to the meaning of materiality”. Now, if texture has a time, I am trying to reflect on whether it is possible to reverse the relation, to imagine that time itself might have its own texture. I remember Chantal Akerman once said, “In general, when we go to the movies, we say, ‘Ah, it was wonderful, I didn’t see the time pass!’ But time is all we have in life. In fact, when we don’t see time pass, it is as if two hours of our life were stolen. So, for me, going to one of my films is about living an experience inside oneself, of time passing within.” In Akerman’s work, actions often stretch beyond their utility, narratives extend beyond their effectiveness, and time slows down, revealing the grain of time itself. I feel time, the friction against its skin—what Bora would call “a kind of fluffy, hairy, feathery, furry, suede-leathery” zone. Time must pass with difficulty; its texture must friction against my presence, a minimal level of masochistic pleasure.

The movements of *STAGED?* stretch and contract with measured slowness; their rhythm gives time a tactile dimension. It slows down, becomes sticky and viscous like saliva, in a texturing and de-texturing of its surface. I feel the flesh of time, brushed against my presence. I am fetishistically absorbed by a tactile zone, distinct from otherwise flat, measurable time. (Time no longer flows. It is my eyes that flow over its texture!) And then the movements never stop. The duration transports time, like those sentences in literature that try to stretch out, adding another phrase after the comma, and then another, taking the reader on a journey with bated breath and no end in sight, where the only pleasure is that of expanding, of making room for a time that swells. I breathe. I think of how Bora coined the term with two x’s—*texxture*—to describe the internal qualities of things, their *stuff-ness*. If “texture” describes the surface (friction, slipperiness, fuzziness), “*texxture*” embodies the suggested properties of “crunchiness, chewiness, brittleness, elasticity, bounciness, sponginess,” like the lips that revealed not just their surface, but their fullness, a plumpness, like a grabbed arm pulsing with libido.

3. What is a *time-based* experience when time cracks and erupts? Well, the base is no longer there. The foundation collapses, and I fall too—crush—a jolt runs down my spine. In a short essay from 1973 on the pleasure of reading (another time-based experience), Roland Barthes elaborates a distinction between *plaisir* and *jouissance*. While *plaisir* is a regulated pleasure inscribed in the flowing of the medium (of writing, of time...), *jouissance* is its “rupture, the deflation, the fading, that seizes the subject” into unspeakable pleasure, similar to an orgasm. With *STAGED?*, time was dissolved into texture—hairy, chewy, rough. It brushed against my presence, and I was fetishistically transported into an unregulated moment of jouissance, a chill running down my spine. I was still sitting in the darkness—the darkness of the theater, so similar to the one of the bushes. I could not speak. How much time had passed? I had lost my perception of time because I was immersed in the texture of time. The lights turned on. If choreography is described as a device for rendering the body legible and affirming my solid and detached position, here, dance corroded multiple layers—a counter-choreography corroding form into texture. First, the bodies I tried to grasp, then, the time I-we shared, and finally, my position. This is why Elizabeth Freeman was saying that to have a crush is also *being* crushed. I’m open, mouth agape, in it the unspeakable tastes of the jouissance I carried with me on this walk.

I was arriving at the end of it. My steps were slowing, as if to extend the night, like a sentence that swells, resisting arrival at the end, to spit the period. I was returning to the surface, but this time I didn’t want to spit. I wanted to keep the taste of this jouissance for a little while, between my tongue and palate. In *The History of Lubrication* (2023), a book dedicated to human saliva, artist Gabriel Pericàs recalls how spit is one of the images Georges Bataille uses to represent formlessness—something that, like sex, dance, or Lepecki’s notes, might refuse to be captured in form. Maybe I’ll speak about it another time. For now, I leave it here. I leave this spit swirling in my mouth, this viscous friend of mine. I feel its texture, I hear the micro-sounds of its rolling: crush, cracks, craters. Like the earth opening, like my steps in the bushes, like time slowing down to spit itself from its lips. Lips, lips, lips—I end here at the border of the lips, “on the crater’s lip” (yes, lip), peering down, “waiting for the burning innermost core to disport itself. Not too close! It’s starting.”

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Maria Hassabi, *Untitled*, 2024. Courtesy: the artist

Maria Hassabi: *I'll Be Your Mirror* installation view at Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong, 2023. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Thomas Poravas



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Maria Hassabi: *I'll Be Your Mirror* installation view at Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong, 2023. Dancer: Elena Antoniou. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Thomas Poravas

Maria Hassabi, *Still Standing*, 2024. Courtesy: the artist

Maria Hassabi, *Untitled*, 2024. Courtesy: the artist

