

# Aisthesis



**Citation:** Tikhomirova, Y.S. (2024). Attempt at Doubt. The Abandonment of Aesthetic Automatism Through Collective Exercises in the Performative Practice by Didymos. *Aisthesis* 17(1): 191-205. doi: 10.7413/2035-8466013

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## Attempt at Doubt

### The Abandonment of Aesthetic Automatism Through Collective Exercises in the Performative Practice by Didymos

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**Abstract.** The research examines how contemporary performance art challenges aesthetic habits, which often manifest as disruptive and constraining elements within imaginative faculties. The Italian duo Didymos focuses its *oeuvre* on deconstructing routine and unintentional behaviors. The artists employ a series of performative practices involving the audience in a political experience by implementing the category of *doubt*. Together, they engage in the execution of the most mundane actions, with the overarching objective of dismantling layers of conventional knowledge. This process entails a deliberate departure from sensible automatism, ultimately facilitating an escape from arguably apolitical modes of engaging with the world. The essay explores Didymos's recent artistic practice, *A Social Gym*, confronts the category of *doubt* used by the duo with Jacques Rancière's concept of *dis-sensus*, and attempts at tracing the bond between aesthetic norms and artistic expressiveness from the perspective of the aesthetics-politics relationship.

**Keywords.** Aesthetic habits, automatism, performance, politicization of art, Jacques Rancière.

## 1. *Introduction*

Contemporary art, particularly within the performative tradition, often intriguingly engages with aesthetic habits. These habits arise from a lifetime of exposure to art and culture, subtly shaping our perception and interpretation – often in ways we are not fully conscious of (Sontag [1966]). The ingrained patterns, frequently operating below the level of intentional thought, influence our interactions within the aesthetic world. They direct our preferences, judgments, and reactions to various art forms we encounter. Over time, the habits become embedded in our identity, affecting what we appreciate and how we engage with the broader cultural landscape (Bourdieu [1993]). This paper examines how contemporary performative art interacts with and challenges these deep-seated habits. I propose that exploring the artistic interrogation of aesthetic normativity offers a valuable approach to transitioning *social* into *political* and to delineating the contours of collectivity by sharing the *sensible* and, ultimately, by moving it out of *trivial appearances* in the terms of Jacques Rancière (2000: 34).

The paper is structured as follows: I begin by outlining the issue of aesthetic habits within the contemporary performative tradition and briefly discuss three prominent art cases. These artists each tackle the issue in unique ways, highlighting the necessity of stripping away habitual layers of perception as a precondition for fully experiencing their work. The subsequent section delves into the work of Didymos, an Italian artistic duo who, since 2015, have made the concept of aesthetic doubt their stylistic hallmark. The collective employs the category of doubt not solely to challenge the boundaries of art and its reception, as in the examples we propose in the second section, but primarily to transform aesthetic uncertainty into a political tool against sensible poverty. By examining *A Social Gym*, a recent Didymos's endeavor, I explore how a deeper understanding of the most mundane and unintentional behaviors can prevent disruptions in imaginative functions (Montani [2017]) and help us to discard automatic responses. Additionally, I juxtapose the category of doubt utilized by the duo with Jacques Rancière's concept of *dissensus*, examining how the Italian collective's practice seeks to dissolve the boundaries between aesthetics and politics. In the essay's conclusion, I argue that while aesthetic habits are valuable and necessary for comprehension, if they are not systematically questioned or put in doubt, they can lead to an acritical engagement with the world.

## 2. *Aesthetic habits in performative art*

Aesthetic habits fundamentally encapsulate the routines, behaviors, and thought processes that guide our interactions with beauty, artistry, and the sen-

sory dimensions of our environment. Deeply embedded within both our individual and collective psyches, these habits are crucial in shaping our ability to perceive, interpret, and value art in its diverse forms. According to Danto (2002), they form the backdrop against which our engagement with art takes place. Acting as conduits between the artist's intentions and the audience's perceptions, aesthetic habits provide frameworks that help us navigate the complexities of artistic expression. Moreover, they facilitate shared cultural experiences and are instrumental in constructing and perpetuating cultural narratives.

In examining contemporary art history, particularly within the realm of performance art, we encounter a rich tapestry of artistic expression that seeks to challenge, redefine, and transcend the conventional norms of aesthetic experience. This strategy is not merely about presenting artworks; it is about provoking the spectators, compelling them to question and reconsider their notions of what art is and can be. For instance, Yoko Ono's interactive installation and performance *Cut Piece*, first performed in 1964, dramatically subverts audience expectations. In this work, Ono sits on stage and invites audience members to cut away pieces of her clothing using a pair of scissors (Bryan-Wilson [2003]). The act of participation not only breaks down the conventional barrier between the performer and the audience but also challenges the viewers' sense of agency and complicity, turning a passive observation into an intense and unsettling experience.

Contemporary performance art frequently incorporates interactive and participatory elements that invite the audience to become part of the process. Tania Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper #5* (2008), which involved police officers conducting crowd control exercises inside a gallery space, dissolved traditional boundaries by making the audience part of a politically charged environment, prompting reflection on authority and personal space (Marschall [2021]). Embedded within these artistic practices are potent cultural and social critiques. William Pope.L's performance piece *The Great White Way, 22 miles, 9 years, 1 street* (2000-2009) involves Pope.L crawling on his belly wearing a Superman costume with a skateboard strapped to his back along the entire 22 miles of Broadway in New York City (Thompson [2004]). This performance challenged the passersby's perceptions of race, vulnerability, and endurance. By physically placing himself in positions of abject humility and struggle, Pope.L disrupts everyday urban routines and confronts viewers with the harsh realities of social marginalization and personal perseverance.

Additionally, many performance artists adopt interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate elements from various fields such as technology, science, and philosophy. Laurie Anderson's *Chalkroom*, for instance, combines virtual reality with spoken and written word to create a navigable maze of stories, blending technology with traditional narrative techniques to create a new form of art that challenges perceptions of reality and virtuality (Anderson, Marranca [2018]).

Richard Schechner, in his seminal works (2003a; 2003b; 2006), discusses how artistic endeavors actively push against the established conventions. By continually exploring and stretching the limits, performance art not only advances new artistic methodologies but attempts to influence how we perceive and engage with the world around us. The evolution of performance art thus represents a vital and ongoing dialogue between artists and society, one that perpetually seeks to redefine the sphere of artistic expression and audience involvement. For the purpose of this research, I have chosen to focus on three performance art cases that target different sensory domains – vision, bodily movement, and spatial reasoning. These same domains are interrogated by Didymos in its works, albeit through critically innovative approaches. Since the following three instances are well-documented in the relevant literature, we will refrain from excessive elaboration at this stage, concentrating primarily on aspects that will inform our reflections on Didymos's practice.

An instructive example that merits consideration in the discussion of aesthetic habits is Marina Abramović's acclaimed performance piece, *The Artist Is Present*, conducted at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2010 (Abramović, Biesenbach, Biesenbach [2010]; Abramović, Kaplan [2018]). Owing to the artist's and the project's renown, the work attracted a diverse audience, extending well beyond the usual confines of contemporary art enthusiasts. Over three months, Abramović sat across from museum visitors, inviting them to engage in a prolonged, silent exchange of gazes. This performance challenges traditional expectations of passive spectatorship in museum settings, compelling visitors to participate in a direct confrontation with the artist through vision – a sense traditionally prioritized in art history (Panofsky [1927]). However, Abramović reverses the typical dynamic by making the visitors themselves objects of aesthetic contemplation within this *looking game*. By disrupting routine behaviors of art consumption, Abramović demonstrates an alternative way of experiencing art that requires personal involvement and emotional presence. Yet, in this process marked by an *icon making* dimension (Brawner [2013]), the exchanged gaze itself becomes the artwork consumed.

In Tino Sehgal's 2012 work, *These Associations*, first presented at Tate Modern, performers engage directly with visitors, provoking discussions about personal experiences through a non-linear narrative. The piece unfolds without any prepared scripts, positioning the performers as aesthetic conduits, deeply attuned and responsive to the audience's presence (Hildebrandt [2015]). The performance facilitates collective bodily interactions, where the physical presence and movements of both performers and audience members become integral to this mode of sociality based on relational dynamics (Paramana [2014]). Physical interactions further emphasize the immediacy and intimacy of the shared moment. Notably, *These Associations* explicitly prohibits any form of document-

tation. This restriction reinforces the idea that sociality is meant to be lived in the moment, challenging the impulse to document and preserve, and prompting contemplation of the politics of memory and of the transient nature of experience (Franco [2023]). The ban on recording also shifts focus from visual consumption to corporeal engagement, where both the body and the encounters it facilitates become mediums through which art is perceived and understood.

The final illustrative example is Alicja Kwade's *Out of Ousia* (2019). At first glance, the installation presents a traditional way of interacting with art exhibitions, and the project itself might appear challenging to contextualize within the performative tradition. Yet, Kwade's distinctive strategic use of mirrors, dynamic lighting, and a mix of organic and synthetic artifacts distorts the perception of space and physical presence, effectively transferring agency to the objects themselves (Friedman [2020]). The installation compels viewers to forsake typical spatial behaviors, converting them into performers (in the eyes of other visitors) who must adapt and navigate the exhibition using novel strategies. Perhaps the most profound impact of *Out of Ousia* is the disruption of self-perception which deconstructs anthropocentric spatial reasoning. The kaleidoscopic reflections morph the surrounding environment and continuously alter the viewer's image within it (Baum, Wagstaff [2019]). The experience undermines the stable sense of identity, presenting an ever-evolving, fragmented self-image and inviting the audience to reassess its preconceived notions of self inside a space and to reconsider the customary reliance on recognition.

Although vastly different in their statements, methods, styles, and receptions, three artists investigate aspects of habitual perception, behaviors, and aesthetic habits to heighten awareness of their artworks. Marina Abramović transforms vision into a piece of art; Tino Sehgal converts bodily interactions into narrative elements; Alicja Kwade reinterprets spatial reasoning into interactive artifacts. While inviting audiences to reflective and deep engagement, the artists repack-age fundamental human sensibility – sight, motor skills, and spatial orientation – into distinct, consumable art forms. The apparently similar strategies, which confront and challenge ingrained patterns of perception and interpretation through gaze, collective movement, and spatial awareness, are utilized by the Didymos collective in its artistic endeavors. However, the approach of the Italian duo significantly diverges: rather than using unsettling elements to enrich understanding of their works, they employ art as a catalyst for personal and subsequently collective transformation, which resonates beyond the confines of the art world.

The disruption of speech, apprehension, and sensitivity, the process of un-learning, and *dis-habitation* – these are not viewed by Didymos merely as ends in themselves, but as steps towards broader societal change. The artists strive to «create a new fabric of common sensible life» by declaring it «a place for politics», in the terms of philosopher Jacques Rancière (2007). In the subsequent

section, I will delve into a specific project by Didymos, titled *A Social Gym*. I will explore how this project poses and addresses the query: can art facilitate a deliberate departure from routine automatism, and aid in escaping conventional, and arguably apolitical, modes of engaging with the world? The analysis aims to uncover the broader implications of Didymos's work in challenging the status quo and fostering a more engaged and politically conscious form of artistic interaction.

### 3. *A Social Gym. Performance practice by Didymos*

The artistic duo Didymos, formed by performers Alessia Certo and Giulia Vannucci in 2007, is based between Alessandria and Bologna. As stated in their 2022 manifesto, the artists view art as a social and political act designed to incite doubt and provoke a «positive contemplation of the given world» (Didymos [2022a]). With a rich background in visual arts, theater, and philosophy, the duo employs a diverse array of aesthetic tools in their creative process, ranging from painting and video to choreography and sound. These tools are instrumental in exploring the viewer's perception of art, the artistic figure, and others. In 2015, the artists initiated a visual and performative practice called *Tentativo di Dubbio (Attempt at Doubt)*, which they have continued to develop since then. This collective participatory research is divided into chapters (five to date) and critically examines the Western epistemological approach, focusing on the interplay between subjectivity, perceptual intuition, and intention. It seeks to redefine creative praxis as a method to «escape from the empiricist/statistical system that engenders an imbalance between consciousness, body, and the world» (Didymos [2022a]). The current paper will closely examine the most recent chapter of this enduring performative practice, *A Social Gym*, conducted in 2022 and 2023 on three occasions: in Bologna at the TIST artist-run space and twice in Omega at the Mastronauta Cultural Center. *A Social Gym* is structured as a training course open to all, featuring *coaches* (the artists themselves), *equipment* (artworks and everyday items), and *exercises* with written instructions designed for group activity and at-home repetition. These exercises involve routine human activities such as seeing, observing, listening, writing, movement coordination, and breathing – linked to aesthetic faculties like perception, cognition, imagination, and to political intention, which are the ultimate goals of the entire training.

Each edition of *A Social Gym* features a slightly different selection of activities, with no more than ten workouts spread over several days and engaging between two and fifteen participants, depending on the daily enrollment. The exploration begins with the sense of sight and progressively incorporates the entire body, while addressing the physical and mental constraints imposed on

individuals. This seemingly simple and direct practice is guided by precise instructions and supported by specific devices. The trainers – Didymos – lead the exercises, expecting participants to invest trust and commitment in the practice. Each exercise session – *Attempt at Doubt* – is meticulously planned within a specific location, designated time, and sequence, which all shape its individual and political impact. The list of workouts includes, among others, the following: *Cleansing the Eyes*, *Cleansing the Space: Workout on Intention*; *Strolling in a Tree-lined Avenue: Self-analysis of the Principles of Perception*; *Tracing the Ellipse: Synchrony Between Body and Thought*; *Watching the Other Who Is Watching: Points Stretched in the Space of Co-existence*; *Embroidering a Flag: Logical Facilitations to Make the World*.

The instructions and simple illustrative materials accompany all exercises. These are distributed to the participants in the form of a small-format publication, which serves as the first aesthetic tool that the audience encounters during the practice. The participants are referred to as *doers*, a term borrowed from theater director Jerzy Grotowski's innovative lexicon. The doers engaged in *A Social Gym* are not informed in advance about the training they will undertake or about the significance of the artistic operations. These aspects are collectively discussed only at the end of the daily sessions. The element of unpreparedness is crucial, as it exposes participants to an *extra-ordinary* action that involves the risk of departing from their habitual patterns. Considering the constraints of the essay, I will focus on a selection of three practices that, in my view, best illustrate Didymos's artistic strategy and encapsulate how the artists engage with the question of aesthetic normativity. These practices will be confronted with the performance art examples mentioned in the second section of the paper.

The exercise *Cleansing the Eyes, Cleansing the Space* begins with both physical and metaphorical cleansing, aimed at resetting sensory and perceptual clarity. Participants start by «submerging their faces in warm water, squeezing their eyes several times», followed by «trying to keep their eyes open while moving them up, down, left, right, and in circles». The act symbolizes the shedding of preconceptions and visual habits. The second part involves cleansing the physical space, where participants «soak a cloth in the water, wring it out, and use it to clean the floor in an inverted “V” position, pushing the cloth with their hands along the floor» (Didymos [2022b]). Inspired by the preparatory techniques of Kabuki theater, the ritual is designed to transform the room into a sanctified space, promoting a deeper engagement with the self and the environment.

The transition from washing faces to cleaning the room floor follows a structured collective procedure, adopting specific bodily positions. The sequence of elementary yet unusual actions evokes feelings of unease and embarrassment among the participants. These sentiments act as the elements of *rupture* in the habitual order. The absence of prior expectations leads the audience to oscil-

late continuously between recognizing the familiar and struggling to understand the unfamiliar, substituting the unknown with their imagination and effectively training new ways of engaging with the world. As Didymos (2023) emphasizes, this practice «suspends the personal and social limitations of one's own body». It also serves as a tool for gaining insight into one's automatic behaviors in everyday life, revealing our tendency to rely on familiar patterns. Becoming conscious of one's discomfort can be the first step toward setting aside preconceptions, abandoning habitual responses, and embracing the extraordinary, which always acts through the rupture of the established regime.

Similarly to Marina Abramović's piece discussed earlier, the sense of sight is central to the exercise proposed by Didymos, albeit with diverging artistic intents and impacts. Abramović draws up vision into a distinct, consumable art form that invites audiences to engage more actively than typical museum settings allow. In contrast, Didymos employs vision as a foundational element for initiating profound communal and politically charged transformations, grounded in the cultivation of phenomenological doubt. By starting with the physical act of cleansing their visual faculties, participants are prepared to perceive their environment and community through a renewed lens. This practice is not merely about enhancing the art experience but is geared towards resetting the participants' sensory apparatus as a preparatory step for more meaningful engagement with their surroundings and fellow participants. Ultimately, despite both artists employing vision to transcend traditional modes of art engagement, their methodologies and objectives highlight contrasting paradigms: Abramović cultivates an intimate, individualized encounter that draws the participant inward, whereas Didymos orchestrates a communal, outward-facing experience aimed at fostering a broadened perceptual and social consciousness.

A further exercise that makes part of *A Social Gym* practice is *Asserting That «Leaves Are Green»: Questioning Truth and Beauty*. It fosters reflections on our approach to aesthetic encounters. In this activity, participants are immersed in an environment that juxtaposes real and artificial elements in a meticulously organized spatial layout. The workspace is divided into three distinct sections: the first occupied by the performers; the second featuring two pairs of twin plants, one real and the other artificial; and the third housing four oil paintings that realistically depict the plants present in the room. Participants are encouraged to engage deeply with both the plants and their representations. The interaction begins with an observation from a distance, which then progresses to a closer inspection where participants «touch and smell the objects». The final interaction involves engaging with the paintings. Throughout this process, participants are prompted with questions such as, «Are these plants beautiful? Why?» and «Can I confidently state that “the leaves are green” or “the flowers are white”? Why?» (Didymos [2022b]). The inquiries are designed to stimulate reflection on



the perception of reality versus representation, urging participants to reconsider their understanding of truth and beauty based on what they observe.

The exercise *Asserting That «Leaves Are Green»*, like Alicja Kwade's strategy in *Out of Ousia*, employs disorientation to challenge viewers to abandon their typical spatial behaviors and the unconscious interactions with objects. However, unlike Kwade's installation, which primarily leverages confusion as an aesthetic investigation into private identities, Didymos uses the spatial arrangement as a critical tool to challenge and redefine the distribution of spaces, objects, representations, and agents in shared environments. Common reactions among the performers, such as surprise, disappointment, and a sense of betrayal upon discovering the artificiality of a plant that appeared genuine from afar – as revealed by collective discussions (Didymos [2023]) – catalyze sensory uncertainty regarding what might be perceived as a mundane relationship. By structuring interactions that evolve from distant observation to close engagement, and finally to confrontation with artistic representations – the methodical progression from visual to tactile to interpretive – Didymos challenges spatial and object reasoning while instilling a deep-seated doubt about the authenticity of perceived reality, creating thus a *void* where a new sense can appear.

One of the most challenging and compelling exercises in the program is titled *Embroidering a Flag: Logical Facilitations to Make the World*, which focuses on enhancing logical reasoning and competencies. This workout explores whether a logical principle can guide and define the boundaries for the morality of actions. The exercise starts with a prompt for participants to reflect on the irrationality of certain human behaviors, such as war, often encapsulated by the paradoxical media statement: «If we want peace, we must prepare for war». In response, Didymos introduces Aristotle's logical principle of noncontradiction as a universal maxim: «It cannot be that a thing is and is not at the same time» (Didymos [2023]). Following a philosophical debate, participants craft a motto that encapsulates their collective insights. This motto is then embroidered onto flags, which are displayed publicly, transforming the philosophical contemplation into a visible, communal statement. The instructions clearly state: «Embroider the chosen words onto your flag, symbolizing your commitment to logical and thoughtful engagement with the world» (Didymos [2022b]). The flag becomes a symbol of ongoing commitment to questioning and re-evaluating views, serving as a public artifact that continues to communicate and provoke doubt within the wider community.

Similar to Tino Sehgal's performance *These Associations*, interactions in Didymos's exercise are not only pivotal to the narrative structure of the work but also embody the narrative itself, with each encounter adding layers to the collective story. Sehgal's method emphasizes the immediacy and intimacy of shared moments, emphasizing the transience of human connections and the

ephemeral nature of the experience. His narratives are constructed and deconstructed over the course of the performance, leaving behind no physical traces, only memories and personal impacts. However, this approach underscores the consumable nature not of relationships per se, but of the encounters within the performative act, where experiences occurring within specific – distinctly artistic – circumstances, far removed from everyday life, are meant to be absorbed and reflected upon personally. In contrast, Didymos extends interactions from the artistic impulse into the realm of tangible and potentially enduring situations. *A Social Gym* not only challenges aesthetic expectations but also provokes in the audience a series of doubts concerning the very nature of the experience it undergoes. Participants are compelled to question: «How can I classify this social operation? What is my role in this process? Who is the artist, if any? Am I sufficiently skilled or educated to understand? How can I use this new understanding further?» (Didymos [2023]).

The purpose of the confrontation between Didymos's practices and three notable contemporary art cases is certainly not to indiscriminately criticize artistic operations for being institutionalized, categorized, or consumed within a domain whose norms they seemingly challenge. Instead, this comparison is conducted with a constructive aim: to explore the qualities and practices that enable art to transcend the boundaries imposed by traditionally structured knowledge and by the impacts of the political status quo. In doing so, it seeks to revitalize the relationship between aesthetics and politics. The key quality that Didymos uses to revive this connection is doubt, aimed at what Jacques Rancière defines as the established *distribution of the sensible*. By embedding the category of doubt into their spatial and perceptual interventions, Didymos shifts the focus from individual psychological impact to collectively shared experience. The intentional introduction of uncertainty serves to dissolve traditional hierarchies, encouraging a re-evaluation of how reality is constructed and understood, as well as how roles and functions are distributed.

These considerations prompt us to interpret the category of doubt in this context as akin to Rancière's concept of *dissensus* (Rancière [1995b]). Rancière uses dissensus not merely in the everyday sense of a dispute but as a philosophical term indicating a rupture in the meaning of familiar concepts, embodying «the presence of two worlds in one» (Rancière [2001]: 37). In his terms, dissensus is not simply opposition or deviation but represents disobedience toward how the common space is socially constituted: «Dissensus is the introduction of a fact into a sphere of sensible experience that is incompatible with it, contradicts it» (Rancière, as cited in Raunig [2007]). Dissensus produces a void in a social fabric, from which politics can arise. Opposed to *police*, politics «counts a part of those without part»; it is based on the unconditional recognition of the other's right to exist, marking a moment of equality

of everyone to everyone and re-distributing the sensible (Rancière [2001]: 36; Rancière [2000]: 51-56). The possibility of equality in practice stands on trust, rather than suspicion: «starting from the point of view of equality, asserting equality, assuming equality as a given, working out from equality, trying to see how productive it can be and thus maximising all possible liberty and equality» (Rancière [1995a]: 51-52).

This kind of trust is precisely what the trainers – members of Didymos – both expect from and extend to participants before engaging in practice. It is not an assurance of a once-stabilized truth, but trust in the other, who, despite being acknowledged as different, is seen as radically equal, since she shares the same sensible disorientation and uncertainty. In this scenario, doubt serves as Rancière's *incompatible, contradictory fact* that catalyzes disagreement among equals, through which the political exists as an instituting force, aimed at continuously redefining the sensible regime. However, Didymos's use of doubt is not equivalent to Rancière's concept of dissensus. Didymos employs doubt primarily as a tool for individual and collective *pause*, focusing on questioning the unintentional responses rather than actively redefining broader societal structures. Rancière's dissensus carries a more explicitly political dimension: it enables the visibility of new subjects and the audibility of new discourse that were previously negated (Rancière [1995b]: 69-72). In this context, Didymos's exercises in instilling doubt can be viewed as a precursor to dissensus, as a preparation of a void for its emergence. Each instance of doubt has the potential to escalate into an act of dissensus, where the shaking of the boundaries of structured knowledge through disorientation can amplify one's perceptions and foster the need to re-distribute the sensible.

In the examples of performative acts discussed in the second section, despite challenging the conventional roles and functions of art, the established regime of the sensible still provides the disoriented audience with a familiar set of social and political coordinates, rooted in separation and exclusion. Even if bewildered, visitors understand that they are part of a cultural operation and recognize the artist as a guide delineating the perimeter of the experience. In contrast, in *A Social Gym*, the artistic structures are considered ever-changing instances where the boundaries of the social are continually shifted by doubt into the political. Here, each individual who encounters the unfamiliar must strive to convert discomfort into new learning, relying on others who share the same sensible experience.

The presence of the other, presumably undergoing similar challenges, transforms individual encounters into a collective *attempt at doubt*, from which a new form of commonality can emerge. The contours of commonality are shaped through the sharing and distribution of the sensible and the disruption of fixed identities, thereby valorizing the continuous process of political subjectivation (Rancière [2000]). Didymos employs phenomenological abun-

dance as a rite of initiation, essential for constructing a political and practical «escape from the ordinary, from the automatic mode of relating to the world, and from the ongoing anthropological crisis» (Didymos [n.d.]). This process is perceived by the artists as an anti-structure that dismantles the habitual, bringing forth new, undoubtedly intentional and collective meanings: «The gym, instead of being a place for subjecting oneself to efforts aimed at caring for an alienated and stylistic exteriority, becomes a teleological space of humanity where a community can be built, ready for mutual engagement and shared responsibility» (Didymos [2023]).

#### 4. Conclusion

Our daily routines necessitate a certain degree of inertia or, more precisely, automatism. Without this, even the most mundane moments in our lives would become intense and demanding, rendering the notion of the *everyday* nearly impossible. Aesthetic processes foster interaction with the environment through a given, intentional performativity. This performativity, focusing on perception and attention, aims to support human survival in the world, highlighting the domesticity that arises from one's presence and existence within it (Matteucci [2019]). However, what occurs when this inertia becomes constant? What if there are no moments when routine transcends the ordinary? If habit becomes synonymous with automatism, then habituation not only tends to diminish the political potentialities of a democratic community but also leaves us impoverished in our sensible inspection, depriving us of the capacity to maintain an active gaze at the world.

Art, as demonstrated by Didymos's performative practice, creates extraordinary instances where, by temporarily suspending our automatic modes of interaction with the world, ourselves, and others, we can act, perceive, and think consciously. This heightened awareness guides our actions and cultivates a sense of presence, thereby unlocking the potential to effect change on the outside. However, not every artistic operation possesses a transformative capacity: the continuous subversion of traditional codes in contemporary art has itself become a new norm. Instances where transgressive endeavors become merely stylistic, falling into recognizable patterns and decorative acts where content and form are intertwined, result in predictable and thus comforting outcomes. Habit, when understood as a synonym for passivity and indifference, is viewed by Didymos's members as antithetical to the sense of wonder that arises from discovering something previously unknown, and is therefore irreconcilable with exploration. According to the artists, «in research, this sense of wonder should be at the forefront, serving as the primary focus of attention» (Didymos [2023]).

In its five chapters, the project *Attempt at Doubt* has evolved from a straightforward presentation of personal reflections by the artists to increasingly open practices that foster sharing and cross-fertilization, ultimately leading to the undetermined and unpredictable developments characteristic of *A Social Gym*. Viewed as a tool for participants, this strategy can be adapted and reintroduced in various contexts. Similar to how regular physical exercise benefits our bodies by breaking the inertia of a sedentary lifestyle, *A Social Gym*'s workouts can foster «a positive habit: taking the time to explore one's sensibility and breaking free from automatic ways of acting, perceiving, and thinking» (Didymos [2023]). Doubt, akin to Rancière's concept of dissensus, is employed by the duo as a conduit for seeing afresh, questioning the status quo, and dismantling preconceived notions, while continually re-instituting the space for the political anew.

Indeed, such practice presents a challenge, as it is not straightforward for individuals to engage in activities that encourage them to disrupt, dismantle, and move away from the familiar modes they are accustomed to, for navigating the world and relating to themselves and others. Nonetheless, the attempt at de-automation is the only mechanism capable of regenerating the conditions for imaginative function and autonomous artistic activity, described as *rule-making creativity*. This term, adopted by Pietro Montani (2017), refers to the interactivity of techno-aesthetic environments, which, according to him, should embody *unpredictability*. A similar premise holds true for the instance discussed in this essay. Didymos approaches the aesthetic world as constantly under construction, being disassembled and reassembled. Art, according to the collective, is capable of connecting originality – when it literally names its own new rules – with exemplarity – if a community adopts these new rules to reorganize the parameters of the faculty of judgment, echoing the political reconfigurations sought by Rancière through dissensus. The shift in perception that the doers of *A Social Gym* experience may indeed catalyze day-to-day actions and, consequently, impact their environment. Didymos's practice confirms that art can be a powerful tool to deliberately depart from empiricist automatisms and facilitate an escape from conventional and apolitical modes of engaging with the world.

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