

**Practicing First Things 1<sup>st</sup>**  
**Gestures, Words, and Ideas**

by

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**Abstract:**

This thesis delves into the creative process and performance of the solo work *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*, which emerged during the 2020 pandemic lockdown. The solo work became an opportunity to engage in a creative mode amidst the limitations imposed by the pandemic. By focusing inwardly and examining the dialogue with choreography, this reflective study explores the complex nature of dance practice as a mode of cognition and its impact on our experience of being present in the world. Integrating movement, speech, and thought, the study aims to understand dance practice's cognitive and creative dimensions, the potential for self-discovery and expression, and the deeper connections between bodily actions and mental processes.

Drawing inspiration from Baruch de Spinoza's *Ethics* and employing his unique method of philosophical inquiry known as the Geometrical Method, characterized by axioms, definitions, syllogism, and propositions presented systematically and logically akin to Euclidean geometry, I began by practicing movement patterns based on geometric shapes. Through this practice, a heightened awareness of actions, images, sensations, and thoughts emerged, sparking an inquiry into the relationship between sensory perceptions and the generation of movement ideas. The exploration continued by integrating spoken words into the practice, aiming to understand the intricate connections and interactions between movement, speech, and thought.

The study examines the interplay between ideas, words, and gestures, emphasizing their role as bridges between bodily actions and mental processes. It reflects on the nature of ideas, words, and gestures, questioning their stability and evolution through repetition and variation while exploring how ideas represent

objects and how subjective experiences of emotions and affect emerge from encounters between different expressive modes such as movement, thought, and speech. Through observation, analysis, and embodied reflection, the study uncovers insights into the ontological questions raised by the practice, particularly the interplay between gestures, words, and thoughts. It contemplates the connection between thought and movement, hoping to contribute to the broader field of choreographic practices by offering more profound insights into the relationship between embodiment, cognition, and creative processes, ultimately fostering a greater understanding of the unity between the body and mind within choreographic practices.

For Dora Karolin, whose heart and soul resonate with me.

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First Things First,

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Prologue

My first work (2006) as an independent choreographer was a 15-minute solo based on the Hungarian composer Gyorgy Ligeti's *Ramifications*— a composition for 12 strings that premiered in 1969. Since then, I have created with and for other people in various consultations.

This submitted thesis is about my process of creating a solo work 15 years later, and it describes my discoveries, research, and analysis of that work. In my practice, I am curious about the relationship between our bodily actions, cognitive responses, the particular and the abstract, and the expansion to respond to the ongoing demands of experiences with a range of physical arousal and emotions. Several of my works have been awarded choreographic prizes at international competitions, including *Cross Connection Ballet 1<sup>st</sup> International Choreography Competition*, Denmark, 2008, and *No Ballet - 9<sup>th</sup> International Choreography Competition*, Germany, 2014.

My dance education began at the Bat-Dor School of Dance in Tel Aviv, co-founded by Baroness Bethsabée de Rothschild and dancer/director Jeannette Ordman. During my eight years of dance education, I trained in Ballet (RAD and Vaganova), Graham technique, Cunningham, Horton, and music theory. Soon after my graduation, I joined the Batsheva Dance Company. After three years with the company, I decided to join Ballet Freiburg – Pretty Ugly, Germany. I spent six years working in Germany before moving back to Tel Aviv to embrace my choreographic journey. As a performer and interpreter, I was lucky and privileged to work with, learn from, and dance works by choreographers Ohad Naharin, Amanda Miller, Marguerite

Donjon, and William Forsythe, among others. These remarkable encounters greatly influenced my development as a dance artist and curved my path in my professional life.

Since 2006, I have been working as an independent choreographer, creating numerous works, some for groups and others more chamber works. I am grateful to have been able to share my works in different festivals and venues: Israel Museum (Jerusalem, 2008/12/17), Suzanne Dellal Center (Tel Aviv, 2008-2022), Holland Dance Festival (Den Haag, 2012), Théâtre National de Chaillot (Paris, 2013), Graz Opera House (Graz, 2014), Schauspielhaus (Hamburg, 2016), Festival Age On Stage (Stockholm, 2017), Springboard dance (Montreal, 2017/19), Nowy Teater (Warsaw, 2018), CID Dance (Seoul, 2018), Le Theatre 71 Scène Nationale de Malakoff (Paris, 2018), Kenzo fashion house (Paris, 2019), *Open Look* (St.Petersburg, 2012/19), Festival Internazionale Fuori Programma (Rome, 2021/23), HangarTfest (Pesaro, 2022/23), Festival Gender Bender (Bologna, 2022/23), among others.

I am regularly teaching seminars and workshops for Bachelor's and Master's programs in leading institutions and dance centers such as the ZHdk (Zurich), Chapman University (L.A), Artez (Arenhaim), Waapa (Perth Australia), Codarts (Rotterdam), StrutDance (Perth Australia), University of Adelaide (Australia), Nuova X (Turin) Kibbutzim College (Tel Aviv), Hebrew University (Jerusalem), Tel Aviv University (Tel Aviv), B12 (Berlin), among others. Occasionally

I also work in theatre and ethnography, researching and facilitating artistic expression with diverse communities and cultures. Currently, I am involved with the "*Songs and Borders*" project, an Israeli-Norwegian-German co-production tracing the liturgy, hymns, and traditional texts of the different cultures and minorities in northern



Israel, in collaboration with the Neue-Vocalsolisten ensemble (Stuttgart) and composer Prof. Daniel Peter Biro (Greig Academy, Norway).

In this research inquiry, I investigate the intricate interplay between bodily-based modes of thought, sensory perceptions, and the generation of movement ideas within dance practice. The study proposes an immersive and embodied inquiry process, incorporating bodily-based modes of thought and movement through reflective and experiential methods. The primary objective of this research is to acquire a deeper understanding of how different expressive modes, such as words, gestures, and modes of thought, intertwine and contribute to the creation of meaning in *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*.

By delving into this inquiry, I seek to uncover valuable insights, observations, and perspectives regarding the generation of movement ideas and the embodiment of meaning in dance. Reflective methods foster self-awareness and critical analysis, while experiential methods provide firsthand engagement and observation. This comprehensive research methodology will develop an understanding of the relationship between bodily-based modes of thought, sensory perceptions, movement ideas, and the generation of meaning in *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*.

The findings can potentially have implications for multiple areas, such as dance pedagogy, choreographic processes, and the broader comprehension of dance practice's cognitive and embodied aspects. This exploration aims to advance knowledge in the field and provide valuable insights for practitioners and scholars in dance.

## 1.2 Artist Statement

To dance means to be on a constant journey and permanent arrival. Practicing is a continuous, repeated work, allowing thought and sensation to reflect on and through the body. We practice in order to forget the mechanics. Creation unravels human experiences. Creation is everywhere, anywhere, somewhere, and nowhere. Being in a creative mode is instinctive, intuitive, and curious; it is somewhat elusive. I explore my understanding of what creation is and inquire about the boundaries of my knowledge about it – discovering the *what* through the *how* – the specificity of a moment.

Choreography serves as the aesthetic lens through which I shape the amalgamated moments for observation. It represents a conscious process of assembling, questioning, intervening, and observing the interplay between the existing state, its functionality, appearance, potential transformations, and unrealized possibilities. "What is" pertains to the structure I currently perceive. "What could" encompasses a singular entity's diverse facets and potential trajectories. It embodies both order and chaos, symmetry and asymmetry—simultaneously an exploration and a grasp with one hand reaching out and the other holding on.

I am curious about disciplines, aesthetics, structures, and systems. I am interested in the relationship between mind and body – qualities of attention, what we think of things, how we do what we do, our body and its properties. I am curious about the gap between what is and our perception of it. I am interested in combining movement with voice and language. I prefer the experience rather than the illustration. It is about finding the courage to say yes; I know I do not know. I ask to reach one person's eye and soul. I know it wishes to appear as one thing.

### 1.3 Methodology

The dialogue between choreographer Mathilde Monnier and philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, titled "*Seule au monde*" (2001), explores Nancy's perspective on the solo dancer. Nancy asserts that while solo dancers may appear solitary, they simultaneously unveil themselves and express the truth of their movement as they navigate toward the world (Burt, 2016). In my understanding, the truth being discussed by Monnier and Nancy is not necessarily objective or universal but rather a subjective and personal truth revealed through the practice of solo dance. It is a truth that emerges from the embodied experience of the dancer and their interaction with the world, towards the world, through movement, through the body.

In chapter two of Gill Deleuze's *Practical Philosophy* (1970), Deleuze focuses on how Spinoza interacts with the world in materiality – through the body, as something that deals with consciousness as an interaction of bodies, emphasizing its dynamic and interconnected nature. According to Spinoza, the body is not separate from the mind or the world. However, it is constantly influenced by external forces and produces affects or states of joy and sadness. This implies an ongoing engagement with the world, as external factors influence the body and contribute to creating new possibilities for existence and interaction. Here, and perhaps in Nancy's notion of "truth," the body folds the force within itself as an immanent and productive force that flows through bodies and creates new possibilities for engagement in the world and modes of existence.

In my interpretation, relating to the world is in the individual's potential to find truth when making (creating). Moreover, since making entails the practice of a specific topic, finding truth in the practice of the specific topic entails procedures, techniques, and methodical research to identify, process, analyze, and select

information about the topic of creation. In other words, “truth” here might be a verb, an action. Fluid and transformative, it is revealed in a procedure, in research of what we know about what we make and how we do it through that knowledge. Such a notion of truth aligns with the Process philosophers, such as Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Sanders Peirce, who propose that reality is constantly in flux. That truth is an ongoing process that emerges through dynamic interactions and transformations (Altshuler, 1980).

Spatz and Nelson define the process of finding truth in making (creation) as “know-what” that includes “what can be gleaned through an informed reflexivity about the process of making and its modes of knowing” (Spatz, 2015, p.231). Thus, potential truth embedded in a solo dance is in the research and practice of such truth, which is the potential for relating to the world. In this context, I will delve into the intricacies of my solo dance creation process and elucidate the research methodologies that underscore this creative journey. I began to create the new Solo, *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*, in June 2020. This project is a choreographic response to the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza, specifically to his theory of ideas and affect (*Latin. Affectus*). It concluded as a 60-minute solo work that premiered in Pesaro, Italy, in 2022. The development of the work took place over three phases:

**Phase 1** Initial investigation of the use of voice together with movement, selection of words and gestures, and exploring the coordination between them. Laying out the use of the camera and designing the space for showing the Solo for video (8.30 minutes), performed by myself: Tel Aviv International Exposure (2020), L.A Chapman University (2020), Bergen Greig Academy (2020), Rome Teatro

Biblioteca (2020), Pesaro Online Festival (2020), Tbilisi Video Festival (2020), Zurich ZhDK (2021); TanzKongress Mainz, (2022).

**Phase 2** Transmission to another body, teaching the choreographic score, information about the use of voice, mode of attention, operational strategies, and creating new movement patterns that will suit the solo for stage (15 minutes), performed by Ariel Gelbart: Tel Aviv Dance Festival (2021); Israel Museum Jerusalem (2021); Rome Teatro Bibliotheca (2021); Helsinki, Tampere, and Jyväskylä (2021).

**Phase 3** In this phase, I developed the solo for stage, creating two new parts, which concluded in a 55-minute work, premiered September 2022, HangarTfestival, Pesaro, Italy, La Democrazia del Corpo, Florence, Italy 2023—performed by Ariel Gelbart.

Within this thesis, my focus will encompass my research's first and second phases. These phases delve into the exploration of gestures, words, and ideas and their intricate interactions. Concurrently, alongside practical exploration, I delved into the methodologies employed by fellow choreographers, unraveling the nuanced perspectives surrounding these three fundamental elements. Moreover, I extended my inquiry beyond dance, investigating how these elements are interpreted in diverse knowledge domains. The subsequent chapters will expound upon the choreographic framework I developed, elucidating the methodologies underpinning the coordination of these three elements, including their seamless integration during performance, their nuanced articulation, their impact on the performer's state of being, and their collective role in shaping the essence of the performance itself.

### **1.3.1 Video Materials**

To document this practice research process, I include six video documents:

- V0.** Rehearsal document, Tel Aviv, 2020 (4 minutes)
- V1.** Rehearsal document, Tel Aviv, 2020 (8 minutes)
- V2.** Rehearsal document, Tel Aviv, 2020 (2:30 minutes)
- V3.** Documentation of P1 — solo for video, online festival, 2020 (8:30 minutes)
- V4.** Documentation of P2 — solo for stage, 2021 (14 minutes)
- V5.** Lecture/performance with Prof Frederike Lampert about stages 1 and 2, *Akuality and Potentiality*, Stadt Theatre Maniz 2022 (20 minutes)

**Total:** 56 minutes

These videos are the heart of the work and can be viewed before, after, or alongside reading the written thesis. My writing will be about developing words, gestures, movements, and ideas and the creation of a choreographic score. I will explain the coordination and relation between them as they are performed and the choreographic idea behind them. I will provide an analysis of the central elements constituting the work:

- \* Words, gestures, and ideas
- \* Critical concepts include embodied reflection, expression, theory of ideas, repetition, and affect theory.

I will discuss the pre-development and development of the project across phases 1 and 2. Furthermore, V6 includes the knowledge transmission of the material as demonstrated in the lecture performance.

### **1.3.2 A note on the full performance**

*First Things 1<sup>st</sup>* consists of three significant main parts and two smaller ones. Each part focuses on a specific choreographic concept— space, rhythm, and thoughts— and the performer’s experience and relation to these concepts. An emphasis on bodily movement characterizes each large part but through a different relation to space, time, and mind. Each part starts from a simple premise: one body – one point in space; one body – one beat; one body – one word. Gradually, an accumulation of tasks challenges the performer to hold on to the existing structure, eventually creating a fracture in the fabric of the choreography and unraveling new bodily movement and attendance compositions. The two smaller parts of the choreographic work are composed of poetic/reflective texts; the performer reflects on what happened, what might happen, and what he knows of the present ephemeral moment. In what follows, I will only write about the part that examines the relationship between body and mind: one body – one word.

## 1.4 Literature, Sources, and Inspirations

Though not all the sources I will mention here are part of the written thesis, they served as inspiration and reassurance that I am not alone with my questions and practice. To help situate my choreographic process in the context of contemporary choreographic and performance strategies, I drew knowledge and stimulation from the following:

Bojana Cvejic's *Choreographing a Problem* (2015). With rigorous thought and consistent methodology, Cvejic lays out the process of thought and creation of the concepts in choreographic practices of several leading European dance makers whose practice can be linked to the philosophical ideas of Spinoza and Deleuze. For example, Deleuze's chapter *Image of Thought* (from *Difference & Repetition*, 1968), the problem with expression, objective and subjective approaches to the body, and the theory of ideas that Cvejic brilliantly traces and explains in the work *Weak Dance Strong Questions* by Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema. Cvejic writes and articulates how performative concepts such as expression and representation are embedded in theoretical thoughts. How two disparate modes of expressions – movement and speech – mediate in dance practice and methods of creation by way of problem-posing. I found these ideas to be valuable assets and a great help in my research.

Ben Spatz's book "*What a Body Can Do*" (2015) is written with detailed historical, sociological, and phenomenological rigor, exploring the notion of embodied technique as a form of knowledge that evolves through time and space. Spatz argues that embodied technique involves discovering specific material possibilities that can be reliably repeated. Spatz's book has been instrumental in structuring my thoughts on approaching and learning different procedures and



modules in embodied practice. I found in his book an endless source of theoretical and practical knowledge addressing my research within the frame of embodied process practices. Rather than simply repeating bodily actions, I could follow a more structured approach that incorporates knowledge alongside the process, allowing me to understand the acquired knowledge about the practice from previous sessions and what makes a practice specific to a particular task.

As a result, I have distinguished between two epistemic processes in producing knowledge. The first process involves acquiring knowledge about the practice from previous sessions, drawing on past experiences, and understanding. The second process involves acquiring knowledge of what makes the embodied practice specific to a particular task. It entails recognizing and exploring the moments of doing, the actions involved, the affordances presented by each specific moment, and the discoveries that contribute to the uniqueness of the practice in that specific moment. By integrating these two forms of acquired knowledge (developed through my understanding of previous experiences and the specific requirements of each task), I could better formulate a reliably repeated overall module for the specific practice. It enables the practice to be transmitted or sustained over time, ensuring its continued effectiveness and development. The aim is to establish reliability in practice, so it may work itself out when transmitted to another body or repeated over the course of the following years.

Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (2008) informed me about how one aspect of a concept can be understood in terms of another (e.g., understanding good and bad as a spatial notion of up and down). Lakoff and Johnson's work presents groundbreaking insights into the pervasive role of metaphors in shaping our understanding of the world. They reveal that metaphors are not merely linguistic

devices but fundamental cognitive structures that influence how we think and perceive reality. Their work highlights how metaphorical expressions are deeply ingrained in everyday language, shaping our conceptualization of abstract concepts based on more concrete experiences. It challenges traditional views of language and cognition, paving the way for a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between language, thought, and our lived experiences. In their example, they propose thinking of language in a metaphorical way where ideas are objects, words are containers, and communication is the act of “sending objects from one container to another.” This metaphor guided me through the practice of communication between thoughts, words, and movements.

Chapters 2.2 and 2.3 of Laura Cull’s *Differential Presence: Deleuze and Performance* (2009) give an account of the different definitions of the term ‘presence’ and its concept in performance. After addressing the more apparent connotations of ‘presence’ – specifically self-presence – in performance, such as being in the moment, charisma, being fully alive, and having a relationship with an audience, she gives an insight into how coming to being is understood from a metaphysics of presence, especially that of Derrida. Derrida points out the irreducible delay between speaking, thinking, and hearing and that meaning could never be fully present in the language. Therefore, the difference between communicative modes simultaneously makes possible and denies the idea of the self coming to presence with itself. Instead, it is a presence of flux and not a fixed notion of self-presence in the now. The thought of what presence is, if indeed it is something we want but can’t have, accompanied me throughout the process.

Ramsay Burt’s *Ungoverning Dance: Contemporary European Theatre Dance and the Commons* (2017) offered a new insight into virtuosity as a phenomenon

residing in the act of performing rather than a quantitative assessment of end product value. Burt accurately articulates my feelings while dancing solo: “different ways of moving out of solitude towards the world.” (p. 117)

Burrows' *Towards a Minor Dance* (2019) helped me explore compositional devices such as repetition and reduction and deepen the performer's qualitative expression of performing actions without attempting the more familiar virtuosity display.

In Richard Evans's essay, *Physical Thinking: The Body and the Mind of Creativity and Cognition* (2009), he explores the synthesis and assimilation of ideas, conjectures, and perceptions that emerge from the practice. In this essay, Evans proposes that abstract thinking directly expresses an embodied aspect of the mind. He suggests that the mind is not a disconnected entity in the world but rather another emerging process of interactions.

Following that, Brian Massumi's book *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2022), along with his Affect Theory, has been a constant source of information for my research and practice concerning the gap between bodily experiences and actions and my ability to understand them as they unfold.

In addition to these sources, I rely on other texts to explain how my choreographic practice grapples with the philosophy of Spinoza, including biographies of Spinoza by Roger Scruton, *Spinoza -A Very Short Introduction*,(1986 ) Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, (2008); Steven Nadler, *Spinoza A Life*, (1999); and Gilles Deleuze, and his readings of Spinoza in various sources.

To conclude the literature review for the thesis, I must list two books as a source of inspiration and inducement that have given me the audacity to write about the philosophical concepts of Spinoza and Deleuze in the first place: Zadok Alon's

*Rationalism and Mysticism in Spinoza's Philosophy* (2016) and Roger Scruton's *On Human Nature* (2017).

## 1.5 How things came to be *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*

As mentioned earlier, this thesis reflects on my practice, making and performing the solo *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*. The decision to engage in solo work came during the 2020 pandemic lockdown. Most of my choreographic projects were postponed; however, my mind was saturated with the desire to work and engage in a creative mode. Although it was a time of social distancing and restrictions, for me, choreographing via Zoom was unthinkable. I asked myself, “If this is it, what do I do?” Instead of looking for answers in the world, I posed this question inwardly and realized that I had my body, a space to practice, and time to reflect on the process of things without the pressure to produce final products. This might be an opportunity to examine my inner dialogue with choreography and perhaps discover new ways of relating to and through it.

I returned to my question, looking at it slightly differently; this time, instead of asking, I proposed, “This is it - I do what it is.” At the beginning of the process, this cryptic self-call for action seemed almost too simple or too abstract and relatively obscure; what is this “it”? What does it mean to practice “what it is”? Does “it” refer to the body? To the thinking of the body? To the experiential or the conceptual process of things? “It” can be anything at any given moment; does “it” refer to a specific moment? Furthermore, if “this is it” suggests that “it” exists prior to making it— the doing of it. How, then, can it be done? Or should “it” reveal itself?

Such reflections and puzzles may perhaps be perceived as theoretical or philosophical. Nonetheless, they play a role in contemporary dance practice concerning bodily knowledge as a mode of cognition of our experience of being present in the world (Hansen, 2022; Norman, 1993). Dance is not only bodily expression through form and motion (though it can be). Rather, it is a complex

apparatus that shapes the individual's cognitive and creative development. Dancers immerse themselves in the physical and mental practice of form and motion, timing, and space— fundamental categories that dancers know and explore, different choreographic ideas that raise a specific content and agency to the practice.

Dance involves rigorous training and heightened awareness, demanding attention to bodily procedures and modes of thought rooted in the body (Evans, 2009). For instance, choreographer William Forsythe's work exemplifies this approach as dancers continuously cultivate their focus across the senses to intensify audience attention, even directing it towards the act of attention itself. Forsythe's choreography challenges the limitations and inclinations of dancers' perceptions and awareness. While in motion, dancers remain cognizant of their ongoing thought processes, consistently gathering specific information visually or proprioceptively about their bodies and how actions and thoughts converge to shape experiences.

Forsyth's approach allows materials to be comprehended and developed with both intelligence and intuition in all directions. As a result, dancers engage with mental concepts, presence, and attentiveness, perpetually seeking enriching performative experiences. Regarding this matter, I went to the studio to move and practice thought. While there, I engaged in improvisation centered around a basic geometric concept, generating patterns and coordination. This activity aligns with the notion of dance as rigorous training and heightened awareness, where bodily procedures and cognitive processes converge to shape experiential outcomes. By placing an imaginary square shape between my arms, for example, my movements were affected by the dimension, placement, and weight of the imaginary object (see **V0**). The more I practiced with the above-mentioned geometrical shape, the more aware I became of my actions, images, sensations, and thoughts. My body took

over, accelerating, displacing, suspending, and renegotiating patterns and coordination. My thoughts became almost silent, yet I remained highly aware and attentive. I was aware of my habitual patterns and tendencies and called forth for new movement patterns to emerge, which produced new ideas and, in turn, new movement patterns in a kind of feedback loop. I thought, what if instead of working with a description of geometric forms that produce movement compositions that are familiar to me, I will address my body as a source of sensation and conduit to ideas? What can be a sensed idea? Is there any relation between the sensed and the thought?

What followed (see **V1**) is an improvisation of laying out pressure and joint points with the right hand and the left hand. Sooner rather than later, the action became more complex and elaborate. Once again, I worked with movement coordination and different patterns that emerged from my dance experience. This drew my awareness further away from the proposed task—to address my body as a source of sensation and conduit to ideas – to explore an alternative approach to movement composition. Rather than relying on familiar geometric shapes, my intention was to explore the connection between sensory experiences and thoughts and to examine how sensory perceptions can give rise to movement ideas. In other words, I wanted to investigate what kind of ideas the body embodies during specific activities and how the mind corresponds to those bodily actions.

My exploration aligns with Spinoza's proposition that the body itself is the object of the idea that shapes the human mind. Spinoza illustrates thought and movement with the geometric example of a circle, “A circle existing in nature, and the idea of a circle existing, which is also in nature, are one and the same thing displayed through different attributes “(E2: PROP. 7). Spinoza argues that the mode

“circle,” when considered under the attribute of thought, is identical to mode “circle” under the attribute of extension.<sup>1</sup>

In the studio practice, I employed arm gestures (see **V2**) to create a circular form. This action possessed the same objectivity as envisioning a circular ball. However, an intriguing phenomenon emerged as I combined physical gestures with spoken language, a perplexing experience I grappled to fathom fully. This convergence prompted profound inquiries: Are words akin to bodily actions, or do they represent mental concepts? Do they denote enacted actions or contemplated thoughts? The verbiage remains constant, but the body's sensations and the currents of thought fluctuate, generating an underlying tension.

I pondered whether the tension and bewilderment I encountered in my modest endeavor to synchronize body, mind, movement, and language stemmed from some elusive intricacy. Why does it matter if words, gestures, and ideas are congruent? However, if they are not, then what precisely defines the nature of words? Do they possess distinct essences or modes of expression? Furthermore, what governs their operation? Moreover, what entity (gestures and ideas) do they encompass, if not the same entity? Alternatively, perhaps they are identical entities—words, ideas, gestures—manifesting diversely within the realms of human existence: body and mind, or, in the language of Spinoza, *Thought and Extension*. What will happen if I act what I think and think what I act? What kind of expression will emerge when gestures, words, and thoughts convey the same idea (idea as an object of thought)?

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<sup>1</sup> Attributes are fundamental characteristics or essential properties of the one infinite and eternal substance, “God” or “Nature.” Spinoza identifies two attributes that human beings can grasp: extension and thought. Extension encompasses all physical objects and phenomena with spatial dimensions, while thought includes mental activities, ideas, perceptions, emotions, and consciousness (Nadler, 2016).



According to Spinoza, the body is understood as a particular mode of extension, referring to its physical existence and properties. "The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, in other words, a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else." (Ethics. Prop. XIII) Essentially, what is being emphasized is that the mind's idea or perception is directed toward the body as it exists in reality. It does not extend to anything beyond the physicality of the body. The focus is solely on the body as an extension in space, without considering any additional aspects or entities. Focusing on the body's physical existence and properties during dance practice highlights the significance of staying grounded in the moment and fully present in the body's physicality, fostering a deeper connection with the movement and enhancing the overall dance experience.

Evans (2009) considers dance practice as a mode of cognition that shapes our experience of being present in the world. The state of being aware is a result of the qualitative attention we devote to what we see, hear, feel, and sense during our practice. Therefore, awareness is knowing how to perform a task best. It is an expressive feature in performance, a type of choreographic "display" of perception as a form of research. But more than mere awareness is requisite; specificity is essential. The term "awareness" encompasses a breadth of possibilities. However, can I focus on a singular aspect of awareness? Can I become aware of awareness itself? As I pondered this, "recognition" seemed better suited for encapsulating what I sought. Recognizing what I am presently aware of and the thoughts accompanying my current actions.

Consequently, I decided on a different practice approach: to speak what I do, to do what I hear, to hear what I say, and to think about what I am doing. Perhaps speaking while making will restrain the body from overtaking the task, and drawing

my attention to its complex coordination will allow me to better recognize what is being addressed and be aware of it. (see **V2**). This is one of the first tryouts, and I couldn't anticipate that it would result in a 60-minute solo performance. Since movement and words were simultaneously performed in repetition, I needed help to differentiate what was initiating what and recognize what exactly was happening between thinking, acting, and speaking. Was the word correlated to my act or my thought? Was the act a representation of the word or another expression of the thought idea? How are the physical and the thinking connecting? Was I repeating the same thing every single time? I got stuck between the different modes operating together, “the head as an exchange organ and the heart as the amorous organ of repetition” (Deleuze, 1968, p.1). What conveys what, and what initiates what? I was both stimulated and irritated from being between things – lost in translation between the object and the concept.

Being between things and inquiring about them (language, thoughts, and physicality) presupposes the ontological question of what is at the most basic level of phenomena: what things are, how they change, and the state of flux. Philosophers such as Jacques Derrida argue that nothing is outside the text, challenging the attempt to ground meaning independent of human history and culture. Derrida also claims that language is unstable and that meaning always differs; thus, we can only partially pin things down (Bush, 2009).

Michel Foucault highlights the transformative nature of meaning and social truth over time as they shape new subjectivities through the interplay of power and knowledge. According to Foucault, truth is not an abstract or timeless concept; instead, it is a product that emerges within the dynamics of various constraints and

influences. "Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint" (Foucault, 1991).

While both Derrida and Foucault point to a world or a human subjectivity in flux, moving and changing, Deleuze is interested in accounting for how things change, the differences that occur over time, and the movement between things. "They (artists) introduce a disequilibrium into the dynamic process of construction, an instability, dissymmetry or gap of some kind which disappears only in the overall effect" (Deleuze, 1968, p.19). In *Difference and Repetition* (1968), one of the questions that Deleuze seeks to answer is: "How should we give structure to our thoughts and acts?" (Williams, 2003, p. 4). He lays down principles to aid his questions: "It is best for our actions to connect with all the things that have brought them about and that they can bring about... It is best to select our thoughts so that everything is left behind" (Deleuze, 2013, p.167).

The dichotomy inherent in the two following principles lies in their contrasting approaches. While Derrida and Foucault emphasize the fluidity and constant change of the world and human subjectivity, Deleuze focuses on understanding the process of change itself, the evolving differences between entities, and the transitions between them. Deleuze emphasizes that artists introduce disruption and instability in the ongoing construction process, creating gaps that only resolve within the overall effect (Deleuze, 1968, p.19).

In *Difference and Repetition* (1968), Deleuze grapples with how to structure our thoughts and actions. His principles highlight this contrast: On one hand, he advocates for connections with all contributing factors and the potential for change they entail; on the other, he suggests selecting thoughts that leave everything behind and evoke a sense of being in the present (Deleuze, 2013, p.167).

The two principles seem contradictory. The first urges us to engage with everything, recognizing the interconnectedness of sources and their potential to influence change. In contrast, the second principle encourages forgetting the past and embracing a sense of presence in the moment. What concerns me here is the direct connection to my practice in *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*. That is to be aware of all potentialities embedded within a moment and simultaneously be immersed within the present moment and nothing else.

Practicing the relation between word, gesture, and thought requires conceptualizing stable categories of thought and substance and inquiring about my understanding and recognition of what things are and how they change. What is an idea, a word, or a gesture? Are they stable categories of thought and substance? or do they constantly change? If they change, does it mean that they differ in their essence from each other? Moreover, how do things develop into new things through the process of repetition? Can I ask these questions through motion, through action? As Deleuze writes, "Rather, it is a question of producing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside of all representation; it is a question of making movement itself a work." (Deleuze, 1968, p. 26)."

My body moves (e.g., **V2**). It creates forms and figures; it feels and senses. It serves as the source of the idea that generates and contemplates it (the body). However, are a thought of a thing and a body making something one and the same? A thought is a thing, and a body is a thing; if they do the same thing simultaneously, will it be one thing? Is it a matter of two different manners of expressing one thing? Does the sequential order of their manifestation hold significance? Can I establish a logical and analytical choreographic framework akin to Spinoza's geometric approach to investigate the interplay between words, ideas, movement, and the

impact of such on the performer's overall experience and expression? What implications arise from this straightforward observation?

The practice becomes a fundamental exploration of the transformation of movement, word, and idea into artistic creation and of how ideas, gestures, and words intricately interact and influence one another. These inquiries delve into the nature of dance as a medium and the relationship between movement, ideas, and their embodiment in the dancer. Exploring these questions can illuminate the intricate interplay between physical action and mental representation within dance, shedding light on the fundamental nature of movement and its expressive capacities.

Since the epistemological framework undermining my practical investigation is grounded in the thought of Spinoza, in the following, I will briefly summarize his biography and work focusing on his theory on the body, ideas, and affects. Then, I will recount how I drew from Spinoza's philosophy and applied it to my practice.

## 1.6 Spinoza

Benedict (Baruch) de Spinoza (1632–1677), of Portuguese Jewish ancestry, was born in Amsterdam. His family had fled Portugal from the Spanish Inquisition to the more tolerant Dutch Republic.

Spinoza received a Jewish education and attended the synagogue. However, Spinoza was never accepted within the Jewish community because of his philosophical position. One of Spinoza's most critical metaphysical foundations was eliminating superficial beliefs, especially superstitions, in a providential personal god. He denied the immortality of the soul, rejected the possibility of miracles, and insisted that the Bible was just the work of a human. Consequently, on July 27, 1656, when he was only 23 years of age, the Sephardic community of Amsterdam issued a writ of excommunication against him. Excommunicated and orphaned (Spinoza's mother died when he was 6, and his father when he was 22), Spinoza voluntarily exiled from his city of birth and no longer identified himself as a Jew. In 1676, his health declined, as he suffered from consumption, aggravated by the dust caused by his profession as a lens grinder. He died on February 21, 1677, at the age of 44.

Spinoza's philosophy rests upon two core principles. Firstly, there is a rationalist theory of knowledge, where what is adequately conceived is deemed accurate. Secondly, the notion of substance is derived from Aristotelian tradition through Descartes. What distinguishes Spinoza is his thorough exploration of this substance concept, extracting its every philosophical implication.

Inspired by Euclid's geometry, Spinoza adopts a geometric method for rational inquiry. He starts with necessary axioms and precise definitions that refine concepts, then deduces theorems with the same confidence and lack of error as the axioms.

He prioritizes precision over everyday language and defends definitions as tools for conveying ideas more accurately.

In his work *The Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* (1663), Spinoza seeks to distill Descartes' metaphysics into fundamental axioms and deduce his complete philosophy. While written outside Descartes' framework, it showcases Spinoza's geometric approach. His magnum opus, *Ethics*, presents his philosophy axiomatically, moving rigorously from metaphysical propositions to principles of rational conduct and descriptions of human Nature.

Spinoza's geometric rigor encompasses various topics, from asserting "a substance is prior to its modifications" (Scruton, 1981, p. 49) to defining the essence of emotions. He treats metaphysical propositions and moral insights with equal logical precision, illustrating his distinctive philosophical approach.

Spinoza is known for his Monistic approach, a cornerstone of his philosophy, which posits that extension is one of Nature's attributes. Like all divine attributes, it is infinitely boundless. Spinoza independently proves this assertion. When examining other attributes, he considers thought as the essence of the mind. Spinoza argues that thought must also be a divine attribute since it is self-conceivable and requires no external reference. Just as the extension has modifications, so does thought, but thought alone is sufficient for a rational explanation. While there are infinitely many attributes, finite beings can grasp only finite knowledge. Thus, we can conceive Nature through extension and thought attributes, while other modes of conception elude us. The knowable world, viewed through thought and extension, is named God or Nature, a single eternal entity that's self-causing and self-sustaining. Thought and extension are not mere properties; they constitute Nature's (or God's) essence and offer a comprehensive understanding of Nature's Nature.

Spinoza's Ethics is a wide-ranging treatise that touches on almost every area of philosophy: metaphysics, theory of knowledge, philosophy of mind, philosophical psychology, moral philosophy, political philosophy, and the philosophy of religion (Nadler, 2016). The first two parts of the treatise delve into his ontology and epistemology, seeking to establish the nature of reality and how humans can acquire knowledge. Spinoza distinguishes between different types of knowledge, including imagination, reason, and intuitive knowledge (Ethics II, p.40), and explains the role of adequate and inadequate ideas in understanding truth (Ethics II, pp. 41-43).

The third part focuses on human emotions and their connection to nature. Spinoza views emotions as determined occurrences akin to a body's motion or a mathematical figure's properties (Nadler, 1999). Spinoza examines the power of the mind over emotions and discusses the desire for continuous living, known as "Conatus," which drives beings to persevere in their existence, "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being" (Ethics 3, prop. 6).

Part four discusses ethical considerations, exploring concepts of virtue, ethical behavior, and political organization. Spinoza examines the definitions of good and evil, considers moral actions, intentions, free will, and moral responsibility, and elaborates on the distinction between subjective and objective value judgments. He offers insights into the foundations of ethical living and the principles that guide our moral choices.

The fifth part completes the Ethics by returning to its fundamental inquiries while presenting new ideas and reflections. Nevertheless, in doing so, Spinoza questions many of the ideas he argues for in other parts of the book (ibid.).

In the Ethics, Spinoza developed a unique method of philosophical inquiry known as the Geometrical Method. Inspired by the rigour and clarity of mathematics,



Spinoza sought to apply a similar approach to philosophical reasoning. The Geometrical Method uses axioms, definitions, and propositions, presented systematically and logically as Euclidean Geometry.<sup>2</sup>

At the core of Spinoza's Geometrical Method is the belief that philosophical truths can be deduced from a small number of self-evident principles (Nadler, 2016). These principles, or axioms, are the foundation upon which the entire philosophical system is built. Spinoza starts with a series of definitions that establish the meanings of key concepts and terms. These precise and unambiguous definitions provide a clear framework for subsequent reasoning. From there, Spinoza establishes a set of axioms, which are self-evident truths or basic principles upon which all subsequent arguments rely. Following this, Spinoza formulates a series of propositions. These propositions are logical statements that follow from the axioms and definitions. Each proposition builds upon the previous ones, gradually unfolding a coherent and interconnected system of thought. The propositions are supported by rigorous logical arguments, employing deductive reasoning to derive new insights and conclusions.

What distinguishes Spinoza's Geometrical Method is its emphasis on logical coherence and systematic demonstration. Ethically and metaphysically, the essence of his geometrical system is to maintain that everything can be demonstrated. Therefore, it was essential to produce demonstrations (Russell, 1910). By structuring his philosophical works, Spinoza aimed to create a clear and transparent framework for his ideas. This method facilitates a step-by-step exploration of complex philosophical concepts.

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<sup>2</sup> Euclid's Elements and Spinoza's Ethics share a systematic approach. Just as Euclid begins with definitions and fundamental assumptions, Spinoza employs axioms and definitions. Both recognize the need to start from accepted principles without proof. While Euclid lays out postulates and common notions, Spinoza establishes axioms as the foundation. Both works demonstrate a structured and logical progression, with Spinoza's Ethics drawing inspiration from Euclidean geometry's method of building a comprehensive framework (Venema, 2006).

Though puzzling to conceive one thing with multiple essences, Spinoza's attribute concept is ontological, emphasizing different ways of comprehending Nature. This approach aligns with his intention for us to recognize the intellectual implications of substance theory. It unveils that the argument proving substance's existence also explains thought and extended matter. This blurs the creator-creation distinction, dissolving theological complexities. Similarly, the division between mind and matter fades, resolving the central metaphysical puzzle. In this view, mind, matter, creation, and creator are mere labels for the same eternal, self-sustaining entity (Scruton, 1981).

Spinoza proposed a radical change in understanding the mind, body, and nature and the role of bodily experience in the quest for proper knowledge or the "true self" (Scruton, 1986). In his words, "No one yet has determined what the body can do (Spinoza, 1994, p. 155; E3. P2S)." Roger Scruton (1986) posits that the love stemming from the pursuit of knowledge, which lays the foundation of everything experienced, is what Spinoza's philosophy is all about. Only by pursuing adequate knowledge of what we know and feel and by practicing it daily, will we constitute a relationship of love with that which cannot be fully comprehended by the human mind.

Reading Spinoza's Ethics is undoubtedly a challenge, and I don't expect to ever understand it fully. Yet, one must recognize the simplicity and economy of its Mishnah (Doctrine). It has everything and lacks nothing, as in mathematical theory or a work of art. Understanding the whole is only possible by understanding its parts. Understanding the parts is only possible against the background of the whole. The minimum necessary and the maximum possible are fused and compressed into one vessel, presented as a perfect whole.

I have applied Spinoza's systematic approach to my practice by implementing a structured and methodical framework and aiming to maintain a clear and demonstrative performative quality in the tasks. I began by focusing on one word, one gesture, and one idea, exploring their expressive possibilities, and seeking logical expressions to emerge from the practice. This process then led to the introduction of a second word, gesture, and so on, creating an accumulative progression that maintains coherence within itself.

To guide my exploration, I have developed a step-by-step compositional grid aligned with Spinoza's Geometrical Method. This grid incorporates gestures, words, and ideas as foundational elements in my creative process. By carefully arranging and grouping them, I have tried to establish a coherent and interconnected sequence, similar to Spinoza's emphasis on logical coherence. This systematic arrangement has facilitated clear navigation and organization within my practice, allowing for a deeper understanding of the connections between different elements and maximizing the reasoning about the choreographic procedure.

By following this approach, I could investigate the complexities of my practice with a logical and structured mindset. It provided a framework to explore and express my ideas, ensuring my creative process remained grounded and comprehensible. Applying Spinoza's systematic approach enriched my practice by promoting clarity, coherence, and deeper insights into the relationships between movement, language, and thought.

The main material section in the current thesis will provide a more detailed explanation of this approach in regard to the practice of words, gestures, and ideas in *First Things 1st*.

## 2. Main Material – *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*

### 2.1 Words

*“The profound tensions between the wordless language of art and verbal language.”*  
(Cvejick, *Choreographig Problems*, Ritsema quotes Hans-George Gadamer).

The use of words in dance applies a form of linguistic communication to an implicit, nonverbal, embodied form of communication, as in the work *WDSQ* (Weak Dance Strong Questions, Burrows and Ritsema, 2001) where the approximation between two disparate expressions—movement and speech— is mediated through the notion of a syntax of dance movements (Cvejic, 2015, p.150). Thus, words can enhance our connection to the dance and help codify its experience and meaning. However, words also highlight the tension between different modes of experiencing and perception. As Ritsema states, “...unlike speech, movements are never something else than they are; they do not pretend.” (Ibid.)

From a structural point of view, the components of choreography share commonalities with language, “like language, dance communicates through cultural codes” (Bannerman, 2014). As such, movement language is a framework imposed by rules and functions of cognitive systems and structural principles embedded in the evolution of communication, thus in culture. The comparison of choreographic elements to culture is also found in the writings of dance theorist Randy Martin, who places the “movement” of dance (here as a field of knowledge) alongside social and cultural movements, “thereby paving the way to an idea of technique that overflows the boundaries between performing arts, physical culture, and cultural identity (Spatz, 2015). However, movement language has a looser relationship (Bannerman,

2014, pp. 65-80) with meaning than spoken language, "It does not convey literal messages;" (Ibid.). In some ways, dance resists definitional categories.

Unlike verbal languages, movement languages intend to communicate aesthetic and tacit ideas through the senses and imagination. Movement languages are created to perform and express meaning, reflecting our aesthetic capacities even without a dictionary. In terms of movement language, taking the perspective of language structure allows both the analytical arrangement of movement phrases in temporal succession and the emergence of a specific presence when explicit and tacit tools (words and movements) are explored and combined in dance practice. "I started speaking while moving, with word and movement springing spontaneously from a common source. This practice has allowed me to know what is on my mind. What is on my mind before I think it through, while it is still a wild feeling in my bones" (Forti, 2003, p.57).

From the late twentieth century in the Western dance tradition, choreographers and dance makers started to explore the different forms language might take when it is created as dance, to incorporate words in creative practice, and to investigate how spoken text can contribute to dance creation. As a result, their works reveal the interconnections and affiliations between language and movement (Hanna, 2001). For example, Barber proposes that "language enhances the personas of the characters" (Barber, 2021). Furthermore, she suggests that with language, the viewers feel more connected to the performative event, "allowing the audience to understand the complex situation on stage or how the performers are feeling."

Choreographers practice different approaches and methods for using words and spoken text; some aid the story of the dance by giving explicit meaning to the

movements and strengthening the emotional aspect of the dancers and the audience or reflecting on the choreographic apparatus itself, creating a meta-choreography. Others explore the connection between words and movements as two distinct meaning-producing agencies and study the language and linguistic models to apply them in dance creation. In turn, the introduction of verbal language to dance practice opens further questions about the ontological nature of the dancing body and the apparatus of meaning production. As Ritsema inquires: "How can one ask a question by moving? This is impossible. Unlike speech, movements are never something else than they are" (Cvejic, 2015).

Choreographers Pina Bausch and Lloyd Newson use words and speech to express the performer's emotions within a narrative context and enhance the connection between dancers and the audience. In their practice, language magnifies the characters' personas and helps the viewers better understand and empathize with the complex situations on stage and the performer's feelings (Barber, 2014).

In the works of Danish choreographer Mette Edvardsen, language expands the notion of choreography without a spectacle of human bodies. "I discovered the efficiency of a language to name and make appear," and "I was negating and looking into what is not." (Lambert, 2019). In the performance *No Title* (2014), Edvardsen uses words to refer to objects that are not present; thus, she triggers the audience to construct a mental image of these objects.

In the work *Véronique Doisneau* (2004) for the Paris Opéra Ballet, French choreographer Jerome Bell's use of language is twofold: to tell a story of an "average" professional ballet dancer and "enacts an anarchic intervention within one of the most hierarchical sectors of the dance industry" (Burt, 2008). The protagonist, Veronique Doisneau, is a *corps de ballet* dancer of 20 years; as such, she never got

to dance her favourite parts, which only the '*étoiles*' (principal soloists) dance. In Bell's work, Veronique performs alone her parts of the corps' material from the second act of *Swan Lake* with all its excruciating, held poses while telling her story about her favourite extracts from that very ballet. The audience witnesses the critical nature of performance and its institutional context (Burt, 2008). On the one hand, by giving Veronique a voice, the personal story and vulnerability of a ballet dancer who is barely ever noticed, not to mention heard, exposes the power structures embedded within Ballet institutions. On the other hand, the audience imagines even more vividly the dance Veronique describes (*Swan Lake*'s famous *pas de deux* in the second act), and all this while she is frozen in her role of a corps de ballet dancer.

Choreographers Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion explore the connection between gestures, movements, and words, thus exposing the production of meaning revolving around bodily knowledge and language. In their work *Speaking Dance* (2006), words are used in rhythmical repetition alongside simple gestures and movements. The gestures were devised as illustrations of the words (or the other way around), reinforcing a predictable hierarchy between mind and body. The attachment of words to the gestures creates the production of chains of signifiers that resemble the Saussurean principle of the syntagmatic relations of phonemes.<sup>3</sup>

Reducing visual material to mental images through words could be understood as both the creation of vocabulary for the dancers to remember the steps for future reenactment or knowledge transmission and as a reference to the human tendency to think of images and recognize objects. It also points out that pre-

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<sup>3</sup> A syntagmatic relation involves how words or signs combine and interact with each other in a specific order based on their grammatical roles to create meaningful language. (Al Umman, 2015).

linguistic forms of communication start from bodily gestures; "Gestures are usually signs of the intention to speak that have become stuck in the body and have not succeeded in penetrating to the sphere of intangible meanings, or the symbolic or linguistic order" (Perazzo, 2008).

In the work *In Act and Thought* (2015), dancer and choreographer Fabrice Mazliah recomposes the working knowledge of the performers by tangling actions with words and thoughts. The performers describe and transcribe their actions, expanding details into complex explanations and revealing the hidden ideas behind the movement and the process of physical thinking during the performance. Mazliah explores how movement is generated through the act of thinking and how to initiate a reflective process through the act of moving.<sup>4</sup>

The choreographer William Forsythe encourages dancers to develop language skills. "Forsythe emphasizes the dancers' competence to describe their own actions, to use verbal language to become aware of how and why they do what they do" (Waterhouse, 2022, p.134). He "emancipates" dancers to be more than simple tools manipulated by the choreographer (Waterhouse, 2022, p. 68). Forsythe examines how Ballet's organizing principles can be dissected and compared to similar ideas in other disciplines, such as the linguistic system. He uses linguistic principles (and even computer programming) to create the conditions on stage within the dancers' need to assess and analyze the performative situation and adapt their movement accordingly, thus creating choreography in real-time. "My own dances reflect the body's experiences in space, which I try to connect through algorithms. So, there is this fascinating overlap with computer programming" (Forsythe & Kaiser, 1998).

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.pact-zollverein.de/en/programme/act-and-thought>



By adapting paradigms from other fields of knowledge, such as language, Euclidian geometry, and computer programming, and translating them to a set of algorithms in dance, Forsythe hinders the dancer's symbolic logic, which, by training, is governed by an image of the end result of movement (Cvejic, 2015). In addition, Forsythe uses principles from language to generate geometrical and architectural relations in the dancers' movement vocabulary as well as “aural compositions” based on speaking, breathing, and sound production, which are distinguished within his choreographic works. When dancers translate movement into vocal sound, they repurpose the voice – the typical conveyor of textual meaning – as a vector for an aural-visceral rendering of corporeal significance. Dancing that Re-sounds in this manner opens a space to rethink how dancing bodies convey meaning and reflect the centrality of vision and text in dance research. “Engaging thresholds of perception; saturating performance spaces with complex, competing information; and thwarting expectations through unexpected juxtapositions, shifts or interruptions (Vass-Rhee, 2010).”

Words play a central role in the creation of the solo work *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*. While it was not my first time incorporating words and text into my works, in the piece *Am I* (Solo, 2019/20), words were utilized to depict the personal relationship of the dancer, Talia Paz, with her craft throughout her 30-year dance career. By deconstructing the text of the famous chorus line "*Let Me Dance for You*" into word fragments and incorporating breath, the dancer is encouraged to redefine her artistic presence and skills.

In *Love Songs* (commissioned work for 17 dancers, Montreal, 2018), two dancers deconstruct the words "Love" and "Songs" into individual phonemes. They then recombine the letters, exploring their order and mining the internal sounds to

create tunes, harmonies, syllables, and words. This auditory process serves as a sound score that elicits responses in movement from the other dancers. As a result, the creation of movement visually influences the choice of words and sound production.

In *Sounds Like Yourself* (commissioned work for 12 dancers, one actor. Tel Aviv, 2016), an actor with a microphone sits on the edge of the down-left stage, with his profile to the audience; at the other end of the stage sits an anonymous person from the audience, the addressee. The poetic text is taken from the letters exchanged between Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, Henry Miller and Anais Nin, and Lea Goldberg and Tuvia Rubner. The actor engages with the text, recontextualizing it and creating a sense of deception for themselves and the audience, similar to the experience of "blinding love." The text runs parallel to the dance performed on stage, creating a dynamic interplay resembling two sine waves on an oscilloscope, sometimes captivating the eye and, other times, captivating the ear.

In the work *Face to Face* (Duet, Tel Aviv, 2012/2017), text was employed to describe the performers' movements and the apparatus they operate. Each dancer took turns translating the events occurring to the other dancer into words, ultimately creating their own textual and physical scores by observing and translating the actions and motivations of their partner.

Building upon my ongoing choreographic research and practice involving text and words, in the current work, *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*, my objective was to delve into the gap and tension between the two modes of conveying meaning: words and movement. I sought to explore their relationship to ideas and the distinct ways in which they express meaning. In resemblance to the exploration in *Speaking Dance*

(2006) and *In Act and Thought* (2015), *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>* uses words and movements simultaneously, aiming to convey the same idea, taking into account the interaction between thought, action, and speech.

I decided on a straightforward practice method, choosing simple words and gestures. The chosen words were picked to indicate the actual gestures performed with the uttered words. From a practice perspective, my attention was directed to executing the speech and action simultaneously, aiming to produce the exact same expression with a demonstrative quality to it.

The words are:

*This*

*Is*

*It*

*To act*

*To say*

*To choose*

*To ask*

*What*

*To give*

*To be*

*Why*

I have grouped the words into five categories, marking the progression in the score.

In the following, I will note the time code for the performed words in the two videos (**V3**, **V4**), the poetic reading of the chosen words, and examples of the different features and connotations they took in the process.

**V2.** Documentation of P1 — solo for video, online festival, 2020 (8:30 minutes).

**V3.** Documentation of P2 — solo for stage, 2021 (14minutes).

### 2.1.1 Words and time code

**1. This, Is, It (V3. 00:48-2:45 // V4. 00:30-2:20)**

This group of words points out inferences and questions about being and subjective and objective features relating to something that exists.

*"This Is It," or "Is This It"?*

**2. To act, To say, To choose (V3. 2:45-3:47 // V4. 2:20-6:18)**

These verbs refer to the subjective experience, which involves physicality, language, and thought.

They point out the need to act, to speak out, and that choice is an action.

*"To act this, To act to say it, To choose to say, To choose it."*

**3. To ask, What (V3. 3:48-4:35 // V4. 6:18-8:08)**

These words invoke questions such as: Is there a right or wrong thing to act?

Is there the right question to ask? To whom or what is the question

addressed? Furthermore, they address the problem of how to dance a question (similar to WDSQ).

*"What to ask? What to act? To ask what, To choose to ask this."*

**4. To give, To be (V3. 4:35-5:10 // V4. 8:08-9:20)**

These verbs refer to the experience of being and doing, suggesting that being is a transformative experience. It involves a change in the individual and, therefore, in the way reality is perceived as an open and interconnected event rather than a fixed and isolated event.

*"To give this, To be this, To be is to ask this."*

**5. Why (V3. 5:10 // V4. 12:25-14:05)**

This is a poetic, philosophical, and even religious question, indicating the need to find reason and motivation for everything while undermining the act of performance itself. "Why choose to act this?"

Also, an existential (or ontological) question about the general nature of what things are.

*Why are things this and not that? Why "to be this" and not "to be that"? Why "this is to be"?*

**2.1.2 Examples of different features and connotations**

***This:***

- A.** As a determiner indicating the position and posture in space (**V3**, 00:47 // **V4**, 00:27).
- B.** As a pronoun referring to the event that is happening now (**V3**, 1:00-1:15 // **V4**, 1:00-1:10).
- C.** As an adverb indicating the size, shape, and space of something (**V3**, 1:20-1:30 // **V4**, 1:10-1:15).

***This Is:***

- A.** Referring to the action of the hands—this is an action of the hands (**V4**, 1:26-1:36)
- B.** Referring to the subject (performer) who makes the action of the hands or asking whether the action and the subject are the same things (**V4**, 1:36-1:46).
- C.** Asking if the subject and the spectator are similar (**V3**, 1:54-2:05).

Like Borrows and Fargion (see p. 35), I practiced using words and gestures simultaneously, but in contrast to their focus on the mathematical and countable structure, I was interested in the synthesized expression of the body and mind through movement and speech, akin to Ingvartsen's interest in exploring the affect in her performance *50/50* (2004). "...I would like to do something that was not only about showing the body as a reproducer of the codification of the body" (Cvejić, 2009, p.173). Ingvartsen refers to the "conceptual methodologies" in choreography, which approach the body and movement as a signifier of cultural codes; she explicitly sets her intention apart from these conceptual methodologies because she believes that they remove bodily, emotional, and affective expression. "I was interested in finding out how to be on the limit of language," constructing an expression that would be "moving faster or more intensively" than the "speed of rational reasoning" (Ibid.).

By repeating, re-organizing, overlaying, and looping the words and word sequences, new patterns emerge, and new propositions and connotations appear. What seems simple suddenly becomes complex. The act of repetition asks to emphasize something stable, a need for a concrete link between the word and the object it refers to. "This" refers to the exact shape of a triangle, to the exact gesture of the hands. However, repeating the word also forms the differences between each moment of an uttered word connected to the object it refers to. Therefore, each time the word is repeated, it also defines the difference between this instance and the one before. Moreover, the differences between the consecutive instances of the uttered word can be recognized only in relation to the last moment and by attempting to repeat it identically. Accordingly, the act of repetition contains both the production of

sameness and the inscription of difference at the heart of a choreographic space that it determines.

When uttered, each repetition of the same word is the same in essence (i.e., “this” stays this, and “it” stays it) but different in its expression from the other repetitions. Each uttered word reproduces its previous utterance while adding to it something new; it points to the increases and decreases of endeavor or intensities that flow through the performer’s thoughts and sensations to preserve its presence while in the presence of things. The word accentuates the ever-changing actions and thoughts. The word stays the same, yet it is always different from itself.

For example, the arms are in front of the hips, elbows touching the hips, palms facing each other, slowly moving the arms upwards until both arms touch each other above eye level, then dropping the arms back to the starting point. It creates a triangle. The idea of a triangle. Now add the word *This* to the action, repeating this movement with the word over and over again. What does the word *This* signify? Does it refer to the actual movement of the arms? Slow or fast? To the triangle shape created? To the space between the palms? Does it refer to the subject who performs the movement? Do I feel the same within each moment? There is only one thing performed, one action, one word, corresponding to one idea, but the body has infinite modes of expression and ways of appearing, which affects the idea. However, the word stays the same. The differences between the conduct of each repeated moment are revealed because the word stays the same, creating a gap between the essence of things and their expression, some form of performative tension between stability and change, actuality and potentiality. Each moment contains the possibilities for change; at the same time, it is an actual and concrete thing.

According to Spinoza, words alone do not possess inherent meaning; they are simply arbitrary signs that we attach to ideas, a source of error and falsity, not the least because they give us an inadequate knowledge of things, a product (words) of contingent associations between bodily motions and images (Alarcón, 2020). Spinoza believed that words are vehicles for expressing and communicating ideas but that their true meaning is derived from the underlying concepts they represent. He emphasized the importance of understanding the ideas behind the words rather than getting caught up in the surface level of linguistic symbols and argued that the clarity and adequacy of our ideas determine the accuracy and effectiveness of our communication.

For Spinoza, true understanding comes from grasping the essence of an idea and being able to express it accurately through language (Ibid.). Furthermore, Spinoza recognized the limitations and potential for confusion inherent in language. He believed that words can be easily misunderstood or misinterpreted due to their subjective associations and varied meanings for different individuals. Therefore, he advocated for careful and precise use of words, urging individuals to strive for clarity and coherence in their communication and emphasizing the importance of connecting language to underlying ideas and bodily experiences. Spinoza considers words as corporeal motions, and he describes them using the concept of *extension* (Alarcón, 2020). For him, words are bodily actions as they involve the movement of the body to produce sound. By understanding the essence of ideas and using words and bodily gestures to express our ideas effectively, we can enhance our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

In the following parts of the thesis, I will elaborate on the gestures and movements developed with a distinct economy of style. Additionally, I will delve into



the profound expressiveness inherent in these movements, arising from the significant disparity between cognitive and sensorial registers in perception. I will touch on a few critical concepts: Spinoza's theory of the body, affect theory, and how they are related to and traced in my practice.

## 2.2 Gestures and Movements

When communicating, we often use gestures to emphasize meanings. Before verbal language evolved, humans relied heavily on nonverbal communication, that is, gestures, proto-signs, and body language. At a core, gestures are symbolic actions, using one's body to communicate with others to convey specific messages (Hens, 2007). According to biologist and psychologist Adam Kendon, "Gesture is a name for visible action when it is used as an utterance or part of an utterance" (Kendon, 2004).

Gestures are performed while speaking but can also stand for themselves. Giorgio Agamben inscribes gesture into the sphere of action. However, he sets it apart from acting and making because it is neither about acting nor making, action nor production. "Production has an end other than itself, but action [praxis] does not: good action is itself an end" (Aristo VI 1140b, in Lazarus, 2022). Instead, he defines gestures as supporting and exposing the very means of communication. "The gesture is the exhibition of a mediality: the process of making a means visible as such." He continues, "If dance is a gesture, it is so, rather because it is nothing more than the endurance and the exhibition of the media character of corporal movements" (Agamben, 1992).

Just like words, which are the articulation tools used in verbal language to communicate ideas, the body parts involved in gesturing are called articulators (Crystal, 2008, p.61). Since dance is a non-verbal art form that communicates through the body, it developed specialist, sophisticated codes of various styles of mime and gesture, for example, classical ballet or styles of South Asian dance or the Gitano Flamenco (Bannerman, 2019).

One way to examine the relation between thinking and acting (making, doing) or ideas and their embodiment through two modes of (verbal and nonverbal) communication is to create a set of simple gestures for each word, which should be practical in function and easily repeated. However, since, as a dancer, gestures (as movements) serve in my training as the building blocks to convey ideas, my challenge was to detach and unlearn the technologies of and within movement production rather than create and develop movements.

The process of detachment required ungrounding and eliminating habits and information carried within my body: idiosyncratic gestures related to different dance styles, action-reaction patterns, abstract-geometric movement, task-oriented movement, somatic-based movements, and ballet movements. The aim was to be left with gestures bare from any expression embedded in the techniques that I acquired as a practitioner besides their mechanics, indifference to the viewer, and self-referential objective. As Ben Spatz writes (about Manuel DeLanda, 1991: 26), "to track singularities in the materiality of embodiment" implies recognizing the knowledge and techniques that "structure the way we think, move, and understand ourselves" (Spatz, 2015, pp.61-62). Hence, one of the more difficult stages in creating the gestures was unpacking personal history and cultural factors to achieve the "purest" or most "objective" gesture movements possible.

The idea of objective or "pure" movement is tied to the synthesis between body and movement, which can be found in the creation and reception of contemporary dance from the early twentieth century. Following that, different techniques were created to promote the "subjectivation of the dancer through (emotive) self-expression and objectivation of movement through the physical expression of the dancing body" (Cvejic, 2015). The dancing body underwent

several transformations in history. Beginning with the symbolic representation of royals and historical figures, where the presence of the body was secondary to the choreography, naked from the spontaneous expression of the individual dancer.

During the twentieth century, a significant paradigm shift occurred, marked by the liberation movement and the empowerment of the 'subject' as a wellspring of knowledge and self-expression. Within this transformative context, pioneers of modern dance embarked on a mission to emancipate movement from the confines of the mimetic regime. Their objective was to liberate dance from imitative representation and explore its full potential for personal expression and artistic exploration. They bound movement with bodily consciousness and physical and emotional experience (Cvejic, 2015, p.18). The movements, the dancer, and the choreographic apparatus became closely intertwined; for example, Henrietta Bannerman writes that the Graham contraction is linked to the expression of emotional states rather than mimetic ideas. (Bannerman, 2014)

As a departure from self-expression, an objectivation of dance presupposes a different relationship between movement, the body, and the expressive act. From the 1950s to the 1960s, artists such as Merce Cunningham and the Judson Dance Theater engaged the dancer's body parts in strictly physical activity, "reduced to a physical articulation of the movement, whose meaning lays, tautologically, in itself, "I.e., distilling or simplifying the dancer's movements into purely physical actions, where the meaning of the movement is contained within the movement itself, rather than being expressed through emotional or subjective interpretation. (Cvejic, 2015, p.18). This approach is further endorsed by American choreographer Yvonne Rainer, "Ideally, one is not even oneself; one is a neutral doer" (Rainer,1974, p.65).

Thus, two contrasting ideals are formulated regarding the synthesis of body and movement. The first ideal involves the subjectivity of the body being expressed in movement, while the second involves the objectivity of movement being conveyed through the body. However, despite this contrast, both approaches emphasize the integration of the body and movement into a cohesive entity. The distinction lies in their methods: the first approach is understood through emotional experiences, whereas the second approach is understood through physical tasks or actions (Ibid.).

In my search for a collection of gestures within *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*, my focus was not primarily on the interplay of movement and the body within an organic framework through the subjectivity or objectivity of movement itself. Instead, my inquiry revolved around identifying bodily gestures that could inherently manifest a certain idea in objective bodily movement. These gestures were seen as a medium for subjectivity to manifest through self-expression, facilitating the communication of the underlying ideas they represent. For instance, this encompassed scenarios where the objective motion involved contraction, the movement itself conveyed self-expression, and the conveyed central concept was 'contraction.'

Searching for a set of gestures in *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*, I was not concerned with the movement and the body's entanglement in an organic regime through the body's subjectivity or objectivity of movement per se. Instead, I asked what kind of bodily gestures would express themselves objectively through bodily movement and be a means for subjectivation through self-expression to the idea they convey. (e.g., the objective movement of contraction, self-expression through the movement, and the actual idea of contraction). I was intrigued by the potential for expression that arises when the interaction between modes of thinking (ideas) and modes of physical extension (movements) is mediated through words. In essence, gestures would

retain their inherent meaning as objective manifestations of bodily movement and serve as a vehicle to explore the interplay between movement, words, and their connection to ideas.

Body, word, and thought (or idea) stand at the center of the solo practice. The problem in conveying one idea (e.g., the idea of 'a triangle' or 'a tree') through the body and speech involves perceiving and recognizing the multiple appearances of that idea when expressed through the body. Movement material is a physical and cognitive 'thing' (Waterhouse, p.163), which may foreground different modes of how thought perceives movement and vice versa. In other words, the body is a source of ideas, a cognitive being for the mind. Therefore, the way thoughts and movements interact when conveying the idea of a circle or a triangle is both a mental and a physical task, which may produce a certain expression.

What would be the expression when practicing a task that is simultaneously physical and mental? I chose to focus on the task by using repetition. Moreover, through repetition, I could better recognize the interactions and effects between bodily and mental experiences of such a task. The word is introduced to the body and thought in a tango-like dynamic to accentuate such investigation, making it more complex and elusive but exciting. However, before entering that, I will note the gestures created, the time code performed with each word, the ideas behind the chosen gestures, and the manner of their execution.

1. ***This:*** the idea of a triangle in space (V3, 00:20 // V4, 00:10)

"This" stands for an idea of an object in space, in this case, a triangle – one of the basic geometric shapes. Triangles have been categorized for more than

2000 years, with their definition appearing on the first page of Euclid's *Elements* (Weisstein, 2003).

The gesture indicates the object of the idea of a 'triangle' and the idea of a body as an object.

The shape includes the notions of point, line, plane, angle, distance, surface, and curve, which are fundamental to almost any dance technique and style.

Besides the idea of a triangle, it can also be understood as a human body drawing from the tip of the head through the shoulders to the hips.

Furthermore, any other connotation of a triangle can be drawn depending on different cultural contexts. (e.g., stability and balance, trinity concepts, illumination, enlightenment, creation, and manifestation. The symbol for the balance of opposing forces or concepts).

2. ***Is*: the idea of a subject (V3, 1:36 // V4, 1:25)**

Indicating someone, a subject. Gesture of two curved axes with thumbs pointing to the body. The curved lines start from the basis of the triangle, ending with both thumbs touching the body.

3. ***It*: the idea of presence (V3, 2:09 // V4, 1:55)**

Arms stretched to the front, presenting the two palms as a signature of human nature; hands that build and dismantle, caress and destroy; hands that play music, paint on caves, sign petitions, and write philosophical treaties.

4. ***To act*: the idea of occurrence of involvement (V3, 2:43 // V4, 2:18)**

Fisted arms stretched directly to both sides. The motion involves the torso and chest, resulting in a horizontal line of both arms hitting imaginary walls. Palms are fisted– the body is vertical, and the arms are horizontal. An intensive chest motion creates a sound effect on the body.

5. **To say:** the idea of communication, language (V3, 3:20 // V4, 3:12)

Fingers touch the basis of the throat and move up and forward until they "hold" the spoken word, presenting it to the front. The gesture symbolizes the production of the voice and, consequently, the word "Say." The action starts from the source of the vibration, the larynx, to the throat, mouth, tongue, lips, and teeth. As a principle, when executing the movement, it is an emphasis gesture that starts from the throat, initiating the sound, performed at the exact time with the voice production, in a manner addressing someone outside oneself. However, the roles are occasionally reversed, and the word meaning becomes the signifier of the physical gesture (this phenomenon also occurs in other moves).

6. **To choose:** the idea of reasoning between this or that

**V3.** Changing direction and attention (or ideology) between the right and left hand.

**V4.** Hands gesturing with the palms near the head in a circular motion, as if animating the mind's thinking and choosing, expressing "the wheels of thought."



The idea here was to portray the act of choosing to do something, act something. However, If the choice is embedded within the moment in which the action is happening, how can one enact a choice?

7. ***To ask:*** the idea of a question (V3, 3:48 // V4, 5:53)

A subtle gesture of looking upwards and addressing an empty space from beneath accentuates vulnerability in yearning for clarity. What does it mean to embody a question? How can a question be expressed through dance?

8. ***What:*** the idea of the need to recognize, rationalize, and produce (V3, 4:05 // V4, 7:36)

Both hands at chest level facing each other, fingers open resembling the letter W, a motion of closing and opening the fingers. The motion mimics the action of the mouth when pronouncing the word "what" from closed to open. The gaze is often towards the hands, hinting at the need for the hands to always do something and the drive to understand things. Moreover, the motion resembles a common hand gesture used among Israelis to express the word "what."

9. ***To give:*** the idea of affecting and being affected by the surrounding, existence as an encounter (V3, 4:36 // V4, 8:08)

The motion of the hands backward and forward in a manner of request or offer. Traveling in space back and forth (in V3). The gesture of giving oneself to space, movement, to the other. It expresses the need for response and dialogue, as well as a request to receive something.

10. **To be:** the idea of being (V3, 4:48 // V4, 8:46)

An intense and quick gesture of "squishing out the life" from the body or clinging tightly to something. The breath should be stopped with the action – a frozen moment in time.

11. **Why:** the idea of doubt (V3, 5:10 // V4, 13:22)

Chest thrown forward, arms thrown back. The gesture is straightforward, expressing the performer's defiance towards the performance and the public. This gesture alludes to a familiar Israeli gesture that embodies the collocation 'Lama Ma' (lit. why what, meaning, roughly, 'why, what's up?').

Canadian philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi writes: "When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It moves. it feels" (Massumi, 2002). The arm movement is concrete. However, with every movement, each moment also holds the abstract possibilities and potential to move differently, express different ideas, enhance different qualities, and send different sensory signals to the mind. In contrast, the words hold their guard. The effect on the practitioner is due to the different modes in which ideas are expressed in the body while movements are expressed as ideas in thoughts. Furthermore, the word, static and stable, accentuates the gap between the multiple potential appearances of one idea in motion and the static definitional element in which the word frames that idea.

The challenge is in the explicit recognition of each component (the performed gesture, the uttered word) whilst each expression (word, movement, idea) entails different modes of attention and awareness (hearing one's voice, sensing one's

movement, recognizing one's own idea/thought). Therefore, the attempt to find an organic synthesis between the word, the physical sense, and the idea of thought that can convey the idea's objective reality results in accumulation, repetition, and a multiplicity of interactions, retaliations, comments, annotations, questions, definitions, and propositions.

There are multiple manners the body can express the idea '*To be*,' and in turn, the idea '*To be*' can be thought of in multiple ways. Therefore, movements and gestures can be understood as thinking entities, cognitive beings. The development of movements and expressive corpus happens simultaneously from the simple account of the words at the beginning to the more expressive emotional tenor of the scene. Each element has its temporal nature (to think a thought, to speak a word, to act a gesture) and is perceived and sensed differently. Each element affects the others while persisting in its endeavor to exist and enhance itself.<sup>5</sup>

The gesture has the trajectory potential to expand into a more complex movement, according to the shape and form it embodies and its properties. **Gesture 1** embodies the triangle's properties: three lines, three vertexes, and edges. It can expand into a movement involving three parts of the body, a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -time signature, an angular movement, and so on. Another example would be **Gesture 5**, which holds the properties of an arch or curve and can be further expanded in that fashion (see **V3**, 3:50). The gestures also serve as building blocks for composing longer, more elaborate movement phrases with direction, levels, velocity, dynamics, and space. Like in sentence structure, they operate as "words" that express a complete compositional movement phrase when strung together. In some sense, the entire

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<sup>5</sup> A poetic resemblance to Spinoza's *Conatus*. For further reading (Della Rocca, 2003)..

movement composition in *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>* is constructed from the 11 gestures described above (see **V3**, 6:36 // **V4**, 9:15).

Each gesture is a bodily expression of the objective movement, becoming subjective and self-expressive when directly interacting with the idea it is trying to convey. This dynamic between body and movement, which is guided by the subjective body expressing feelings and emotions or an objective body expressing movement, is related to the performer's attempt to deal with concepts of thoughts (ideas). For example, in order to embody a triangular shape in space, the body needs to relate to the movement as objectively as possible – free from any subjective feelings. Such an attempt challenges the performer since the gesture is simple and pedestrian; there is not much material in the 'thing' that the body can objectively process.

Since the inclination of dancers is to always find something to identify with, either in the objective movement or the subjective feeling expressed through the movement, marking a simple gesture requires trust in the ability to overcome an uncanny feeling of emptiness and letting go of the need for affiliation, identification, and for producing more than what there is. Hence, the demand compels the performer to continuously seek to identify with something beyond the familiar *Modus Operandi* of objective movement or the subjective feeling expressed through movement.

My perspective differs slightly from Cvejic's exploration of the moving body, which questions its identification of the body in relation to its recognition as such in the creation and reception of contemporary dance (Cvejic, 2015, p.74) because rather than asking why the body moves as it does, I ask how to name what is happening? How to recognize the tools and faculties that are at play now? How is

movement capable of interacting with an abstract idea? Is the movement the objective reality of the idea? Do the movements of the body produce a change in thought? Are ideas objects in the mind, and are words "containers" of ideas (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980)? How to comprehend one aspect of a concept (e.g., the idea of 'being') in terms of another (e.g., squishing out the life from the body; **Gesture 10**). Which defines what? How does the body perform its way out of the word definitional framework?

The initial choreographic decision involves acting upon a thought and thinking upon an action. This decision presupposes engagement with inquiries about the nature of ideas, recognizing the different expressions of one thing (represented through the body with one gesture and word), and how these parts relate to the whole. Therefore, basic categories were created for each mode involved in the practice, facilitating better recognition of moments of occurrences between ideas, speech, and experiences. Like cognitive psychologist Eleanor Rosch's Basic-Level Categories Theory (Rosch, 1978), I have categorized three levels: the mental, the spoken, and the experiential. The latter is the most fundamental and cognitively optimal; it represents a specificity that balances general and too specific.

Only when the performer experiences through the body can he recognize, identify, and interact with the different agencies at play more efficiently. The experiential level, rooted in the body's engagement, connects the dancer to the occurrences and provides him with a rich and immediate understanding of the current action. The experiences involve sensory perceptions, emotions, and physical sensations, all of which help shape his understanding and guide him from moment to moment.

The body here acts as a vehicle for active interaction, exploration, and gaining firsthand knowledge. Moreover, the exploration is accompanied by emotional responses that influence the physicality. Emotions are integral to the performer's subjective experience, and as such, they affect his perceptions and interpretations of the tasks significantly, providing a visceral and immediate understanding of experiences and influencing thoughts, actions, and decision-making processes. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991) argue that our cognition is deeply intertwined with our physicality. Our bodily engagement shapes our understanding of the world, and, in the context of *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*, it influences the way the performer perceives the word and the idea. Emphasizing the experiential level allows the performer to connect and be involved with the occurrences, enabling him to navigate the complex interplay between the word, thought, and movement. However, it also enhances the unity and multiplicity within the expressive possibilities of his physical and cognitive experiences.

The demand for practicing unity and multiplicity does not solely reside in the physical execution itself. However, when performed successively, it requires a certain level of virtuosity. The true challenge lies in the simultaneous performance of gestures, speech, and thought, engaging in thinking and doing simultaneously. Since ideas belong to the realm of thought while gestures belong to the realm of the body, how do these two aspects interact? The primary challenge here is neither physical nor emotional (as they are outcomes or effects). Instead, the cognitive demand to recognize the interconnectedness and mutual influence between these elements leads to heightened emotional and physical intensity. For instance, in **V4** (2:08 to 2:20), The performer is affected by the particular way the word is expressed (in combination with other words), and he implies and enacts a sense of stability – a

frozen concept in time – through the movement of his hands, which possess both material and abstract qualities. Thus, it is crucial to recognize and acknowledge the profound connection between the body and its affects and the interplay between bodily experiences, emotions, and thoughts.

Spinoza's philosophy investigates the profound relationship between bodily experiences and the emotions and passions that emerge within individuals (LeBuffe, 2022). For Spinoza, the body is a finite extension within the larger fabric of nature, operating under the laws of causality. In his perspective, the body is not separate from the mind; instead, they are intricately intertwined, influencing each other. Each body corresponds to a distinct idea or mind, leading to the emergence of mental perceptions and thoughts related to that body. Each body, a finite mode of the *Extension* attribute, corresponds to a finite mode or "idea" of the *Thought* attribute.<sup>6</sup> This interconnectedness means that the mind affects the body and vice versa. For instance, encountering the idea of beauty enhances our bodily actions, while encountering a troubling idea diminishes our capacity for physical expression. Spinoza termed these emotional fluctuations and modifications "affects" (*Affectus*. Latin).

The term affects refers to the range of modifications, emotions, passions, and feelings that individuals undergo. Spinoza uses the term "affection" (*Affectio*. Latin) to refer to the objective change or modification that occurs within a person due to interactions with the external world – the physical and objective alterations in the body. Affect, on the other hand, is a mode of thought arising from such encounters (Deleuze, 1978). It refers to the individual's feelings, intensities, and emotional states

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<sup>6</sup> Extension and Thought are capitalized as they represent the concept of Attribute in Spinoza's philosophy. Attributes refer to the fundamental qualities or characteristics of a substance. Extension refers to the physical and material aspect of reality, while Thought refers to the realm of mental and cognitive processes (Nadler, 2008).

that arise because of the "affection," i.e., because of the concrete changes or modifications. The affects are not solely mental or subjective experiences but also bodily states and processes. They are determined by their occurrence, with the experience of physical properties. Neither random nor arbitrary, the affects follow the laws of nature and are influenced by the body's constitution, its interactions with the external world, and the ideas or thoughts that arise from these interactions, much like the movements and properties of the physicality in which the performer is involved in the interplay between bodily experiences and mental perceptions.

Spinoza makes a distinction between active and passive affects. Active affects occur when an individual understands the reasons behind their emotions and can control them. In contrast, passive affects happen when people are unaware of the causes of their emotions and are influenced by external factors (Deleuze, 1978). Moreover, Spinoza suggests that knowledge and understanding can transform and modify affects. By gaining knowledge of the causes and mechanisms of their emotions, individuals can gain control over them and guide their actions accordingly (ibid.). This transformation of affects involves shifting from passive, reactive states to active, affirmative ones.

Spinoza employs the term affect to describe the perceived impact arising from transitions between different states of being. Overall, Spinoza's theory highlights the interconnectedness between ideas and things, mind and body. Spinoza's exploration of how ideas represent objects and how affects emerge from encounters between modes is aligned with my investigation of the different components in *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>* and with the performer's challenge in recognizing and synchronizing these different modes.



Interestingly, however, Spinoza's framework reveals that ideas can represent affects inadequately. Feelings, intensities, and emotions do not serve as representations but as modes of thought. These subjective and imprecise emotions manifest as the body transitions through various states. Although they do not provide precise knowledge, they offer a personal viewpoint. In *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*, these emotions manifest in various variations, intensities, timings, and sequences in the performance, resulting in a complex and occasionally challenging experience. Understanding these relationships between emotions and ideas allows the performer to manage and channel his emotional responses effectively, enhancing his creative process.

Thus, I am left with some questions: What constitutes the objective reality of the idea of "To be"? Does it even exist? And if it does, does it reside in the bodily gesture or uttered word? These questions, which emerge from the practice, significantly influence the performer's journey in the choreographic scheme, as he constantly deliberates whether to follow and trust the word or the movement in conveying the idea's objective reality. This internal struggle creates a rupture, causing him to continuously seek unity. This unity, which expresses different modes, becomes an expression in itself. Paradoxically, the pursuit of unity leads to more multiplicity. These questions and thoughts serve as the foundation of the practice method, unfolding during the performance of *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*. Moreover, they are fundamental in Spinoza's philosophy.

Spinoza developed a comprehensive system encompassing different aspects of human existence, including the relationship between ideas and things and the connection between our minds and bodies. Understanding the ideas in practice can help the performer engage at the experiential level and become more adept at

identifying and interacting with various aspects of the creative process. Spinoza's theory of the body and affect gave me insights into the interplay between bodily experiences, emotions, and the mind. It highlights the significance of self-awareness, understanding, and active engagement with one's affects for personal growth within the creative process and effective practice.

In the following, I will discuss Spinoza's theory of ideas and explore the relationship between ideas and things, specifically in the context of the mind and body. By investigating these concepts, I could better understand the intricate connections and varied expressions between ideas and the objects they represent. This exploration is particularly relevant to the artistic practice of *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*, where the interplay of words and gestures serves to examine the dynamic relationship between ideas and their embodiment.

## 2.3 Ideas

Ideas for Spinoza are objects (modes) of thought (mind).<sup>7</sup> By thought, Spinoza refers to all the thinking things in the world, which are the mental expression of the one substance (the universe or nature or God). Spinoza defines all the mental things (thought) and material things (extension) in the world as Attributes. Modes are the "particular and determinate way in which the thing exists" (Nadler, 2006). For example, the specific size and shape of my body is a mode of that body, and the exact texture, form, and quality of my arm's movement is a mode of that movement. The same is true for the modes of thinking; my specific thoughts or ideas are modes of my mind.

While nature expresses itself in infinite ways,<sup>8</sup> humans know only two: extension and thought, that is, material things (body) and mental things (mind). We perceive things and thoughts in the world through their modes, appearances, and unique ways of manifesting themselves (a specific thought or idea, a flower's distinctive shape, and colour). We express ourselves in the world through our particular appearance (the shape, size, and texture of our bodies, our actions. etc.) and the specific ideas and thoughts we convey. Therefore, ideas are particular forms of thought about things; they are actions of the thinking mind on the body and extended things in nature.

In the *Ethics* (II Prop. vii), Spinoza writes, "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things." Spinoza posits a monistic view of reality in his theory of the relationship between ideas and things, suggesting that everything manifests a single substance. This substance is infinite and encompasses

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<sup>7</sup> "Ideas are modes of substance conceived under the attribute of thought" (Eth. ii, 7, Scholium). Hence are identical to their objects, which are those same modes, conceived under the attribute of extension.

<sup>8</sup> "Since God (or nature) is an infinite substance consisting of infinite attributes" (E2: PROP. 3).

all existence. Within this framework, Spinoza argues that the order and connection of ideas in our minds mirror the order and connection of things in the external world, including our bodies. For him, a mode of extension (Matter) and its corresponding idea are essentially identical, although expressed in two distinct ways (Radner, 1971). According to Spinoza, the structures and relationships of our ideas mirror the structure and relationships of the things they represent in the external world. "The mind and the body are one and the same thing, which is conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension" (3p2s). For instance, the extension of my arm and the idea of the arm being extended are fundamentally the same, but their expressive manifestation differs. However, before expanding on the order and connection of ideas and things, what exactly are ideas for Spinoza? And how did I relate to Spinoza's theory of ideas in *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*?

Spinoza extensively expounds on the nature of ideas, presenting various perspectives on the matter. In essence, ideas can be understood as modes of the mind, analogous to how the precise form of an individual is a mode of their physical body. Thus, a particular idea represents a mode of the thinking mind, just as a specific shape represents a mode of the body (Nadler Steven, 2016). Consequently, when I speak about the idea of something, such as the idea of a triangle, I am referring to a concrete manifestation of the inherent essence that defines that thing, its triangular nature. In the context of *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*, the performer's comprehension of **Gesture 1**, its triangularity, relies on his ability to envision and embody the fundamental attributes of a triangle. Furthermore, this can only be understood by conceiving what it is to embody an idea or what the idea itself is. Therefore, ideas cannot be conceived without also conceiving the attribute or nature that underlies them (Nadler, 2006). So, an idea is an object or concept of thought of the mind;

"Thought is a determinable nature of particular thoughts or ideas" (Ibid.). It is an action of the mind, an expression. "Ideas are determinate expressions" (Ibid.). Thus, they are not a perception where the mind is being acted upon.<sup>9</sup>

Deleuze (1978) agrees that "an idea is a mode of thought representing something" and proposes two types of ideas as representing a thing. One representation (previously mentioned on p. 51) is the idea of a triangle in space (**Gesture 1**). As it represents something, this idea is said to have an objective reality (e.g., Graham's contraction is the objective reality of an idea as far as the idea represents contraction, with everything it entails).

The second type of idea is more complex: each idea, which represents something, is also an idea of itself. I.e., the idea of a triangle is an idea of itself – the reality of the idea itself as being something – an idea. In other words, if the objective, real triangle is the reality of the idea representing a triangle, then the *formal reality* of the idea would be the reality of the idea itself as something (Deleuze, 1978).<sup>10</sup> For example, In *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*, the idea of **Gesture 1** is an idea of itself, regardless of the gesture it represents. The performer is forming an idea of an idea. By the motion of repetition, he addresses the very fact of forming ideas, not necessarily the thing they represent. This creates a multilayered expression and requires a practice of multi-functionality. The body is conversing with the idea, and ideas are conversing with the very fact of their production. All this is happening simultaneously and in parallel.

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<sup>9</sup> "I say concept rather than perception, because the word perception seems to indicate that the Mind is acted on by the object. But concept seems to express an action of the Mind." (IID3)

<sup>10</sup> Objective and Formal realities of idea are terms Deleuze uses in explaining Spinoza's theory of ideas (Deleuze, 1978).

Spinoza's statement: "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things" (II Prop. vii), can also be addressed from a different perspective, one which encapsulates a fundamental principle of his philosophy, the concept of Parallelism between the mental and physical.<sup>11</sup>

Spinoza's philosophy is deterministic, suggesting that everything, including human thoughts and actions, follows a necessary chain of causation (Nadler, 2016). Since mental ideas and physical things share the same fundamental substance, they are interconnected in a deterministic web of cause and effect. This means that the order, relationships, and connections between mental ideas mirror the relationships and connections between physical things. Spinoza argues that there is a direct correspondence between mental ideas and physical things. Each mental idea corresponds to a specific configuration of physical attributes or states. In other words, the structure of ideas corresponds to that of the external world.

Spinoza proposes a comprehensive system that unites thought and existence, asserting that mental ideas and physical things are interconnected and governed by the same underlying laws. It is a monistic worldview, where everything – ideas, thoughts, emotions, and physical entities – is interconnected and governed by a single, all-encompassing substance. This interconnectedness implies that understanding the order and connection of ideas can provide insights into the order and connection of things and vice versa.

Practicing the connection between ideas and things creates a specific type of expression, where the performer constantly grapples with the objective reality of ideas (objective in the sense that they represent something) and seeks to

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<sup>11</sup> Parallelism refers to the idea that there is a correspondence or parallel between the realm of mental ideas (mind) and the realm of physical events and objects (body) (Della Rocca, 1993).

understand how they can be manifested through bodily gestures and uttered words. Spinoza's assertion that the order and connection of ideas correspond to the order and connection of things opens avenues of inquiry to further explore the interplay between ideas, movement, and embodiment, and their structure and order. It raises intriguing questions that came up during the practice: How can one structure a choreographic grid to practice the "sameness" between ideas and movements? Moreover, can it be effectively integrated into choreographic compositions? What strategies can be employed to emphasize this unity? What principles should guide the establishment of order within a choreographic grid to reflect the interconnectedness of ideas and their physical manifestations? What kind of order should be established? What is the expression of an idea in the body? What does it mean to express an idea through the body? Can two diverse expressions within dance be considered identical? Moreover, how can I discern and understand their distinctions if they are indeed different? What comes first, the idea or the body? Mind or body? (These questions are means for choreographic exploration and not necessarily to be answered explicitly).

In the choreographic practice, I explored the interconnectedness of mental concepts and physical movements, drawing inspiration from Spinoza's monistic worldview to delve into the harmony (and disharmony) between the realm of ideas and the realm of bodily expressions.

**The Interconnectedness of Ideas and Movements:** Acknowledging the interconnected nature of ideas and bodily movements, I sought to bridge the gap between the conceptual and physical. This reflects Spinoza's assertion that the same underlying laws govern both mental ideas and physical things.

**Manifestation of Ideas through Movement:** I considered how abstract ideas can be translated and manifested through bodily gestures and expressions. This aligns with Spinoza's idea that the order and connection of ideas correspond to the order and connection of things.

**Unity and Sameness:** I explored the possibility of achieving a "sameness" between ideas and movements within the choreography. This echoes Spinoza's concept of parallelism, where mental ideas and physical events share a harmonious relationship.

**Inquiry and Exploration:** Like Spinoza's call for understanding the connection between ideas and things, my practice raises questions and prompts further exploration. I have used these questions not to search for definitive answers but as avenues for creative exploration.

**Principles of Structure:** I have considered the principles that guide the establishment of order within the choreographic grid. This reflects Spinoza's idea that the structure and order of mental ideas mirror the structure and order of physical things.

**Expression through the Body:** I have contemplated how ideas can be expressed through the body in dance. This mirrors Spinoza's emphasis on the correspondence between mental ideas and their physical counterparts.

**Different Expressions and Identical Essence:** Just as Spinoza suggests that mental ideas and physical events correspond with each other, I have explored whether diverse expressions can be considered conceptually identical, highlighting the underlying essence that connects them.

**Relationship between Idea and Body:** Exploring whether the idea or the body comes first in the creative process resonates with Spinoza's parallelism, which



emphasizes the interdependence of mental ideas and physical expressions, or mind and body.

For Spinoza, the human mind possesses ideas that faithfully depict various aspects of the body; "The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else" (E2, p.13). Nevertheless, many of these ideas require further development and validation to establish their accuracy concerning the multiple occurrences our body undergoes; "We feel that a certain body is affected in many ways" (E2ax4). Consequently, our understanding of our bodies may be incomplete. As Spinoza writes, "The idea of the idea of each modification of the human body does not involve an adequate knowledge of the human mind" (*Ethics*, PROP. XXIX). This statement essentially means that understanding each specific change or modification that occurs in our body doesn't automatically lead to a complete understanding of it. In other words, just because we can perceive or comprehend a particular change happening in the body doesn't mean that we fully understand the complexities of the mind associated with that change. Hence, the ideas produced by the mind in relation to body modifications can be inadequate. The intricate workings of the human mind go beyond the mere observation of physical modifications.

But how does Spinoza distinguish between adequate and inadequate ideas? He argues that the relation between the mind and the body is the same as that between an idea and its object (Radner, 1971). Every idea of which the human mind is composed is an idea of some affection of the human body. For each affection of the human body, there is an idea of it in the mind, and ideas can be adequate or inadequate based on their coherence and conformity to the objects they represent. In other words, we perceive things and thoughts through their modes and unique

manifestations. The mind is the idea of the body, and each idea of the mind corresponds to an affection for the body and vice versa.

Barker points out that Spinoza uses the term "idea" in two distinct ways: sometimes to refer to a concept or mental representation and other times to denote an element in the conscious experience of individuals (Barker, 1938). Deleuze explains that Spinoza employs this term to signify both the form or nature of a mode of extension (referring to physical aspects and objects) and an element within human consciousness. Ideas have objective reality, capturing the essence of what they represent, and formal reality, existing as ideas of themselves. Ideas can only be conceived by understanding the attribute or nature that underlies them.

Ideas can be either adequate or inadequate, depending on their coherence and conformity to the nature of the objects they represent (Deleuze, 1978). Adequate ideas are those that accurately represent the nature of things. They correspond directly to the attributes of objects in the external world. Spinoza considered adequate ideas to be clear and distinct perceptions that align with reality. These ideas are based on a true understanding of the attributes and essences of things, and they enable a person to grasp the nature of reality as it is.

Adequate ideas lead to rational thinking and a more comprehensive understanding of the world. Inadequate ideas, on the other hand, are partial, confused, or distorted perceptions of reality. They arise from the limitations of human perception and understanding. Inadequate ideas often result from a lack of knowledge, misinformation, or the influence of emotions and passions. These ideas do not represent the true attributes of objects and phenomena accurately. Inadequate ideas can lead to confusion, irrationality, and a skewed perception of reality (Radner, 1971).

Spinoza believed that the human mind is naturally inclined to form inadequate ideas due to its finite nature and the influence of emotions. However, he also argued that individuals have the capacity to strive for adequate ideas through rational inquiry and a disciplined approach to knowledge. By understanding the causes and principles that govern the attributes of things, individuals can gradually elevate their knowledge from the realm of inadequate ideas to that of adequate ideas.

Spinoza's distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas has profound implications for how individuals perceive and interact with the world. He viewed the pursuit of adequate ideas as a path to intellectual liberation and a deeper connection with the fundamental nature of reality. Through the cultivation of adequate ideas, Spinoza believed that individuals could gain a clearer insight into the true essence of things and achieve a higher degree of rationality and freedom from the limitations of inadequate perceptions (Radner, 1971). Spinoza's perspective highlights a crucial differentiation between two levels of understanding: one pertains to the visible alterations in the body (these could be bodily movements, expressions, reactions, or any alterations that can be perceived through the senses), while the other delves into the deeper mental processes that drive those changes.

As mentioned previously, the mind is a thinking thing; it contains thoughts and ideas. Some of these ideas are sensory images, qualitative feelings, and emotions. These are perceptual data and imprecise qualitative phenomena; they are an expression of thoughts in the mind about the states of the body as it is affected in the transition between the different encounters. Therefore, such ideas do not convey adequate and accurate knowledge of the state of affairs but only a partial and subjective picture of how things are. There is no systematic order to these emotions nor any critical oversight by reason. However, in each performance, they emerge

within the nature of the performance, in different variations, intensities, timing, and order.

In *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*, ideas play a significant role as a bridge between the body and the mind. The performer's inquiry into the different modes of understanding of specific ideas allows them to embody and express these ideas effectively. Conversely, when the performer comprehends a particular bodily action or gesture, it helps them form a suitable idea of the object they are representing. This intricate interplay between the body, movements, mind, and ideas is central to the practice. Encounters between modes of motion, rest, and thoughts (body, movements, and the mind with its ideas) result in impressions or traces left on the performer. These impressions are different states of being and can evoke feelings and emotions (*Affectus*) arising from the impact and power experienced during transitions between these states (which could lead to the performer's confusion and a "burn-out" effect). They refer to the subjective experience, physical modifications (*Affecitio*), or any emotional state that arises.

In practicing *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>*, I relied on Spinoza's distinction between the two levels of understanding to enhance the performer's comprehension of such encounters and enrich their reactions in and to such moments. This involves understanding and researching more than just a movement's visual and operational aspects. It entailed comprehending why a movement is executed in a particular manner and what is the conceptual message it conveys. By exploring how diverse mental states influence movement choices and how these states can be translated into expressive bodily gestures through experimenting with internal mental processes that emerge from the interplay between ideas and embodiment. Additionally, by grasping the mental states and intentions behind movements, the

performer's comprehension of interactions between ideas and physical actions is also enriched, achieving a sense of uniformity and likeness between bodily movements and conveyed ideas. These explanations about the idea and its impact pertain to sections in books two and three of the *Ethics*.

Spinoza creates a geometric depiction of our lives in these sections. This geometric portrayal states that our ideas follow one after the other constantly: one idea replaces the next, which happens in a very short time. For him, perception can be considered a specific idea. For example, the performer lifts his head to look at the ceiling, seeing the lights that hang above him, then he shifts his gaze to the audience, and it becomes a new idea; or when he expresses the idea "to say" and becomes speechless, sensing the effort of the body in producing sound, this became another idea. This sequence represents a progression of ideas, a series of ideas succeeding one another in a perpetual fluctuation. This fluctuation is a pattern of change distinct from the sequence of ideas itself. Spinoza employs phrases like "variation of my force of existing" or synonyms like "vis existendi" (force of existing) and "potentia agendi" (power of acting). These variations are ongoing. To Spinoza, there is a constant variation, which essentially signifies existence itself. This continuous variation pertains to the force of existing or the power of acting (Deleuze, 1978).

Being in a state of constant variation or fluctuation is another important element of the work, more pertinent in the practice than in the performance. In some ways, it is everything I attempted to write. This third element is at the core of everything else, but it constitutes a problem in the organic unity of all elements in performing them- thus enveloping a particular expression and presence, one of rapture between the experience of a thing and the idea of a thing and the desire to

find unity in multiplicity. It is the intense and profound engagement, being deeply absorbed in the dynamic interplay between experiencing a thing, forming an idea, and desiring to find unity within this multiplicity. The constant variation or fluctuation of ideas creates an ecstatic connection between the experience of the world, the conceptualization of that experience, and the striving to reconcile the diverse aspects of existence into a coherent whole.

Spinoza defines the body as "relations of movement and rest" (Massumi, 2022, p.15), namely, transitions. Each transition of the body is an encounter with something, a mode, with a varying degree of affecting that mode and being affected by it (note that modes are the particular and determinate way in which things exist). In other words, the performer in *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>* is in a continuous transition brought about by encounters between modes of motion and rest and modes of thought (which entail the objective and formal reality of an idea). It is the experience of the relations between the various modes, effects, and affects and their mutual impact on one another. This also leads the performer to the inherent strive or drive for self-preservation in the performed task to find coherence and unity in all things, whether physical or mental. In Spinoza's terminology, this drive for self-preservation is called *Conatus*.

*Conatus* is a foundational principle in Spinoza's metaphysical framework, in which he contemplates how beings and things act and interact in the world. *Conatus* is a being's inherent tendency or inclination to strive for its preservation and well-being. In Spinozian terms, it's the endeavor to persist in its own being (Scruton, 1982, p.54). The more an entity strives for self-preservation, the more it actualizes its potential and expresses its essence. In human beings, *Conatus* can be examined from the perspective of physical cohesion, a quality inherent to all organic life, and

through the lens of cognition. When approached from a cognitive standpoint, *Conatus* materializes as desire. Given the human capacity for comprehensive self-awareness, this desire is accompanied by its cognitive representation, making it a "self-conscious desire" (Scruton, 1982). This self-conscious desire constitutes the impetus driving our endeavors and accomplishments. This perspective has implications for the understanding of human behaviour, emotions, and ethics. The realization of this desire consequently underpins our sense of gratification and achievement, forming the bedrock of our conception of the good.

Spinoza's concept of *Conatus* underscores the innate drive for self-preservation that exists in all things. It shapes the way beings act, interact, and express their essence. The mediation between different modes of expression and between the objective reality of the idea and formal encapsulates a challenge in the performer's execution and thus imbues a distinct presence and expression. This interplay between the different modes leads the performer to a state of inherent strive for self-preservation and an inherent drive for coherence and unity (within the multiplicity) in all aspects, physical or mental. It is this drive that the performer experiences in **V4**, and I experience in **V3** when performing a structured and somewhat rational scheme of the intricate relation between modes of thought (ideas) and modes of extension (gestures and movement).

The structure in which words and gestures are arranged reflects, albeit loosely, the organization of Spinoza's *Ethics* into five books. The way I structured *First Things 1<sup>st</sup>* can be seen as a poetic interpretation of Spinoza's *Ethics*, even though it doesn't strictly adhere to the exact same order.

1. ***This, is, it:*** These deictics stand for ontological questions about what exists.

- 1'. **Book I** sets the foundation for Spinoza's metaphysical and ontological system (Melamed, 2017).
2. **To act, To say, To choose:** These verbs stand for the body. The subjective body and its traits, a finite thing, and how it interacts with the mind.
- 2'. **Book II** focuses on human nature and the relationship between the mind and the body (Ibid.).
3. **To ask, What:** These words embody questions about the physical, mental, and emotional experience.
- 3'. **Book III** explores the nature of emotions and affects, examining how they arise from the interactions between our ideas and external circumstances (Ibid.).
4. **To give, To be:** Experience is relational, always in relation to something; we give and receive, act and react. Through encounters, we feel who we are, which in turn changes the way we are.
- 4'. **Book IV** discusses the nature of bondage, how emotions can dominate our lives, and how understanding and rationality can lead to freedom from emotional turmoil (Ibid.).
5. **Why:** This word questions all of the above and the grand scheme of things.
- 5'. **Book V** explores the power of reason and intellect. Here, Spinoza discusses the idea of human freedom, which he sees as arising from the understanding



of our own nature, the laws of nature, and our place within the greater cosmic order (Ibid.).

### 3. Findings

My exploration and practice of the intricate relationship between movement, language, and ideas, backed by insights and inspiration from the philosopher Baruch Spinoza, has unveiled a treasure trove of findings that hold remarkable potential for advancing my practice further in the field of dance and choreography in several aspects:

**1. Embodiment of Complex Ideas:** The amalgamation of movement and language within choreography provides a unique avenue for me to embody intricate ideas.

This union enriches the layers of narrative, emotion, and concept, elevating choreography to a multidimensional expression that resonates on both cognitive and sensory levels. This discovery might offer choreographers the tools to convey profound concepts in ways that transcend the limitations of verbal language or pure physical movement.

**2. Tensions as Catalysts for Innovation:** Though complex, the inherent tension between nonverbal movement and spoken language becomes a catalyst for innovation in choreography. These harmonious or conflicting tensions inspire me to explore novel realms of creativity. This dynamic interplay encouraged me to question traditional notions, break boundaries, and craft performances that fuse the profound, the visceral, and the intellectual.

**3. Bridging Philosophy and Artistic Expression:** Infusing choreography with philosophical concepts, such as Spinoza's philosophy of ideas, infuses the creative process with intellectual depth. This synergy bridges the realms of philosophy and artistic expression, enhancing choreographic practices with a conceptual framework that examines the interconnectedness of the mind, body, and emotions. Such an

interdisciplinary approach enriches the experience for the performer, the audience, and myself.

**4. New Frontiers for Exploration:** Integrating language and movement within choreography opens doors to hitherto unexplored frontiers of expression. By investigating characters, emotions, narrative depths, and hierarchies, I found new avenues for self-expression and innovation. This expansion widens the choreographic possibilities, enabling artists to engage audiences with a captivating blend of thought-provoking speech and evocative motion.

**5. Evolution of Choreographic Language:** The ongoing exploration of the interplay between movement and language propels the continual evolution of choreography. As choreographers grapple with the intricacies of melding these distinct modes of expression, they push the boundaries of what dance can communicate. This evolution ensures that the art form remains dynamic, relevant, and reflective of the changing human experience.

**6. Catalyst for Audience Engagement:** The amalgamation of language and movement catalyzes audience engagement. This integration empowers audiences to engage with performances on multiple levels, connecting with the raw physicality of movement while delving into spoken language's intellectual nuances. Such layered engagement ensures that dance performances resonate with diverse audiences, fostering a deeper appreciation for the art form.

## 4. Conclusion

### 4.1 Contributions to the Field of Knowledge

This research carries the potential to contribute to the broader field of knowledge in dance and choreography in the following ways:

**1. Theoretical Enrichment:** By merging philosophical concepts with choreographic practices, this research elevates choreography from a purely physical form to a deeply conceptual one. It expands the theoretical underpinnings of dance, allowing choreographers to engage in broader discussions about embodiment, communication, and the intersection of different art forms.

**2. Pedagogical Advancement:** The findings of this research can influence dance education by offering new insights into how movement and language can be integrated. This enriches the training of emerging choreographers, nurturing their ability to craft performances that resonate on intellectual, emotional, and sensory levels.

**3. Creative Innovation:** As choreographers harness the tensions and harmonies between movement and language, they tap into a wellspring of creative innovation. This research may inspire choreographers to experiment with new forms of expression, fostering an environment of artistic exploration and invention.

**4. Audience Appreciation:** By enhancing the audience's engagement through language integration, dance performances become more accessible and relatable. This contributes to a broader appreciation of dance as a versatile and evocative art form.

**5. Evolutionary Catalyst:** The integration of language and movement could potentially reshape the trajectory of choreography's evolution. As choreographers

continue to explore this dynamic interplay, dance as an art form may develop in unexpected and groundbreaking ways.

## **4.2 Potential Investigation and Expansion of This Research**

**Cultural and Historical Contexts:** I am interested in exploring how the integration of language and movement varies across different cultural and historical contexts and investigating how different languages, cultural traditions, and historical periods influence the choreographic choices regarding the use of spoken language within dance performances.

**Comparative Analysis of Philosophical Influences on Choreography:**

Investigate how different philosophical frameworks, beyond Spinoza's, can impact choreographic practices. Explore the integration of ideas from other philosophers to create innovative choreographies that reflect diverse philosophical perspectives.

**Neurocognitive Impact:** I find the neurocognitive aspects of integrating language and movement fascinating; thus, I would like to conduct studies or collaborate with neuroscientists to understand how the brain processes and responds to the simultaneous experience of spoken language and movement in dance performances.

**Interdisciplinary Collaborations in Dance:** Collaborate with philosophers, cognitive scientists, linguists, and other specialists to deepen the interdisciplinary exploration of movement and language integration. Examine how cross-disciplinary collaborations contribute to the enrichment of choreographic concepts and practices.

**Somatic Approaches in Integrating Language and Movement:** Further explore somatic practices and their role in enhancing the integration of language and movement in choreography. Investigate specific somatic techniques that facilitate the

embodiment of complex ideas and emotions, leading to a deeper connection between the performer and the choreography.

**Pedagogical Applications:** Further explore the pedagogical applications of integrating language and movement in dance education. Develop curriculum materials, workshops, or training programs that guide choreographers and dancers in effectively integrating language and movement in their practice.

## Appendices

In this section you will find the credit list of *First things 1<sup>st</sup>*, as well as three critical reviews of the performance, two of them translated from Hebrew, for convenience.

The work was performed at the Suzanne Dellal Centre, Tel Aviv, Dance Festival, June 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

### Appendix I

#### ***First Thing 1<sup>st</sup>*, Credit list**

Choreographer: Michael Getman

Performer: Ariel Gelbart

Dramaturge: Yael Venezia

Music: O-taiko by master Eitetsu Hayashi // Beethoven Piano Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Daniel Barenboim// Iannis Xenakis, *Pléiades II. Métaux*

Original sound: Gal Hochberg

Sound design: Gal Hochberg, Michael Getman

Light design: Nadav Barnea

Video director: Idan Herson

Camera: Offir Yudilevich

Branding & Social Media: Laetitia Boulud

Production International relations: Gloria De Angeli

Co-Producer: HangartFest, Pesaro, Italy

The work is supported by the Derrida Dance Center/ Bulgaria, The Pais Lottery Foundation, The Suzanne Dellal Center, The Ministry of Sport and Culture in Israel, The Rabinowitch Foundation, and the Mifal HaPais Council for the Culture and Arts.

## Appendix II

Zecharia, Anat (poet and dance critic), [www.anatzecharia.com](http://www.anatzecharia.com), August 07, 2023

### First Things by Michael Getman

It is often taken for granted that words mirror reality, yet they merely truncate existence into verbal form; reality persists independently, untouched by the concepts that endeavor to define it. The mind, analytical in nature, constructs these concepts, and much of our existence unfolds within their confines; while sometimes beneficial, these conceptual labels can impede the raw experience of the reality of being present with what exists at the moment.

"How, then, can 'it' be articulated?"

Getman inquires, placing a body devoid of external connections into a black hole that delves into inner realms, collapsing within itself and exploring. The body is present, though it still needs to be fully unveiled. For a moment, it captivates the viewer's gaze without delivering a precise response, an image that remains abstract, a stain of existence - and let there be skin, this marks the dawn of time. The darkness directs us towards the minutiae, the subtle movements, the intense, almost impossible tension coalescing into rigid unity inbound legs: rise, hip, palm. The body, a dwelling, a cell from which one strives to escape - intentionally stripped of its central attribute, to roll, to move. A pause exists to linger amid the paradox of discontinuity and continuity before yielding to the linear progression of time, to life's unceasing movement. In "First Things," the essence of the dancing body prevails; the movements spring forth from genuine inner exploration, challenging the constructs that emerge from the observing consciousness. Getman transcends these confines, renewing the notion of a unique language existing somewhere between



gesture and thought. “It It It” - these words burst forth from the dancer Ariel Galbert during the act of reaching forward, locking the elbows.

These words do not impart explicit knowledge about the world but convey inquiry, doubt, and contemplation.

The next moment, the mouth opens, and the clenched hands stretch backward - does the image create a divide from the truth, or does it point to the truth that unfolds in the present moment? This corporeal, sculptural dance is fragmented, devoid of a complete, defined sequence, often existing at the threshold, holding a mental bubble. This disassembly and observation bring pleasure, creating a beauty that must also be disassembled and observed - a delicate dance between revelation and concealment. Curious syllables scatter, fragmented gestures scatter, and verbs get lodged in the throat. Once again, the words dissipate, pouring into the image; and again, Galbert gestures toward the hatches 'lines that transform into escape routes, a way to exit the words and enter the image. The image morphs into the word more significantly, becoming a tapestry of envisioned sight and motion- treetops, clouds, and fabric folds. It serves as a reminder that movement is not exclusive to humans but a cornerstone of all nature, perhaps the only means of touching humanity.

Sometimes, Getman restrains himself within knowledge, but on his part, this knowledge retreats repeatedly in favor of adventure and playfulness. Furthermore, the recent solo works “First Things” and “Am I,” performed by the talented soloist Talia Paz, exhibit a heightened intensity. They are decisive, free from unnecessary embellishments, and deserve acknowledgment as unique accomplishments. Their intricate self-adjustment is delicate and complex. Getman’s choreography seems wholly dedicated to the tension between overcoming and self-authorization:

overcoming urges and yet surrendering to them, transcending the banality or over-intellectualization that “explains” dance, all while generously granting permission to be swept away by its enchantment, to experience its performance anew as a one-of-a-kind spectacle enthusiastically.

“First Things” is an exigent, hypnotic, mesmerizing work. It guides us, not towards a peak or finish line, but instead towards the notion of a beginning - courageously striving to convey something profound and succeeding. This achievement is, in no small part, thanks to Ariel Galbert’s performance, which possesses the quality of a ticking bomb, an element of imminent revelation.

[Zecharia's review \(Hebrew\)](#)

## Appendix III

Brown, Ran, Haaretz (newspaper), August 03, 2023<sup>12</sup>

### Two dance works offering a breath of fresh air during a challenging summer

The new dance creation by Michael Getman ... [is] a breath of fresh air in this challenging summer...[A] solo performed brilliantly by Ariel Gilbert ... [it] constitute[s] a "double achievement": impeccable choreography met with an inspiring execution. Both pieces, premiered at the Tel Aviv Dance festival held in recent weeks at the Suzanne Dellal Center, raise questions about the very potential of dance to convey something and the way it does so — distinct from spoken language, whose presence pursues it in the soundtrack, in the dancers' movements, and in the spectators' thoughts. In both, works there is a persistence in examining the conceptual, the arspoeitic aspect, within the language of dance itself.

*First things*, by Michael Getman opens with a powerful blast, followed by a mesmerizing birth of an image from the darkness. This pivotal moment captures the essence of the work, emphasizing the birth of imagery before movement becomes explicit and words gain understanding. Stuttering, a recurring theme, manifests in various forms - from fleeting stationary images to hesitant movements, even to an authentic voice where Galbert's utterances explore many languages. It is a captivating, productive stutter that momentarily captures the essence of perception, language, words, and movement before slipping away, like trying to grasp a fleeting thought that sparks countless more.

The performance beautifully questions the capacity of dance to communicate and provoke thought, especially when juxtaposed with spoken words, which linger in

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<sup>12</sup> The review discusses two dance works, for relevance's sake, I only translated the parts discussing my work.

the soundtrack, on the dancers 'lips, and within the minds of observers. It is a "double win" - a triumph of conceptual exploration, a poetic venom expressed through dance, redefining how we perceive this art form. This piece is a testimony to dance's profound and elusive nature, invoking many sensations and sparking endless contemplation...

[Brown's review \(Hebrew\)](#)

## Appendix IV

**Brafman, Ora, Jerusalem post, August 14, 2023**

### **'First things': An Intriguing and powerful dance show - review**

Michael Getman's choreography: *First Things*, performed by Ariel Gilbert on Yerusakmi's compact stage, turned out to be intriguing, powerful, and contained distinct original elements.

The work aims to explore the body in new ways. Getman begins by treating it as separate exposed segments while revealing fragments of the dancer's body. Using a contained approach for the stage's lighting design on one hand and a particular sense of timing on the other gives power to the dance. Thus, lighting designer Nadav Barnea became the third creative partner of the performance. As a result, the opening chapter carries a artistic solid mark.

The work is composed of three somewhat distinct layers. Getman kept tight control of the pace of its progression, aiming to build up the tension by restricting information concerning the semi-hidden dancer that kept the viewers in a deep dark. Literally.

Gelbart slowly changed positions yet remained confined to one square meter. Occasionally, he raised an arm or positioned himself so we could see a fleeting glimpse of his partially exposed skin, a fraction of his back, a foot. It took a very long time before the elusive Gilbert wobbled up and stood on his feet.

The human body that we now saw seemed distressed. Lost in his own limbo while his deconstructed, sporadic motion offered him no salvation. Most of the time, there was minimal use of sounds; far away, large birds chirped, and later, for a moment, the edgy moves were soothed by a Beethoven sonata playing in the background. An illustrative image of dancing.

On pauses between the scenes, he donned a pair of trousers and settled on a vacant seat in the first row, breaking away from the illusions he worked so hard to create on stage. A clash between matter and form became more apparent as time passed, and the dancer covered a broader space yet retained the fragmented style of the body's actions as he gradually dared to open up.

Since the work was not leaning on a straightforward narrative, it was difficult to predict where the next choreographed scene would take us.

The earlier abstract images gave way to a process that led toward more concrete statements about the human body and its actual appearance. The latter part allowed Gelbart to open his wings and move freely, partially improvising. His movement became the music. His body revealed unsuspected inner powers and followed rhythms that pushed him up.

Getman had already proved that he could build solo works for exceptional dancers, as he had done before for Israeli dancer and exquisite international star Talia Paz. Offering the role of this solo work to Ariel Gelbart was a clever move since he is an excellent dancer with a strong stage presence.

Shifting from relying on nuances and minimal gestures to powerful, highly intense, almost violent movements enabled him to move seamlessly from his sporadic exposure at the beginning to an abundance of fast, endless whirling steps, which ended in total immersion of contradicting elements inside the dancing human body.

It was a pleasure to see the refined choreography by Michael Getman and the nuanced and powerful interpretation by Gelbart, who commanded the stage.

[Brafman's review](#)

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