

Cadences: Attentional Moves in the Arts and Everyday Life

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I. The fall we start from

Attention is always in movement. It bends toward a desire, a task, a need, an intention, a volition, only to drift away again. It quickens and slows, sharpens and blurs, fastening onto one thing while a hundred others recede to the edges of a field it never wholly commands. To attend is to turn toward: to lean, to stretch, to incline the bodily and noetic senses in a certain direction. Each such tending carries its own tempo, its rises and its lulls. Art and the array of artistic practices work directly on these variations. They slow a gesture until we feel its grain, or crowd the senses until focus scatters; they compose cadences — movements, intensities, and rests between kinds of focus — and in doing so they treat attention as something we cultivate, lose, and recover together, rather than a private resource to be spent.

Yves Citton's *The Ecology of Attention* (2017) provides a crucial framework for understanding these attentional dynamics as fundamentally relational and environmental. His ecology conceives attention not as an individual cognitive resource to be optimised, but as a collective, distributed phenomenon that emerges from the interaction between bodies, technologies, and environments. This ecological approach reveals how attentional practices create and sustain particular forms of life while foreclosing others, demanding that we consider the ethical and political stakes of how we collectively organise our perceptual capacities.

This issue begins with a fall. "Cadences" carries a procedural and dynamic dimension: modulation, rhythm, measure, the timing of a movement. But *Cadere*, its Latin root and a living Italian verb, also means to fall. We can fall into a certain kind of attention, be drawn away by curiosity or passion, and step out of it again. We can flow in attention through the attunement of falls, as happens in surfing or Contact Improvisation. These possibilities, succeeding one another like waves, describe the way we live in constant improvisation, amid metastable and extemporaneous flows. The anthropologist David Graeber speaks of an impulse of this kind through the cultural zones of improvisation that certain societies deliberately hold open (Graeber 2013). These are concerted ways of disconcerting our most deeply rooted collective patterns; *modes of unpredicting the world* that loosen the grip of dominant ways of ordering perception, making room for other ways of relating to the world around us.

Two concerns, therefore, run through the issue with equal force. The first is that attention is a collective and ecological affair: something that happens between bodies and together with mediations and milieus, rather than inside a single being. The second is that attention is inseparable from movement and from the body: an action and a state, present in the shift of weight, the turn of the head, the support of the ground, as much as in the fall or the vertigo of the abyss. These two concerns, the ecological and the corporeal, structure issue 64 of the *Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens* — *Cadences: Attentional Moves in the Arts and Everyday Life*.

II. From an economy to an ecology of attention

Across the issue, attention is consistently displaced from the terms of economy toward the terms of ecology. The economic picture treats attention as a scarce resource to be captured, optimised, or defended as sheer concentration; the ecological picture treats it as distributed, relational, and environmental. Citton names the reclaimed version *attensité*, that is, an attention that is curious, shared, and open. He sets it against the "attentional fracking" of the platform economy and against the reduction of attention to the concentration model inherited from the military-industrial complex that inspired certain schools of thought.

When we choose a frame for what we show, we also produce a surplus, i.e. everything we choose not to show, and a margin, present within the frame yet not marked as what matters most. Much of what escapes us in the play of figure and ground, of focus and blur, of centre and margin, asks for a patient training, so that the arts, the sciences, and everyday life can be shared and lived in common. Several contributions attend precisely to this margin: minor gestures that go unnoticed, peripheries treated as though they had no centre, bodies denied a history.

What the ecological picture opens, above all, is the possibility of the emergence of a “common” attention. Several authors reach for the concept of joint attention, the reciprocity and affective attunement that arise when we attend together to something: an event, a score, a script, or one another. We never pay attention alone, and the studio, the classroom, the museum, and the film set are all places where attention concentrates and gathers people. This is the approach that shifts the question of attention from the intimate, personal sphere toward what is shared or discovered together.

III. Attention as movement, and the body

If attention is ecological, it is also, and just as fundamentally, corporeal. Across this issue, the claim stands out that attention and movement constitute one event. Bojana Cvejić describes the experienced dancer’s bodily movement as being, at the same time, a movement of attention; Marramaque, Huang, and Cardoso return attention to its Latin root, *attendere*, to stretch toward, and insist with Citton that attention “is a doing”; Madeira and Madeira coin the term *atten(ac)tion* for a looking that is already an acting. In cognition and dance, as in media theory and performance analysis, attention proves to be an act, not merely a cognitive faculty.

In their aesthetic laboratory of attention, Virginia Kastrup and Luciana Caliman propose experimenting with a shift of perspective, including distraction in their practices as one of the possibilities of attentional regimes, and not as an “absence of attention.” It is through psychology that they reiterate, as several other authors do, that concentration should not be confused with narrow focalisation.

To take the body seriously as an agent of attention is to take grounding and falling seriously. Dance, as the essay “Cair em Si” observes, is perhaps the art form that has paid most attention to descent. Paulo Filipe Monteiro names the work of William Forsythe and Pina Bausch as examples he sets against the film recounting eleven years of Steve Paxton’s Contact Improvisation (from 1972 to 1983), tellingly titled *Fall after Newton* (1987). The moving body is aware of the displacement of its weight; it is a kind of embodied physical attention. We can let gravity act, recover our motor agency, or fall into a movement phrase and out of it again. This issue is full of bodies whose attention is also a matter of tonus, of metastable balance, balance, of heartbeat and

breath. The body more or less vulnerable, more or less possessed, propelled by heartbeats; the body in labour that hands us over, already falling.

In “Relational Attention in Choreography and the Felt Sense of Motor Learning,” *[title translated from the PT version — please check against the article’s official English title]* Cvejić highlights the sequencing of movements she considers present in all dancing, allowing us to say that even improvised movement is already choreographed: “everyone who dances is already choreographing.”

By contrast, much of this issue centres more on improvisation and emergence than on the composed, planned project. Certain kinds of real-time composition, Contact Improvisation, the cadence at play in letting oneself fall — these are ways of circumventing closed programmes of performance, harnessing the inertia of chance to step out of commonplaces. The oppositions do not resolve, and the reader can feel the tension between structure and surrender as one of the live questions attention poses to the arts. It is this tension we would like to leave exposed here, rather than present it as revealed fact or proposed solution.

IV. Between scales: the derivative and the collective

If attention shifts, for example, from observing the transfer of our body’s weight to the fate of a collective, how do we move between those scales? How do we move from “the ‘micro’ scale of collective presence to the ‘macro’ scale of media aggregations” (Citton 2017, 194) and back? Here, Randy Martin’s social logic of the derivative proves most useful. Martin worked across dance and finance, reading the dancer’s “critical moves” and the hyper-sensitivity of financial instruments, affects and moods (Massumi 2015) through one another, and finding in both a way that small, local, embodied gestures are bundled and dispersed into collective capacities. In his account, derivatives are a reinvention of things for themselves into matters of interest to others, of local capacities viewed from the perspective of global attentions, and of future prospects seen as present opportunities:

The social logic of the derivative brings to notice the potential impact of seemingly minor variations, and the way agency is incorporated and dispersed, such that the capacity to direct the flows of life is reappraised as a kind of abundance. (Martin 2012, 68)¹

Read this way, attentional practice is speculative: it generates value through the act of selective focus, and it lets a small variation — a dancer’s shift of weight, a workshop’s quiet gesture, a camera’s turn — register within a larger ensemble of shared attention.

¹ For a deeper inquiry into the challenges posed by attentional scales, value and the formation of derivative collectivities, see Bordeleau (2023).

This is how the issue oscillates between its two strands: corporeal attention and the collective body that attention composes.

In *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Martin 1998), Martin lays the ground for the intricate relation he draws between dance and politics as “critical moves,” critical activities already in motion. It is this title, “Critical Moves” (critical movements and the criticality they mobilise), that we would like to make resonate in our subtitle, “Attentional Moves,” speaking at once of movements of attention and of attentionality — the qualities of attention that move us.

The contributions

Setting the terms: Yves Citton

The issue opens with “Coincidances: Attentional Cadences Against Political Decadences.” Citton follows *cadere* through a family of words — decadence, cadence, coincidence (*co-in-cadere*, to fall together into a shared world), accident (*ad-cadere*, what falls upon us) — and asks how the arts of attention might help us face a falling world. Against the paralysis of eco-anxiety, he makes two important moves. He de-universalises the “we” that mourns a collapsing world, noting that what is ending is *a* world, the West’s, rather than the world as such. And he re-reads the fall itself as potentially freeing, a loss of the commanding horizon the West built to master the planet. From there he reclaims *attensité* against attentional fracking, and offers a “minimal toolbox” of everyday attentional gestures — among them the included third, attention to infrastructures, and the improvising tradition. His name for the art of holding chance and structure together is *coïncidanse*: we need, he writes, encounters that “teach us to dance *à pas de trois*” between apparently incompatible but deeply complementary truths. His essay is the gravitational centre of the issue, and its recurring figure — that we are always already caught up in a dance, more or less discordant — sets the terms for much of what follows.

The moving body: Cvejić, Stuart, and the descent

A revised version of the paper Bojana Cvejić and Jonathan Burrows presented at the 2025 “Cadences” conference, Cvejić’s article reports from the preparatory phase of their project *Rethinking Choreography*, which includes the movement neuroscientist Guido Orgs. The essay sets out to dissolve a divide that organises much of contemporary European dance: choreography as authorial blueprint on one side, improvisation as privileged access to the sensing body on the other. Against that split, Cvejić and Burrows advance a single speculative claim: “Everyone who dances is already choreographing — a sequencing that may feel nonconscious or be explicitly declarative but

which runs, as a matter of course, through all motor action.” Drawing on Buzsáki, Alva Noë, Tim Ingold, and Andy Clark, and reading studio prompts from dancers trained in vogue, house, hip-hop, and contemporary practice, they reiterate that we perceive through moving, and that skill is never simply owned by the mover. From here, the article turns to a body-brain-environment ecosystem and to what Cvejić calls “a transindividual space,” where a method or a tradition is transmitted across bodies and generations, while each body individuates it as a singular variation.

Closing this issue of RCL, co-editor Sílvia Pinto Coelho interviews the choreographer Meg Stuart, giving voice to a practitioner navigating between singularities. Drawing on decades of improvisation and real-time composition, Stuart treats attention as working material: “a smooth way to shift the dynamics or the material while you’re moving.” Her language of “levels” and “temperatures” of attention resonates with the proposals that, across this issue, refuse the attention/inattention dichotomy; and her account of steering attention in real time recalls some of the dancers’ experiences that Cvejić cites.²

“A fall into the self” by Paulo Filipe Monteiro is a wide-ranging visual essay that thinks the fall and ascension as related movements, moving across painting (Allori, Brueghel, Van Dyck’s *Daedalus and Icarus*), literature (António Vieira, Poe, Pessoa, Huidobro), dance (William Forsythe, Ushio Amagatsu, Pina Bausch, Steve Paxton), and the ordinary-language wisdom held in Portuguese expressions and popular songs about love. Following “Oxford philosophy,” Monteiro treats everyday speech as a *ma-tesis*, a bodily wisdom that precedes theory, and takes the fall not morally or spiritually but as a physical fact whose gravity shapes common sense, language, and the arts. The title phrase, *cair em si* (to come to one’s senses, to fall into oneself), names the essay’s central figure: attention as a kind of landing in oneself.

Cultivating attention: laboratories, decolonisation, and care

Virginia Kastrup and Luciana Caliman report from an *Aesthetic Laboratory of Attention* run with sixteen university students, built on the wager that “poetic propositions”, that is, open invitations rather than tasks, can loosen the regimes of alert, vigilance, and dispersion and cultivate joint attention. They first diagnose a colonisation of attention, from the cognitivist model of ADHD — attention deficit hyperactivity disorder — to Cray’s “internet complex” that flattens gaze, voice, and face. Drawing on Citton and Guattari’s ideas about ecologies of attention, they reorganise the classroom into circles and wandering bodies so that attention can be practised as something collective, embodied, and slow. For Kastrup and Caliman, “cultivating joint attention” translates into a pedagogical

² For a description of possible variations of attention, see, for example, Coelho 2026, “Conduire l’attention. Une histoire de procrastination.”

proposition to “activate spontaneous and unprogrammed modes of being together.”³

Posesas: Arts of attention as cinematic, pedagogical, and caring gestures, by Sebastián Wiedemann, Verónica Naranjo-Quintero, and John Echavarría Cañas, recounts an anti-colonial audiovisual co-creation made over two years with five adolescent women from the periphery between Medellín and Bello. Working blindfolded, they confront colonial ghosts, among them a figure tied to the region’s history of slavery. Framed by Stengers’s “arts of immanent attention” and by a slow temporary autonomous zone of vital experimentation, minor gestures are attended to before any form, and a “minor cinema” emerges in the body itself, without projection.

These two decolonial pedagogies of attention share a frame and a commitment to slowness that resonate closely with “Towards a Poetics of the Female Body: Attention and Technical Mediation in Salette Tavares’s “Mechanical Ball” (1956)” by Sandra Guerreiro Dias. The essay explores Salette Tavares’s *Baile Mecânico*, an experimental film-script written in 1956 and unpublished until 2019, which stages the domination between the female body and the clinical control of motherhood in a militarised hospital. The article reads the camera’s “dual gaze, focused on experience rather than on the object,” as “a form of attention and care for this body”, one that restores dignity to a body that is vulnerable and alive. Across a wide gap in era, medium, and geography, “Posesas” and “Towards a Poetics of the Female Body: Attention and Technical Mediation in Salette Tavares’s “Mechanical Ball” (1956)” hold the same concern: the female body and its care, and attention as the practice that returns a body to itself.

Mediated attention: screens, sensors, and institutions

A cluster of contributions asks how an apparatus can capture or free attention. Cláudia Madeira and Raquel Rodrigues Madeira read Ana Borralho and João Galante’s VR installation *O Centro do Mundo*, in which spectators in swivel chairs meet ghostly social-media personae in a black void, turning 360° to chase a middle that keeps dissolving. The piece stages the attention economy from the inside, pushing capture and dispersal to excess until the spectator becomes, in the authors’ fine phrase, one of many “centres without a centre.” Its media-scale decentring rhymes with Citton’s de-universalising of the “we,” at a very different register.

In “Rhythm and Self-Perception: Performatively Disrupting the Self by Paying Attention to Attention”, Gabriela Marramaque, Yi Huang, and Daniel Cardoso describe *The (heart)Beat*, a performance built on a percussion piece in which a performer’s live heartbeat is fed through biofeedback sensors and visualised in real time. The uncontrollable graphics pull focus away from the score and toward the performer’s own

3 On “Práticas de Atenção” see also Coelho 2018.

rhythms, so that technology meant to guarantee control becomes an instrument for a voluntary loss of control. This contribution turns a critical eye on the issue's own framing, warning that anti-economic critique can remain economist in its assumptions. Its loss of control, orchestrated through sensors, contrasts with the possibility of “letting ourselves go” that runs through Stuart's discourse and Monteiro's “Cair em Si.”

Finally, “Snap, Hiss, Crackle, Pop” is a first-person essay from within the Victoria and Albert Museum that repurposes an institutional time-tracking tool — the “Activity Snapshot Module” — into a creative archival practice. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the author asks: “What does it feel like to hear a museum thinking? How does it feel to be up close to an object and in doubt?” The piece gathers field recordings of the canteen's afternoon clamour giving way to lockdown silence, the hum of building systems, security radios crackling through empty corridors. The author invents the figure of the “unreliable conservator,” who wanders past protocol and whose method is listening: an embodied attunement to the “material cadences” pulsing beneath official metrics.

“Cadences” extends a movement of its own. If, in 2013, a colloquium on “Movement and Technical Mobilisation” organised by the now-defunct Centre for Communication and Languages resulted in the last print issue of the *Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens* (Miranda and Patrício 2016), issue 64 draws its inspiration from that other “movement,” to which this publication in some way gives continuity, paying homage to RCL itself at the moment it changed medium and style. In 2016, issue 45/46 was the last RCL published in print; in 2026, forty years after the journal's founding, we try to draw near to that movement through attention. The “Cadences” conference (ICNOVA, May 2025) gathered attention around fundamental aspects of artistic process and everyday mediation, in a set of proposals of which we can share only a small selection.

We present this issue under the motto that titles its final interview: attention moves us, we move our attention, and artists move the attention of others. Between the fall we start from and the dance we are always already inside, these contributions invite us to tend and to attend — to the body, to one another, and to the world we compose together through the simple, difficult act of turning toward it.

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