

Where is *The Centre of the World*? Moving from the centre and the periphery, towards a Dramaturgy of Atten(ac)tion, based on the analysis of Ana Borralho and João Galante's VR performance installation

Onde está O Centro do Mundo? Do centro e da periferia, rumo à Dramaturgia da Aten(a)ção, a partir da análise da instalação performativa em RV de Ana Borralho e João Galante

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Abstract

The world surrounding us is constructed through the constant dialogue between inside and outside, centre and periphery, public and private. “Where is The Centre of the World?” is the question suggested by the performance by Ana Borralho and João Galante, a performative installation that uses VR devices, which premiered in 2024 at Teatro do Bairro Alto, and that summons precisely this permanent communication between these binary axes, taking as its motif the “mirror” of the contemporary world. In what ways can these devices, when used in Theatre and Performance, promote or result in new forms of attention, or even in reverse,

or disordered, forms of everyday attention — that is, what dramaturgies of attention (Georgelou, Protopapa, and Theodoridou 2017) are produced from the hybridisation of presence? Where does the spectator's self find itself in the chaos of perception produced in this hyper-mediated space?

In “The Centre of the World” (2024), the spectator's attention is invited to immerse itself in an augmented reality, which is constructed from a black space (Alston and Welton 2017; Lepecki 2016), which is simultaneously an interactive space where editing takes place between the action proposed by the created characters and what we shall term “atten(ac)tion” (an attention-action) of the spectator.

Starting from a methodological approach based on the analysis of the performance and interviews with the artists, we draw on the concepts of ‘centre’ (Shils) and the ‘disorder of attention’ (Bishop) to problematise a dramaturgical strategy that mimics characters and techniques from social media, where individual and collective attention is immeasurably and acceleratedly captivated, exposed and challenged. A continuous demand for action arises, creating an ambiguous and hybrid space that not only deconstructs but also seems to undermine the relationship between centres and peripheries in our world.

Keywords

dramaturgy of attention | *atten(ac)tion* | centre and periphery | vr performance | Ana Borralho & João Galante

Resumo

O mundo que nos rodeia é construído através do constante diálogo entre o interior e o exterior, o centro e a periferia, o público e o privado. Onde é “O Centro do Mundo?” é a questão sugerida pela performance de Ana Borralho e João Galante, que estreou em 2024 no Teatro do Bairro Alto, uma instalação performativa que utiliza dispositivos de realidade virtual, e que evoca precisamente a comunicação permanente entre estes eixos binários, tendo como mote o “espelho” do mundo contemporâneo.

De que forma podem estes dispositivos, quando utilizados no Teatro e na Performance, promover ou resultar em novas formas de atenção, ou mesmo em formas inversas ou desordenadas de atenção quotidiana — isto é, que dramaturgias da atenção (Georgelou, Protopapa, and Theodoridou 2017) são produzidas a partir da hibridização da presença? Onde se encontra o eu do espectador no caos da percepção produzido neste espaço hipermediatizado?

Em “O Centro do Mundo” (2024), a atenção do espectador é aliciada a mergulhar numa realidade aumentada, construída a partir de um espaço negro (Alston and Welton 2017; Lepecki 2016), que é simultaneamente um espaço de interação, onde se dá a edição entre a ação proposta pelas personagens criadas e o que denominaremos de “aten(a)ção”, (uma ação-atenção) do espectador.

A partir de uma abordagem metodológica baseada na análise do espectáculo e de entrevistas com os artistas, convocamos os conceitos de centro (Shils) e de desordem da atenção (Bishop), para problematizar uma estratégia dramaturgical que mimetiza personagens e técnicas dos media sociais onde, de forma incomensurável e acelerada, a atenção individual e coletiva é capturada, exposta e desafiada. Emerge uma solicitação contínua que implica ação, criando um espaço ambíguo e híbrido, que parece esvaziar a relação entre centros e periferias no nosso mundo.

Palavras-chave

dramaturgia da atenção | *aten(a)ção* | centro e periferia | rv performance | Ana Borralho e João Galante

Introduction — Where is “The Centre of the World”?

This paper is based on the analysis of one of the recent projects by the Portuguese artistic duo Ana Borralho and João Galante entitled “O Centro do Mundo” (“The Centre of the World”), which premiered in October 2024 at Teatro do Bairro Alto.

In a context in which, as Claire Bishop (2024a) notes, we experience a “disordered attention” hyperactivated through the accentuated dispersion promoted by the use of internet devices and social media platforms, which in some ways create a virtualised and decentred presence, this performative installation constitutes itself as a kind of laboratory experience, where the main question is where do we find “The Centre of the World”? From this perspective, we can also question: how can we find the centre of the world; what is this centre; and who is or defines the centre of the world? This performance summons precisely the permanent communication between interior and exterior, public, privacy and intimacy, centre and periphery, taking as its motif, on the one hand, the “mirror” of the contemporary world created through the digital platforms that we use in our daily lives, and, on the other hand, the proposal to enter a parallel reality by crossing through this mirror. Through this oblique mirror, created by a specific kind of dramaturgy, we experience the triggers of an attention economy based on the continuous search for the centralisation of attention, for impact, which, in turn, allows us, through its excess, to produce the necessary distancing that is the basis for the necessary and ecological reconfiguration of attentional regimes.

In this article, we start from the hyper-mediated condition of contemporary experience and examine how Borralho and Galante’s artistic approach addresses this condition and presents a specific dramaturgical configuration, composed of fragments of characters constructed from TikTok and social media attention-grabbing techniques that produce or reveal a distinct regime of attention. This attention is driven by a strategy of continuous sampling that compels us to chase after an idea of a centre, becoming increasingly multifaceted and diffuse, demanding our action.

Everything is central?

In the analysis of “The Centre of the World”, we will juxtapose two different perspectives: first, the classic definition developed by Edward Shils, who in his book *Centre and Periphery* (1975), points out that:

Society has a centre. There is a central zone in the structure of society. This central zone impinges in various ways on those who live within the ecological domain in which the society exists. Membership in the society, in more than the ecological sense of being located in a bounded territory and of adapting to an environment affected or made up by other persons located in the same territory, is constituted by relationship to this central zone.

The central zone is not, as *such*, a spatially located phenomenon. It almost always has a more or less definite location within the bounded territory in which the society lives. Its centrality has, however, nothing to do with geometry and little with geography.

The centre, or the central zone, is a phenomenon of the realm of values and beliefs. It is the centre of the order of symbols, of values and beliefs, which govern the society. It is the centre because it is the ultimate and irreducible; and it is felt to be such by many who cannot give explicit articulation to its irreducibility. The central zone partakes of the nature of the sacred. (...) The centre is also a phenomenon of the realm of action. It is a structure of activities, of roles and persons, within the network of institutions. It is in these roles that the values and beliefs which are central are embodied and propounded. (Shils 1975, 53-54).

Second, the perspective of Claire Bishop, who in her recent book *Disordered Attention: How We Look at Art and Performance Today* (2024a), remarks that the performing arts and the notion of performativity in the arts are undergoing a new paradigm of reception and attention among audiences, which in some ways creates a virtualised and decentralised presence, that also comes to disturb the central zone as stated by Shils (1975).

As Fernando Ribeiro, “The Centre of the World” dramaturgy assistant, points out, this performance constitutes:

(...) a play with the idea that we are all the centre of the world. Everything and everyone is the centre of the world. It just depends on the point of view. The audience as the centre of the world. Art as the centre of the world. Life as the centre of the world. People’s thoughts as the centre of the world. Empathy as the centre of the world. This project places the viewer inside a light installation where they can enter a parallel reality through virtual reality (VR) headsets. An “illuminated” space that has to be crossed, like the other side of a waterfall, the other side of a mirror. (Ribeiro 2024)

Thus, the performance was developed from the perspective of each one of the participants, who present themselves as a kind of ideal-type characters drawn from our contemporary reality, specifically that which represents our relationship with internet platforms such as TikTok.

In this sense, this collective dramaturgy, which was developed collaboratively with the various participants of the performance, constitutes itself as an activity that allows a subjective investment in a theme and considers it on a 360° axis (Hamilton and Chon 2022, xiii). That is, as Hamilton and Chon state in their book *Dramaturgy: The Basics*, what lies at the heart of dramaturgy is the heart itself, allowing us to ask important questions such as what matters and why? And what does it mean to be human?

Through a performative installation and the use of Virtual Reality technology devices, Ana Borralho and João Galante place the spectator at the centre of an augmented reality and propose a critical reflection on contemporary society, on the daily tensions that permeate our stance in the world mediated by technologies, which move, without

any obvious order, from the most intimate to the very public. This performance potentially provides some answers to the questions: in what ways can these devices, when used in Theatre and Performance, promote or result in new forms of attention, or even in disordered/reverse forms of everyday attention? What dramaturgies of attention (Georgelou et al. 2017) are produced from the hybridisation of presence? Where does the spectator's self, as an agent and participant in the performance, find itself in the chaos produced in this hyper-mediated space? What aspects change in the performance when the dramaturgy is built from the coexistence of different centres?

Starting from this analysis where the notion of centre is expanded in different propositions (screen; spectator; VR), and in the search for answers to these questions, we began this research through participation in the performance¹, its analysis based on records and documentation, and also by interviews with the authors. The objective was to identify differentiating elements in the work-spectator interaction, invoking the creative strategies and tools used by this artistic duo.

Chasing the centres

In this work, *The Centre of the World*, through the exploration/experimentation of strategies used in social media to capitalise on users' attention, these artists create an ambivalent digital universe that challenges both the attention economy of hyper-mediated society and the place of the spectator in the space of contemporary performing arts.

On the stage of Teatro do Bairro Alto, the audience finds a light and sound installation, and several swivel chairs and VR headsets.

When we put on the VR headsets, we enter into another reality, a total and black void, without spatial references. After some time, various characters emerge like ghosts, with a sublime and surreal appearance, rather than frightening. A dog crosses the space, a child plays like Alice in Wonderland, a lost woman with an astonished gaze looks around. Different characters with a strange profile continuously enter, looking at us, as if they too are trying to understand where they are, in a limbo, as if mirroring themselves in us, searching for any references, witnesses or partners in this unexpected encounter.

They are like centres of their own world, but at the same time they are looking for *a* centre of reference in their relationship with the audience. In this liminal place, they are centres without a centre.

¹ The authors of this article experienced this performance on different occasions: both at a public performance at the Teatro do Bairro Alto and at a private performance with the artists at NOVA FCSH, followed by a discussion about the work. The authors were given access to the project's creative dossier, provided by the artists. One of the researchers, Raquel Madeira, followed the creative process behind this performance as part of her PhD in Communication Sciences at NOVA FCSH.



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Image 1
“The Centre of the World”, by Ana Borralho
e João Galante | © Leonor Fonseca (2024)

The black space of the virtual set in this piece allows for the production of a sense of immersion, a total focus on the action on stage, breaking down external sociabilities to intensify an experience that occurs through the body. This experience sometimes permeates an almost metaphysical notion, meaning an illusory displacement through time and space that crosses the suspension of disbelief, approaching what happens in Italian-style theatres or in Wagnerian theatres, albeit with significant differences: the darkness is not in the auditorium environment, but in the very framing of the scene itself, in which the spectator himself is submerged, transforming himself into one of the participants. Inside this scene, on the one hand, it is not clear where the characters come from, the audience does not perceive from where they appear, as if instead of backstage there were only the infinite void, emptiness; on the other hand, to find all the characters on this filmic stage, we, as the “spect/ator” must move our body in 360 degrees, using the swivel chair for this purpose.

Through this rotation, the characters appear, disappear, and intermittently settle on this expanded screen from a kind of bottomless black hole, at a depth unattainable to the eye. What kind of world do these characters enunciate? How do they interact with the audience through this device?

As João Galante points out, this performance “is almost traditional theatre, but hyper-realistic. Where the spectator is outside, but very close, and creates an intimacy with those people, but they do not exist.” (Borrvalho, Galante, Freitas and Cóias 2024)

This performance-film with a black frame also distinguishes itself from other theatre and cinema experiences, such as Beckett’s sound plays or the *black screen films* of Debord or Duras, amongst others. The darkness allows for increased expectation, the indefiniteness of space-time and the amplification of the role of the various senses. It is not only the presence of the actors that stands out when revealed but also other elements such as the voice or other sonorities (like the sounds of birds, the sound of steps), that sometimes replace or indexicalise a presence, as a kind of fragment of a puzzle under construction, or a labyrinth to be crossed. Between presences and absences, the spectator composes a possible plot for an imaginary and speculative theatre. Every absence is a presence in disguise (Remes 2020, 13), and/or every presence could also be an absence, even a hyper-absence that disturbs our feeling of being present with others.

As mentioned by Alston and Welton in the introduction to their book entitled *Theatre in the Dark*, darkness “draws inward” and allows us to speak “not only to, but through the body that listens and feels” (2017, 16); that is to say, in a sensory way. The black scenery/set underlines questions of confusion, chaos, accentuating the obscurity of things, ambiguous perception, the abyss.

As these authors further note, this type of theatre is frequently mixed with an installative and performative dimension, as happens in this piece, so that each audience member feels like an integral part of the world created.

Installed in the theatre stage space of the Teatro do Bairro Alto, it is through the juxtaposition of lights and colours, the surfaces placed on the ceiling and floor, and the use of smoke that the physical and virtual environments blend together.



Image 2

“The Centre of the World”, by Ana Borralho
e João Galante | © João Galante (2024)

Although the device does not allow us to interact with the characters by touching or talking back to them, the sensation is always one of shared attention-action: the characters are actively interacting with us, and there is always approximation or distancing, which disturbs the idea of fiction.

The use of 360° technology allows the spectator the freedom to look around, search, follow, zoom in and out, approach or distance themselves from whatever is awakening or catching their attention. As Ana Borralho explains, “It is the audience that chooses where to look (...) the audience is not only a witness to what is happening around them, they are also an editor, because they are making the choice of what they are seeing” (Borralho and Galante 2024).

Sampling

This performative installation confronts the spectator with a large quantity and variety of information, for example when the discourses of the different characters cross each other, or when their images and voices are overlapped with texts or other images and sounds. In this sense, the editing, as Ana Borralho points out, emerges when the spectator faces the velocity and ambivalence of information, mirroring the universe of Big Data, and has to choose how to deal with or navigate throughout the performance. This kind of editing action is subjective and made in real time, for example when the spectator has to choose between seeing the character that is close to his face, or following the sound of a whisper near his nape.

We can thus draw an analogy with the operating modes of spectatorship, as pointed out by Bishop (2024b), who, through the lens of contemporary possibilities of attention, proposes the notions of “*skimming*” and “*sampling*”, as ways of dealing with the huge quantities of text or other archival materials in an installation or an exhibition. This process of “*sampling*” is inherent to the very structural hybridisation we experience in our contemporary world (Madeira 2010). Here, we can also reflect on how the spectator can opt to ‘*skim*’, that is, attempt to “read diagonally to try and get the gist”, like observing sequentially parts of the whole to try to perceive the meaning; or choose to ‘*sample*’, look at one part and “assume it’s representative of the whole”, like following a character and getting lost in their universe — both options, as Bishop points out, are efficient “ways of dealing with informational inundation” (Bishop 2024b, 126). The author also describes a third option, “diligently go through the entire installation and read every word”, which is impossible in the case of the performative installation under analysis, due to its spatial-temporal conception and presentation format.

As Ana Borralho shared in an interview, “because it is in 360º, it is difficult for the spectator to manage to see and follow everything, so although all spectators are in the same time, each will have their own version” (Borralho et al. 2024).

Several overlapping sounds and characters emerge and disappear, each bringing its own universe. They are characters who look at us, photograph us, pose questions, share their thoughts and concerns about themselves and about the world. They always seek to centre our attention.

As Bishop further points out, “search” as an epistemic strategy has a preponderant role in contemporary art:

(...) the emphasis has shifted from creating objects to finding, aggregating and reformatting them. It is an update of the ready-made in order to deal with the abundance of information. Like the ready-made, it also calls into question ideas of authorship related with the production of original content. It suggests that the aggregation of pre-existing objects, often from unrelated and incompatible contexts, constitutes an important contemporary artistic strategy — and, moreover, reflects the contradictions of globalisation. (Bishop 2024b, 126)

In “The Centre of the World”, Ana Borralho and João Galante created the script of the piece, as we have already stated, from TikTok data. Rather than simply aggregating content, the dramaturgy functions as a kind of distillation of reality, calling into question both the contents and their authorship, as well as the media and their role in the world, building a kind of updated ready-made, similar to what Bishop (2024b) underlined.

These characters have a centripetal action that engages the spectator. The intensified proximity creates a tension between the spectator’s position at the centre and the desire to move away. When feeling the pressure of a character upon them (for example, a proxemic excess, when the audience is ‘literally’ swallowed up by one of the characters), they tend to distance themselves and seek another scene or another character. This proximity simulates an interaction, but the viewer never has a voice.



Image 3

“The Centre of the World”, by Ana Borralho e João Galante | © João Galante (2024)

As Ana Freitas, one of the actresses in the piece, shared:

The audience becomes more voyeuristic, in the sense that if it were an actor standing beside them, perhaps they would not look, but this way they allow themselves to look wherever they want, for as long as they want. The audience in a ‘real’ theatre might feel uncomfortable in observing an actor in detail. With the (VR) headsets, the audience, curiously, will have more freedom. (Borralho et al. 2024)

This degree of freedom translates into the possibility of deeper intimacy, of greater attention to the character's details, which would be difficult to achieve in the context of a real encounter.

Each of the characters reveals, in that total void, the urgency of some humanity, of closeness to the others, of listening, of something that makes them feel like a person, either through the radical alienation of their speech, or through the extreme loneliness in which they find themselves.

Like the young woman dressed in pink like a princess, but with her eyes bleeding, looking tired from so much crying, and who says *"I want to be a person. I would like to be a person"*. She wants to be real, she whispers while she talks about herself, and about the lack of meaning in the world and of her existence; or the woman who trembles and who with a lost gaze, frightened laughter and dragging voice between moans tells us: *"You have to make me less special. And less intelligent. And less magical"*; or the one who calls himself *"a bit' of a scientist"*, and who thinks that *"ethics is very far from science"*; or the sensual woman in lace lingerie who speaks to us in detail about food and how she feels when she devours it, *"I've just finished eating the most diabolical peanut butter bowl in the world"* (Borrvalho and Galante, n.d. [Excerpts from the script of *The Centre of the World* (2024)]).



Image 4

"The Centre of the World", by Ana Borrvalho
e João Galante | © João Galante (2024)

All the characters wander in a notion of post-Brechtian strangeness, in the sense that they densify to the point of bizarreness, and at the same time seem strangely close and familiar to our reality. On this threshold between character stereotypes, we sometimes even feel some of our own thoughts echoing, as if these discourses came from a meta-discursive magma.

It is as if we dived into the psychic imaginary of each of the characters and simultaneously into the dystopia they represent as a whole, unable to completely distinguish ourselves from these characters. They themselves become a strange observer, a voyeur of strangeness who becomes strange.

This world is made up of: stories and discourses that we easily hear daily on any social media platform, and which here equally navigate the limbo between reality and fiction; characters who interact with the audience, each sharing their own universe, but who interact little with each other, highlighting an extreme, narcissistic and constant unease at becoming real, facing the mirror that represents the spectator themselves, like someone questioning and seeking to transcend the limits of that black hole where they wander. Focused on their individual experiences, they oscillate between a certain innocence and a seductive, almost lascivious presence. This process presents itself as a continuation of previous projects developed by these artists. For example, in *Mister-MissMissMister* (2002) or *Sexy MF* (2007), they explored the eroticisation of gender, creating an intensely intimate dialogue/game of gazes between the nude performer and the spectator. In *Time to Reflect* (2021), they developed a type of reflective device in which the spectator's image merged and blended with the performer's, creating illusory perspectives and evoking a fictional alternative space, where the self seems to dissolve into the other.

In the Centre of the World performance, sound, as we have already stated above, brings another essential dimension to this performance, which intensifies the 360° experience. The sound emphasises the sense of the spectator as a kind of geometric centre, as a spatial reference point around which the actions unfold, but which is also continually disturbed. Binaural sound recording devices, spatial audio and other sound techniques used in ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) multisensory content are utilised, such as trigger sounds that challenge the spectator's attention, repetitive sounds that incite their movement, or whispers that arouse physical sensations created by the proximity of the sound and image of the characters.

Other 'digital' sounds and written text compose other layers, such as alerts for a particular action or character, for example, regarding the character that represents an NPC. NPC is a term that refers to Non-Player Characters, video game characters that are not controlled by players, and/or people who mimic these characters in their daily lives in formats such as livestreams or videos, which have become viral.

As Fernando Ribeiro points out, "The Centre of the World" also scrutinises "the way in which in our zombie condition of self-consumption there is included a resistance to the mechanics implicit in the technological vacuum, embodied by the NPC (Non-Player

Character)” (Ribeiro 2024). In “The Centre of the World”, this character of a character, who moves, reacts and emits digital sounds, presents itself as a machine with an empty gaze, with a voice superimposed on its own, which reverberates and illustrates its actions. She begins by presenting us with a set of expected social behaviour rules, and also a kind of survival manual for that place. She brings several references to real situations mixed with myths that circulate on the internet, reinforcing once again the sensation of our incapacity to distinguish fiction from reality in these metamedia.

The relationship with virtual games extends to other moments during the performance, such as when one of the characters, upon touching the others, dematerialises them in the air and disappears. As if touching were forbidden. Interaction between characters is sporadic, and in general they present themselves as self-focused or self-centred in their relationship with themselves and with the audience.

At some moments they even present themselves as characters from a shipwreck, increasingly deeper and calling for help, our help, which we cannot provide them.

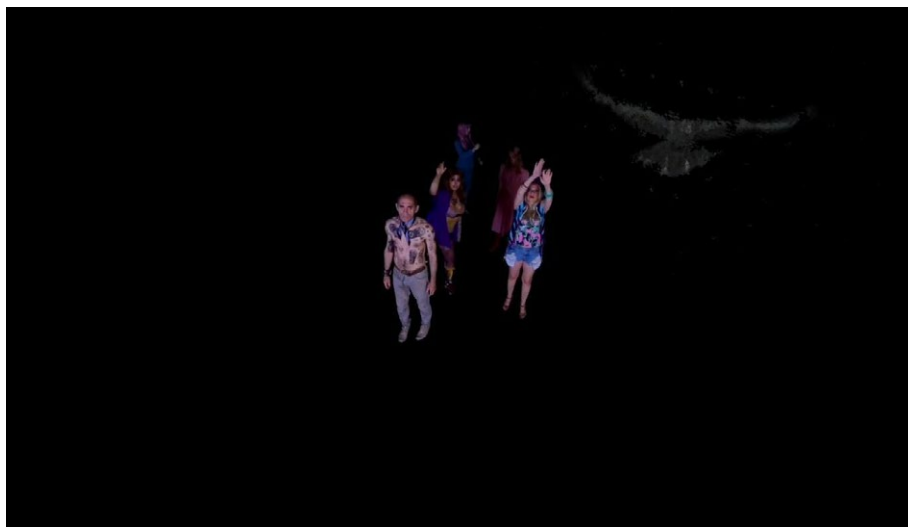


Image 5

“The Centre of the World”, by Ana Borralho
e João Galante | © João Galante (2024)

In the end, they lie on top of one another, always focusing on the spectator until they fall asleep, as if in a kind of final plea where they ask the spectator: please let us rest.

When we remove the VR headsets, we are confronted with a blurred reality, as if reality had changed during the time the audience experienced this performance.

We realise that the stage where we are has become an extension of the virtual space. If we consider the way in which we apprehend an artwork, this moment illustrates an experience in which diverse realities intertwine, challenging the conventions of the theatre.

The sound lingers between realities and the colours of the lights maintain traces of the presence of the characters amidst the smoke that blurs everything. A space between that dystopian world and the daily life that awaits us.

Conclusion — Or is there emptiness at the centre?

The artistic strategies and devices used in this performance installation somehow mimic and emphasise the hyper-centralisation of social media in our lives, intensifying a real dissonance between a desired and an illusory agency, which ends up being fake.

Such ambiguities, strangeness and discomfort potentially encourage us to create a critical perspective about our agencies in a platformised world (Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018; Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy 2021) that creates a specific attention economy (Citton 2017). In other words, this performance is created using exponential techniques and strategies designed to capture attention, such as those employed in marketing, and that are so explicit here that they subvert the attention-grabbing device on which it is grounded. The final images, in which the characters appear lying on a pile/mountain of bodies, where they seem lost between sleep and wandering through nightmares, with their thoughts appearing overlapped in disconnected texts, seem to illustrate Laurie Anderson's sentence, which opens the synopsis of the performative installation: "*Technology today is the campfire around which we tell our stories.*" (Teatro do Bairro Alto 2024)

This quote, besides reflecting how this performance attempts to capture and explore the individual experiences of online shared environments, highlights how these digital tools function as the central gathering place for human connection and sharing today, replacing, yet mirroring, the ancient, physical and community traditions. This ancient place of contemplation and reflection is now transformed into a place of slumber, alienation, and estrangement, the "burnout society" place (Han 2014), where anyone can get lost anywhere while trying to find their way. A mere gathering replaces a group around the campfire previously formed by proximity, neighborhood, and/or familiarity.



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Image 6
“The Centre of
the World”, by Ana
Borrvalho e João
Galante | © Leonor
Fonseca (2024)

This statement, along with the question that we evoked from the collision with the title of the work, ‘where is “The Centre of the World?”’, challenges and disrupts the notion of the continuity of a hierarchical centre. Although at an initial analysis, the notion of centre as designated by Shils (1975), allows us to understand the spheres of relationship that have been established between centre and periphery and their logic in the development of what we understand, for example, as social value systems, organised around symbolic and institutional centres; a deeper analysis reveals a dissonance between the sociological framework proposed by Shils and the realm of the contemporary performative experience, as exposed by the dramaturgy of “atten(ac)tion” proposed by the work of Borrvalho and Galante.

“The Centre of the World” questions not only the notion of centre (as presented by Shils 1975) but also the mechanisms of (des)centralisation present in hypermediated societies, where each individual appears to occupy multiple centres at the same time through the use of a variety of digital platforms, creating, as Bishop (2024) points out, a distributed or disordered attention. Borrvalho and Galante use, expose and dismantle the logic of apparent power and meaning that operates in the context of virtualised, shared and multiplied subjectivities, which have long since collapsed the possibility of a singular and stable centre. In this context, identities under construction, rather than being fluid, appear distorted, excessive and in a process of degradation, or even annulment or evaporation. Something difficult to define, something that exponentially amplifies the negativity of the Shakespearean question of *to be or not to be*.

When each person becomes the centre of their own universe through digital platforms, where they are simultaneously producers, consumers and distributors of content, the traditional centre-periphery dynamic collapses, giving way to the exhaustive multiplication of centres that coexist in the endless universe of data. In this digital

condition, and given the architecture and modes of operation of these social platforms, each person is the centre of their own networked universe, in their own algorithmic bubble, making the periphery a limit in continuous renegotiation, through each interaction, their own or that of others, which sets the algorithm in motion. “The Centre of the World” makes explicit the proliferation of illusory centres, which are exclusively for themselves, which simultaneously coexist with so many others, producing a periphery that also ends up being an illusion. By placing the viewer at the centre of the action in a 360° environment, immersed in their self-centred perspective, but still conscious of their polycentric condition within the theatrical context, Borralho and Galante materialise the paradox of the illusory centrality of digital platforms. At the same time that they centralise the experience on the viewer through the use of digital technologies, exponentiating the tools of the economy of attention, they reveal its constitutive fallacy, because the viewer cannot see simultaneously in 360°, cannot observe all the characters, texts and images simultaneously, and it is their choice and movement that define what they observe or not. This question, which we linked to Claire Bishop’s term *Disordered Attention* (2024a), is, in this performance, addressed through the established strategy of interaction, in which the spectator’s body, positioned at the centre of the performance, is invited to choose, through live sampling, which one of the characters (who, in turn, also present themselves as centres of the performance), are central and which are not. In this process, the centre becomes simultaneously omnipresent and non-existent, possible for everyone and for no one. This audience is placed in a third place, which does not reveal the traditional dichotomy of centre and periphery, but rather the void, the emptiness of the centre(s).

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