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CADENCES: ATTENTIONAL MOVES IN THE ARTS AND EVERYDAY LIFE

**CADÊNCIAS: MOVIMENTOS DA ATENÇÃO NAS ARTES
E QUOTIDIANO**

Sílvia Pinto Coelho
Erik Bordeleau
Luís Mendonça
(Eds.)

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NAS ARTES E QUOTIDIANO**
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CADENCES: ATTENTIONAL MOVES IN THE ARTS AND EVERYDAY LIFE

CADÊNCIAS: MOVIMENTOS DA ATENÇÃO NAS ARTES E QUOTIDIANO

Abstract

This introduction frames issue 64 of the Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens around cadence and the fall lodged inside it, treating attention as something we cultivate, lose, and recover together rather than a private resource. Two concerns organise the issue: attention as a collective and ecological affair, distributed between bodies, mediations, and milieus; and attention as inseparable from movement and the body. Moving across dance, cinema, pedagogy, and media theory, the contributions ask how the arts of attention make room for other ways of attending to the world, and of composing it together.

Keywords

attentional moves | ecology of attention | art | dance | movement | improvisation | relational ontologies

Resumo

Esta introdução enquadra o número 64 da Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens em torno da cadência e da queda que nela se aloja, tratando a atenção como algo que cultivamos, perdemos e recuperamos em conjunto, e não como um recurso privado. Duas preocupações estruturam a edição: a atenção como experiência colectiva e ecológica, distribuída entre corpos, mediações e ambientes; e a atenção como inseparável do movimento e do corpo. Percorrendo a dança, o cinema, a pedagogia e a teoria dos media, as contribuições perguntam como as artes da atenção abrem espaço para outras formas de atender ao mundo, e de o compormos em conjunto. movimentos da atenção | ecologia da atenção | arte | dança | movimento | improvisação | ontologias relacionais

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Attention moves us. An interview with Meg Stuart

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 heart-beats; 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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Cadências: Movimentos da atenção nas artes e quotidiano

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I. A queda da qual partimos

A atenção está sempre em movimento. Inclina-se para um desejo, uma tarefa, uma necessidade, uma intenção, uma vontade, apenas para se afastar novamente. Acelera e abranda, aguça-se e esbate-se, fixando-se numa coisa enquanto centenas de outras são largadas nas margens de um campo que nunca domina totalmente. Prestar atenção é voltar-se para: inclinar-se, alongar-se, orientar os sentidos corporais e noéticos numa determinada direcção. Cada uma dessas tendências tem o seu próprio ritmo, os seus picos e pausas. A arte e miríades de práticas artísticas actuam directamente sobre estas variações. Abrandam um gesto até sentirmos a sua textura, ou sobrecarregam os sentidos até que o foco se disperse; compõem cadências — movimentos, intensidades e pausas entre diferentes tipos de foco — e, ao fazê-lo, tratam a atenção como algo que cultivamos, perdemos e recuperamos em conjunto, em lugar de simplesmente a gastarmos como um recurso privado.

The Ecology of Attention (2017), de Yves Citton, oferece uma estrutura muito importante para compreender estas dinâmicas como sendo fundamentalmente relacionais e ambientais. A ecologia que propõe concebe a atenção não como um recurso cognitivo

individual a ser otimizado, mas como um fenómeno colectivo e distribuído que emerge da interacção entre corpos, tecnologias e ambientes. Esta abordagem ecológica revela o modo como as práticas de atenção criam e sustentam formas de vida específicas, ao mesmo tempo que excluem outras, pedindo-nos que consideremos os desafios éticos e políticos da forma como organizamos colectivamente as nossas capacidades perceptivas.

Esta edição da RCL inspira-se também numa palavra e na queda que ela contém. A palavra “cadências” carrega uma dimensão processual e dinâmica que não está apenas relacionada com modulações e ritmos, mas também com quedas. “Cadere”, uma palavra com a mesma origem de “cadência”, significa cair em italiano. Podemos cair num determinado tipo de atenção, desviarmo-nos por curiosidade, ou paixão, e sair dela. Podemos fluir na atenção através da afinação das quedas, como acontece no surf ou no contacto-improvisação. Essas possibilidades, que se sucedem como ondas, descrevem a maneira como vivemos em constante “improvisação”, entre fluxos metaestáveis e extemporâneos. O antropólogo David Graeber fala de um impulso desse tipo a partir de zonas culturais de improvisação que certas sociedades mantêm deliberadamente abertas (Graeber 2013). São formas concertadas de desconcertar os nossos padrões colectivos mais arraigados — modos *de desprender o mundo* — que diminuem o poder das formas dominantes de organizar a percepção, abrindo espaço para outras formas de nos relacionarmos com o mundo à nossa volta.

Duas ideias atravessam esta edição da RCL com igual força. A primeira é a de que a atenção é uma experiência colectiva e ecológica, algo que ocorre entre corpos e em conjunto com mediações e ambientes, e não apenas no interior de um único ser. A segunda, é a ideia de que a atenção é inseparável do movimento e do corpo, uma acção e um estado, presente tanto na transferência de peso, no movimento da cabeça, no apoio do chão, como na queda ou na vertigem do abismo. Estas duas questões, a ecológica e a corporal, estruturam o número 64, da Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens — *Cadências: Movimentos da atenção nas artes e quotidiano*.

II. De uma economia para uma ecologia da atenção

Ao longo da edição, a atenção é constantemente deslocada dos termos da economia para os termos da ecologia. A perspectiva económica trata a atenção como um recurso escasso a ser capturado, otimizado ou defendido como mera concentração. A perspectiva ecológica trata-a como algo distribuído, relacional e ambiental. Citton recupera a palavra francesa *attensité* para dar nome a uma atenção que é curiosa, partilhada e aberta por oposição ao “*fracking* da atenção” presente na economia das plataformas *online*, e à redução do sentido dado a “atenção” como modelo de concentração herdado do complexo militar-industrial que inspirou algumas escolas de pensamento.

Quando escolhemos um recorte ou compomos um enquadramento para aquilo que queremos partilhar, criamos um excedente — que corresponde a tudo aquilo que optámos por não mostrar — e uma margem, que está presente dentro do enquadramento, mas que não é destacada como o mais relevante. Muito do que nos escapa no jogo entre figura e fundo, entre foco e desfocagem, centro e margem exige um treino paciente, para que as artes, as ciências e a vida quotidiana possam ser partilhadas e vividas em comum. Várias contribuições deste número dedicam-se precisamente a esta margem, aos gestos menores que passam despercebidos, às periferias tratadas como se não houvesse um centro, ou aos corpos a quem é negada uma história.

Aquilo que o panorama ecológico revela, acima de tudo, é a possibilidade do surgimento de uma atenção “comum”. Vários autores recorrem ao conceito de atenção conjunta, à reciprocidade e à sintonia afectiva que surgem quando prestamos atenção em conjunto a algo, a um acontecimento, a uma partitura, a um guião ou uns aos outros. De facto, nunca prestamos atenção sozinhos, e o estúdio, a sala de aula, o museu, o *plateau* de uma filmagem são locais onde a atenção se concentra e agrega pessoas. Esta será a abordagem que desloca a questão da atenção do foro íntimo, pessoal, para o âmbito daquilo que é partilhado ou descoberto em conjunto.

III. A atenção como movimento e o corpo

Se, por um lado, a atenção é ecológica, ela também é fundamentalmente física, corporal. Ao longo desta edição, destaca-se o modo como a atenção e o movimento constituem um único acontecimento. Por exemplo, Bojana Cvejić descreve o movimento corporal de um bailarino experiente como sendo, simultaneamente, um movimento da atenção. Marraaque, Huang e Cardoso remetem a atenção para a sua raiz latina, “*attendere*” (estender-se na direcção de...), e insistem, com Citton, que a atenção “é uma acção”. Madeira e Madeira cunham o termo “atten(ac)tion” para designarem um olhar que já é, em si mesmo, uma acção. Tanto na cognição, na dança, como na teoria dos meios de comunicação e na análise da performance, a atenção revela-se um acto, e não simplesmente uma faculdade cognitiva.

No seu “laboratório estético da atenção”, Virginia Kastrup e Luciana Caliman propõem experimentar uma mudança de perspectiva, incluindo a distração nas suas práticas como uma das possibilidades dos regimes da atenção, e não como uma “ausência de atenção”. É através da psicologia que reiteram, como vários outros autores, que a concentração não deve ser confundida com uma focalização restrita.

Levar a sério o corpo como agente de atenção é levar a sério o enraizamento e a queda. A dança, como observa o ensaio “Cair em Si”, é talvez a forma de arte que mais atenção tem prestado à descida — Paulo Filipe Monteiro nomeia os trabalhos de William Forsythe e de Pina Bausch como exemplos que se contrapõem ao filme que narra onze anos do contacto-improvisação de Steve Paxton (de 1972 a 1983), com o título elucidativo *Fall*

after Newton (1987). O corpo em movimento está ciente do deslocamento do seu peso, é uma espécie de atenção física incorporada. Podemos deixar actuar a gravidade, recuperar a nossa agência motriz, ou cair numa frase de movimento e sair dela novamente. Esta edição está repleta de corpos cuja atenção é também uma questão de tónus, de equilíbrio metaestável e de respiração. O corpo mais ou menos vulnerável, mais ou menos possuído, mais ou menos propulsionado por batimentos cardíacos, o corpo em trabalho de parto entrega-nos já em queda.

Em “A Atenção Relacional na Coreografia e a sensação corporal da aprendizagem motora”, Bojana Cvejić dá destaque à sequenciação de movimentos que considera estar presente em toda a dança. É deste modo, que pode dizer que mesmo o movimento improvisado já é coreografado — i.e. “toda a gente que dança está a coreografar”.

Em contrapartida, grande parte desta edição centra-se mais no improviso e na emergência do movimento do que no projecto composto e planeado. Alguns tipos de composição em tempo real, o contacto-improvisação, a cadência no acto de se deixar cair usam modos de contornar programas fechados de actuação, que aproveitam a inércia do acaso para sair de lugares-comuns. As oposições não se resolvem, e o leitor pode sentir a tensão entre estrutura e rendição como uma das questões vivas que a atenção coloca às artes. É esta tensão que gostaríamos de deixar aqui à mostra, mais do que apresentá-la como facto revelado ou solução proposta.

IV. Entre escalas: o derivado e o colectivo

Se a atenção se desloca, por exemplo, da observação da transferência de peso do nosso corpo para o destino de um colectivo, como é que fazemos a transição entre as escalas? Como é que conseguimos passar da “escala ‘micro’ da presença colectiva para a escala ‘macro’ das agregações mediáticas” (Citton 2017, 194) e vice-versa? É aqui que a lógica social do derivado, de Randy Martin, se revela mais útil. Martin trabalhou na intersecção entre a dança e as finanças, interpretando os “movimentos críticos” dos bailarinos e a hipersensibilidade dos instrumentos financeiros, afectos e estados de espírito (Massumi 2015) através uns dos outros, e descobrindo em ambos a forma como gestos pequenos, locais e incorporados são agrupados e dispersos em capacidades colectivas. Na sua análise, os derivados são uma reinvenção das coisas em si mesmas, mas transformadas em assuntos do interesse de outros, passando de capacidades locais a possibilidades vistas da perspectiva das atenções globais, e de perspectivas futuras encaradas como oportunidades presentes:

A lógica social do derivado chama a atenção para o impacto potencial de variações aparentemente menores e para a forma como a agência é incorporada e dispersa, de tal forma que a capacidade de orientar os fluxos da vida é reavaliada como uma espécie de abundância. (Martin 2012, 68)¹

Nesta perspectiva, a prática da atenção é especulativa, ela gera valor através da selecção de focos e permite que uma pequena variação — a transferência de peso do corpo de um bailarino, um gesto discreto num workshop, ou o movimento de uma câmara — se insira num conjunto mais vasto de atenção partilhada. É assim que esta edição oscila entre as duas vertentes: a atenção corporal e o corpo colectivo que a atenção compõe.

Em *Critical Moves, dance studies in theory and politics* (Martin 1998), Martin estabelece a base da intrincada relação que faz entre dança e política como “movimentos críticos”, actividades críticas já em movimento. É este título “Critical Moves” (movimentos críticos e a criticalidade que mobilizam) que gostaríamos de fazer ressoar no nosso subtítulo “*Attentional Moves*”, falando simultaneamente sobre “movimentos da atenção”, e de atencionalidade, as qualidades de atenção que nos movem.

As contribuições

Definindo os termos: Yves Citton

A edição deste número da RCL abre com o artigo “Coincidanças. Cadências de atenção contra decadências políticas”. Citton percorre uma família de palavras a partir de “*cadere*” — decadência, cadência, coincidência (*co-in-cadere*, cair juntos num mundo partilhado), acidente (*ad-cadere*, o que recai sobre nós) — e questiona de que forma as artes da atenção nos poderão ajudar a enfrentar um mundo em queda. Contra a paralisia da eco-ansiedade, ele dá dois passos importantes. Desuniversaliza o “nós” que faz o luto por um mundo em colapso, observando que o que está a acabar é um mundo, o do Ocidente, e não o mundo enquanto tal. E reinterpreta a própria queda como potencialmente libertadora, uma perda do horizonte dominante que o Ocidente construiu para dominar o planeta. A partir daí, ele reivindica a “*attensité*” contra o “*fracking*” da atenção e oferece uma “caixa de ferramentas mínima” de gestos de atenção do quotidiano — entre os quais o “terceiro incluído”, a atenção às infraestruturas e a tradição da improvisação. O nome que dá à arte de manter o acaso e a estrutura juntos é “*coïncidanse*”: precisamos, escreve ele, de encontros que “nos ensinem a dançar um *pas de trois*” entre verdades aparentemente incompatíveis, mas profundamente complementares. O seu

¹ Para uma análise mais aprofundada dos desafios colocados pelas escalas de atenção, pelo valor e pela formação de colectividades derivadas, ver Bordeleau 2023.

ensaio é o centro gravitacional desta edição, e a sua figura recorrente — a de que estamos sempre já envolvidos numa dança, mais ou menos discordante — define os termos para grande parte do que se segue.

O corpo em movimento: Cvejić, Stuart, e a descida

Numa versão revista da comunicação que Bojana Cvejić e Jonathan Burrows apresentaram na conferência *Cadências*, de 2025, o artigo de Cvejić fala da fase preparatória do seu projecto “Rethinking Choreography”, que conta com a participação do neurocientista especializado em movimento, Guido Orgs. O ensaio propõe-se dissolver uma divisão que estrutura grande parte da dança contemporânea europeia: a coreografia como plano autoral, por um lado, e a improvisação como acesso privilegiado ao corpo sensorial, por outro. Contra essa divisão, Cvejić e Burrows avançam com uma afirmação especulativa: “Quem dança está já a coreografar — uma sequência que pode parecer inconsciente ou ser explicitamente declarativa, mas que percorre, como é natural, toda a acção motora”. Baseando-se em Buzsáki, Alva Noë, Tim Ingold e Andy Clark, e analisando as sugestões recolhidas durante workshops de bailarinos formados em *vogue*, *house*, *hip-hop* e práticas de dança contemporânea, Cvejić e Burrows reiteram que percebemos através do movimento, portanto, a habilidade nunca pertence simplesmente a quem se move. A partir daí, o artigo debruça-se sobre um ecossistema corpo-cérebro-ambiente e sobre aquilo a que Cvejić chama “um espaço transindividual”, onde um método, ou uma tradição, é transmitido entre corpos e gerações, enquanto cada corpo o individua numa variação singular.

A fechar esta edição da RCL, a coeditora Sílvia Pinto Coelho entrevista a coreógrafa Meg Stuart, dando voz a quem pratica a dança navegando entre singularidades. Baseando-se na experiência de décadas de improvisação e de composição em tempo real, Stuart encara a atenção como matéria de trabalho: “um modo subtil para mudar as dinâmicas ou as matérias enquanto nos movemos”. O recurso a “níveis” e “temperaturas” de atenção no seu discurso ressoa com as propostas que, ao longo desta edição, recusam a dicotomia atenção/desatenção. E a sua descrição de como orientar a atenção em tempo real lembra algumas das experiências de bailarinos que Cvejić cita.²

“Cair em Si”, de Paulo Filipe Monteiro, é um ensaio visual abrangente que encara a queda e a ascensão como movimentos interligados, percorrendo a pintura (Allori, Brueghel, *Dédalo e Ícaro* de Van Dyck), a literatura (António Vieira, Allan Poe, Fernando Pessoa, Vicente Huidobro), a dança (William Forsythe, Ushio Amagatsu, Pina Bausch, Steve Paxton), e a sabedoria da linguagem comum presente nas expressões portuguesas e

² Para uma descrição de variações possíveis da atenção, ver, por exemplo, Coelho 2026, “Conduire l’attention. Une histoire de procrastination”.

nas canções populares sobre o amor. Seguindo a “filosofia de Oxford”, Monteiro trata a linguagem quotidiana como uma *matesis*, uma sabedoria corporal que precede a teoria, e encara a queda não de forma moral ou espiritual, mas como um facto físico cuja gravidade molda o senso comum, a linguagem e as artes. A expressão do título, “cair em si” (recuperar os sentidos, cair em si mesmo), designa a figura central do ensaio: a atenção como uma espécie de aterragem no próprio.

Cultivar a atenção: laboratórios, descolonização e cuidado

Virginia Kastrup e Luciana Caliman relatam a experiência de um Laboratório Estético da Atenção realizado com dezasseis estudantes universitários. A proposta baseia-se na intuição de que as “proposições poéticas” — convites abertos em lugar de tarefas — podem flexibilizar os regimes de alerta, de vigilância e de dispersão, e cultivar a atenção conjunta. As autoras começam por fazer o diagnóstico de uma “colonização da atenção”, percorrendo desde o modelo cognitivo do TDAH — transtorno do défice de atenção e hiperactividade — até ao “complexo da Internet” de Crary, que achata o olhar, a voz e o rosto. Apoiando-se nas ideias de Citton e Guattari sobre ecologias da atenção, reorganizam a sala de aula em círculos e corpos errantes, para que a atenção possa ser praticada como algo colectivo, incorporado e lento. Para Kastrup e Caliman, “cultivar a atenção conjunta” traduz-se numa proposta pedagógica para activar modos espontâneos e não programados de estarmos juntos”.³

Poesas, artes da atenção como gestos cinematográficos, pedagógicos e de cuidado, de Sebastián Wiedemann, Verónica Naranjo-Quintero e John Echavarría Cañas, narra uma co-criação audiovisual anticolonial realizada ao longo de dois anos com cinco adolescentes da periferia entre Medellín e Bello. Trabalhando com os olhos vendados, elas confrontam fantasmas coloniais, entre os quais uma figura ligada à história da escravatura da região. Enquadrados pelas “artes da atenção imanente” de Stengers e por uma zona autónoma temporária lenta e de experimentação vital, os gestos menores são atendidos antes de qualquer forma, e surge um “cinema menor” no próprio corpo, sem projecção.

Estas duas pedagogias decoloniais da atenção partilham um enquadramento e um compromisso com a lentidão que se aproxima da proposta de “Para uma Poética do Corpo Feminino”, de Sandra Guerreiro Dias. O ensaio debruça-se sobre *Baile Mecânico*, de Salette Tavares, um guião cinematográfico experimental escrito em 1956 e inédito até 2019, que encena a dominação entre o corpo feminino e o controlo clínico da maternidade num hospital militarizado. O artigo interpreta o “olhar duplo da câmara, centrado na experiência e não no objecto”, como “uma forma de atenção e cuidado para com este corpo”, que devolve a dignidade a um corpo vulnerável e vivo. Apesar de uma

3 Sobre “Práticas de Atenção” ver também Coelho 2018.

grande distância em termos de época, de meio e de geografia, “Posesas” e “Para uma Poética do Corpo Feminino” partilham uma preocupação com o corpo feminino, o seu cuidado, e a atenção como a prática que devolve o corpo a si mesmo.

A atenção mediada: ecrãs, sensores e instituições

Há ainda um conjunto de contribuições que questiona a forma como um dispositivo pode capturar ou libertar a atenção. Cláudia Madeira e Raquel Rodrigues Madeira analisam a instalação de Realidade Virtual de Ana Borralho e João Galante, intitulada *O Centro do Mundo*, na qual os espectadores, sentados em cadeiras giratórias, encontram personagens fantasmagóricas das redes sociais num vazio negro, rodando 360° para perseguir um centro que se vai dissolvendo continuamente. A peça encena uma economia da atenção a partir de dentro, levando a captura e a dispersão ao extremo até que o espectador se torne, na bela expressão das autoras, um dos muitos “centros sem centro”. A sua descentração à escala dos meios de comunicação rima com a “desuniversalização” do “nós” de Citton, num registo muito diferente.

Em “Ritmo e Auto-percepção: Performativamente Perturbando o Eu Prestando Atenção à Atenção”, Gabriela Marramaque, Yi Huang e Daniel Cardoso descrevem *The (heart)Beat*, uma performance desenvolvida a partir de uma peça de percussão em que os batimentos cardíacos de um intérprete são captados ao vivo por sensores de *biofeedback* e visualizados em tempo real. Os gráficos incontroláveis desviam a atenção da partitura para os próprios ritmos do intérprete, de modo a que a tecnologia programada para garantir o controlo se torna, pelo contrário, num instrumento de perda voluntária do controlo. Esta contribuição lança um olhar crítico sobre o próprio enquadramento desta edição, alertando para o facto de que a crítica anti-económica pode continuar a ser “economicista” nas suas premissas. A perda de controlo, orquestrada através de sensores, contrasta com a possibilidade de nos “deixarmos levar” que permeia o discurso de Stuart e o ensaio “Cair em Si” de Monteiro.

Por fim, “*Snap, Hiss, Crackle, Pop*” é um ensaio escrito na primeira pessoa a partir do interior do Museu Victoria e Albert, que transforma uma ferramenta institucional de monitorização do tempo — o “Activity Snapshot Module” — numa prática criativa de arquivo. No contexto da pandemia de COVID-19, o autor questiona: “Como é ouvir um museu a pensar? Como é estar perto de um objecto e sentir dúvidas?”. O texto reúne gravações de campo do alvoroço da cantina à tarde a dar lugar ao silêncio do confinamento, ao zumbido dos sistemas do edifício e aos rádios de segurança a crepitar pelos corredores vazios. O autor inventa a figura do “conservador não fiável”, que se afasta do protocolo e cujo método é a escuta: uma sintonia corporal com as “cadências materiais” que pulsam por debaixo das métricas oficiais.

As “Cadências” prolongam um movimento que lhes é próprio. Se em 2013, um colóquio sobre “Movimento e Mobilização Técnica” promovido pelo extinto Centro de Comunicação e Linguagens resultou na última edição em papel da Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens (Miranda e Patrício 2016), o número 64 da revista colhe a sua inspiração desse outro “movimento” a que esta publicação, de algum modo, dá continuidade homenageando a própria RCL, no momento em que mudou de suporte e de estilo. Em 2016 — o número 45/46 da RCL foi a última revista RCL publicada em papel; em 2026 tentamos aproximar-nos desse movimento, através da atenção, quarenta anos após a sua fundação. A conferência “Cadências” (ICNOVA, maio de 2025) reuniu a atenção em torno de aspectos fundamentais do processo artístico e da mediação no quotidiano, num conjunto de propostas de que apenas podemos partilhar uma pequena selecção.

Apresentamos esta edição sob o lema que dá título à entrevista final: “a atenção move-nos, nós movemos a nossa atenção e os artistas movem a atenção dos outros”. Entre a queda de onde partimos e a dança em que estamos desde logo imersos, estas contribuições convidam-nos a atender e a estar atentos — ao corpo, uns aos outros e ao mundo que compomos juntos através do acto simples e difícil de nos voltarmos para ele.

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Os autores declaram que não utilizaram ferramentas de inteligência artificial generativa na redação, revisão ou edição deste manuscrito.

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ARTIGOS

ARTICLES

Coïncidances. Cadences attentionnelles contre décadences politiques

*Coincidances. Attentional Cadences Against
Political Decadences*

*Coincidanças. Cadências de atenção contra
decadências políticas*

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Resumé

En mobilisant la racine latine du vocabulaire de la chute (*cadere*), cet article analyse quelques exemples de cadences dans les domaines des arts de l'attention (en littérature, musique, danse) pour voir comment ils peuvent nous aider à sortir des angoisses effondristes et des paralysies de l'éco-anxiété. Quelques livres récents, sur la peur d'une planète blanche morte et sur le mouvement de libération de l'attention, un article de Hito Steyerl ainsi que quelques chansons du groupe d'indie rock Ventura servent de pivots pour dégager une dizaine de gestes attentionnels pouvant inspirer des « coïncidances ». Au-delà du fait de « tomber-ensemble-dans » (*co-in-cadere*) un monde décadent, ces coïncidences peuvent devenir des pratiques attentionnelles de chorégraphie du quotidien aidant à contrer l'arrivée annoncée des fascismes et des catastrophes écologiques.

Mots-clés

études de l'attention | collapsologie | éco-anxiété | danse | indie rock

Abstract

Drawing on the Latin root for falling (*cadere*), this article analyzes several examples of cadences in the arts of attention (literature, music, and dance) to see how they can help us escape the paralysis of eco-anxiety. Several recent books on the fear of a dead white planet and on the liberation of attention, an article by Hito Steyerl, and a few songs by the indie rock band Ventura, serve as pivots for identifying a dozen attentional gestures that can inspire “coincidences.” Beyond “falling together” (*co-in-cadere*) in a politically decadent world, these coincidences can become attentional practices of everyday choreography that help counter the predicted arrival of fascism and ecological disasters.

Keywords

attention studies | collapsology | eco-anxiety | dance | indie rock

Resumo

Mobilizando a raiz latina do vocabulário da queda (*cadere*), este artigo analisa alguns exemplos de cadências nas áreas das artes da atenção (na literatura, música, dança) para ver como elas podem ajudar-nos a sair das angústias apocalípticas e da paralisia da eco-ansiedade. Alguns livros recentes, sobre o medo de um planeta branco morto e sobre o movimento de libertação da atenção, um artigo de Hito Steyerl, bem como algumas canções do grupo de indie rock Ventura servem de pivôs para destacar uma dezena de gestos de atenção que podem inspirar «coincidências». Para além do facto de «cairmos juntos» (*co-in-cadere*) num mundo decadente, estas coincidências podem tornar-se práticas de atenção na coreografia do quotidiano, ajudando a contrariar a chegada anunciada dos fascismos e das catástrofes ecológicas.

Palavras-chave

estudos da atenção | colapsologia | eco-ansiedade | dança | *indie rock*

Décadences

En entrant dans le deuxième quart du XXI^e siècle, il est difficile d'échapper à l'impression que le sol se dérobe sous nos pieds¹. Derrière les sempiternels discours déclinistes qui, depuis le XVIII^e siècle au moins, se lamentent d'une désagrégation sociale en état terminal, de la disparition de toute valeur humaniste, quand ce n'est pas de l'extinction probable de l'humanité (Moynihan 2020), notre époque offre de très puissantes

1 Outre avoir bénéficié du soutien de Culturgest, de NOVA University Lisbon Communication Institute, de l'Institut Universitaire de France, de l'Université Paris 8 et de l'EUR ArTeC financée par l'ANR au titre du PIA ANR-17-EURE-0008 — cette réflexion a été grandement enrichie par les apports généreux d'Asaf Bachrach, Emma Bigé, Erik Bordeleau, Graham Burnett, Sílvia Pinto Coelho, Liliana Coutinho, Martin Crowley, Aurélien Gamboni, António Guerreiro, Philippe Henchoz, Anne Querrien, Dominique Quessada et Jacopo Rasmi.

raisons pour sombrer dans le désespoir, la dépression, la paranoïa ou la schizophrénie. Sixième grande extinction, dérèglement climatique, ubiquité des micro-plastiques, perturbateurs endocriniens et autres PFAS, incapacité de nos régimes politiques à faire bifurquer nos sociétés vers moins d'inégalités et plus de soutenabilité, montée en puissance d'idéologies fascistes et d'agendas guerriers... La litanie effondriste nous encercle de partout : comment ne pas sentir ce que nous croyions être « notre monde » tomber, en chute libre, toujours plus bas, toujours plus vite, sans perspective d'atterrissage autre que catastrophique ?

Partons de ce sentiment de chute, qui fait le cœur étymologique de la *décadence* (du latin *cadere*, « tomber »). Prenons-le comme point de départ — au double sens que c'est bien là où nous en sommes actuellement, mais aussi qu'il faut nous en départir, nous en désengluier comme d'un piège attentionnel paralysant. Cherchons des complices et des alliées pour nous en sortir ensemble, penseuses, danseurs, universitaires, chanteurs. Collectons quelques-unes de leurs voix et de leurs pratiques pour apprendre à vivre dans le trouble de la chute (Haraway 2016), sans la nier, mais sans y succomber. Contre les multiples décadences politiques qui plombent notre époque, mobilisons quelques cadences artistiques qui scandent différents réaménagements attentionnels (*attentional moves*) susceptibles de nous faire tenir ensemble par le partage de nos incomplétudes (Harney & Moten 2021).

La Peur d'une Planète Blanche Morte

Partons du refrain d'une chanson du groupe suédois de thrash metal MESHUGGAH (2008) :

Bloodened hands lead the waltz
We're trapped in the out of tune swirl
Still we set the show on continue mode
And dance to a discordant system [...]
What are we, but stupefied
Dancers to a discordant system

« Que sommes-nous, sinon les danseurs stupéfiés d'un système discordant » ? La stupefaction de voir un monde s'effondrer, la sidération de voir les fascismes monter ne nous empêche apparemment pas de danser. *The show must go on*². Œufs, bananes et tomates continuent à surabonder dans les étals de nos supermarchés. Jamais autant de publicités

² La lecture de cet article gagnerait peut-être à se dérouler en parallèle avec l'écoute de l'album *Superheld* (2005) du groupe VENTURA, disponible sur bandcamp à <https://vntr.bandcamp.com/album/superheld-2>.

n'ont assailli nos rétines et nos tympans. Nous continuons à faire de notre mieux, dans nos bureaux, universités, hôpitaux, pour résoudre les problèmes, pour accueillir les étudiants (et les) malades, pour répondre aux demandes d'évaluations. La grande danse de nos attentions conjointes continue à s'affairer, malgré les discordances de plus en plus patentées d'un système qui scie les branches sur lesquelles nous sommes assises. Tout se poursuivant comme avant — quoiqu'avec la douloureuse crainte d'un sans-après.

Advertiser (2025)

Advertising should be banned

Advertisers hanged

Useless idiots

Useful somewhere else

Paper never refuses ink

We can help you (3x)

To think (3x)

I wouldn't mind a drink

We can't help this boat from sinking (7x)

Qui sommes-nous à éprouver cette crainte ? Le nihilisme des paroles d'une chanson de *death metal* suédois est-il à entendre comme le symptôme de cette Peur d'une Planète Blanche Morte (*Fear of a Dead White Planet*, ou *FDWP*) récemment analysée par le *More Worlds Collective* (Masco & al 2025) ? Le monde des Yanomanis d'Amazonie ou celui des Igbo du Nigeria se sont déjà effondrés depuis la conquête dévastatrice menée par les colons blancs (Achebe 1958 ; Kopenawa 2010). Voilà des siècles qu'ils vivent dans la chute de ces mondes. Le nihilisme médiatico-éco-politique de Suédois blonds (ou rasés) aux yeux bleus rejoint paradoxalement l'afropessimisme de Frank B. Wilderson III (2020 ; voir aussi Ajari 2022) pour enterrer tout espoir d'un monde habitable (pour toutes et tous) en régime de capitalisme mondialisé : le problème n'est pas d'un possible effondrement à venir, mais d'une injustice, d'une aberration et d'une non-viabilité fondatrice.

Ce qui « nous » fait peur n'est pas tant la fin *du* monde que la fin d'*un* monde, le « nôtre », celui que l'Occident a imposé à une planète qui ne meurt qu'à force d'être blanchie. Parmi tous les doubles sens que des auteurs africains ont pu dénicher dans la référence à l'Occident — un Oxydant dont le capitalisme corrode la vie sociale partout il se répand, un Occident qui occit tout ce qui ne se plie pas à sa soif de profit individuel — on peut rappeler que le terme désigne d'abord la direction vers laquelle le soleil « tombe » (*cadere*) pour aller s'y coucher.

Twenty-four thousand people (2010)

I don't really care about politics

I have no opinion about religion

I do understand terrorism

And I encourage war

I am following trends (4x)

Twenty-four thousand people die of hunger

In the world

Every day (2x)

Fuck them all!

I'm following trends (4x)

Bless you all my friends!

Faut-il vraiment paniquer face à l'effondrement de ce monde-là ? Sur l'écrasement de quels autres mondes (passés, futurs, possibles) trône-t-il, de façon temporaire et désormais clairement précaire ? Le soleil ne finit-il pas toujours par remonter, bien loin d'où il était tombé ?

Un double déplacement attentionnel peut nous désengluier de la Peur d'une Planète Blanche Morte. On peut d'abord se demander quel est le *nous* qui s'identifie à cette danse discordante. Comme l'ont bien analysé Denise Ferreira da Silva (2007) et Sylvia Wynter (2015), l'imposture centrale de l'emprise exercée par l'Occident moderne consiste en une certaine « transparence » qui permet à un *nous* très localisé (géographiquement, culturellement, socialement identifié à la blanchité) de se faire passer pour universel (« l'Homme », « l'humanité »). Les rythmes et une partie des mélodies de la danse discordante ont été imposées par la force sur d'autres formes de mouvements collectifs, dont beaucoup (pas forcément moins violents, mais généralement moins écocidaire) s'en sont trouvés obérés.

Le premier déplacement attentionnel consiste donc à dés-universaliser *le sujet* et *le périmètre* de la chute en cours : même si tout le monde se trouve *de facto* emporté en elle, seule une minorité (occidentalisée) des humains se trouve *de jure* (*de origine* et *de causa*) — financièrement — responsable d'en mitiger les effets. (On sait que les 30% les plus riches sont responsables de 80% des émissions de gaz à effets de serre — Oxfam 2015.)

Little Wolf (2013)

So we're all
On the same boat,
You say

So why is it
We've got the nutshell (4x)

Don't you cry, little wolf,
It will be alright (8x)

Une chute libératrice ?

Mais une autre propriété de la danse discordante appelle à un autre retournement attentionnel. Ce que la *Peur d'une Planète Blanche Morte* dépeint comme un effondrement relève-t-il si évidemment que cela d'une *chute* ? Et, si oui, cette chute est-elle si regrettable que cela ? À qui manqueraient vraiment les myriades de gadgets absurdes qui ne s'échangeraient plus si une décroissance radicale réduisait à zéro le rituel des cadeaux de Noël ? Comme l'a bien montré Jacopo Rasmi (2023 ; voir aussi Citton & Rasmi 2020, chap. 6), il en faudrait assez peu pour que la tragédie annoncée de l'effondrement se retourne en comédie burlesque de chutes plus risibles les unes que les autres — révélant le profond ridicule de certains modes de vie et de consommation normalisés par la blanchité.

Dans un article saisissant, Hito Steyerl invite elle aussi à repenser les potentiels libérateurs de l'expérience de « chute libre » (*free fall*) : davantage qu'une perspective d'effondrement, elle propose d'y voir une corrosion de la perspective surplombante construite par l'Occident pour asseoir son emprise sur la planète (à force de mappemondes, de bombardiers et de vues satellitaires). Elle évoque surtout l'expérience potentiellement jouissive de celles et ceux dont la danse très particulière consiste à plonger d'un avion pour se laisser volontairement tomber en chute libre :

Les modes traditionnels de voir et de ressentir sont brisés. Tout sens de l'équilibre est perturbé. Les perspectives sont tordues et multipliées. De nouveaux types de visualisation apparaissent. Cette désorientation est due en partie à la perte d'un horizon stable. Et avec la perte de l'horizon vacille aussi tout paradigme stable d'orientation, qui a situé les concepts de sujet et d'objet, de temps et d'espace, à travers la modernité. [...] Tomber ne signifie pas seulement tomber en morceaux (*falling apart*), cela peut aussi nous faire tomber sur une nouvelle certitude (*a new certainty falling into place*). Aux prises avec un avenir qui s'écroule et qui nous propulse vers un présent angoissant, nous pouvons découvrir que l'endroit vers lequel nous tombons n'est plus enraciné, ni stable (*no longer grounded, nor*

stable). Il ne promet pas de communauté, mais une transformation en cours (*a shifting formation*). (Steyerl 2010, 14 & 28)

Un deuxième déplacement attentionnel appelle donc à *questionner le sens de la chute* (à la fois sa direction et sa signification). Non pour y substituer une inversion simpliste : la décadence occidentale n'entraînera pas mécaniquement l'élévation des derniers prenant la place des premiers. On sait que les plus exposées aux catastrophes climatiques sont les populations qui ont été les plus démunies par les ex(tr)actions de la modernité. Questionner le sens de la chute invite plutôt à discriminer, à *l'intérieur* de chaque formation culturelle, ce qui la rend compatible (ou non) avec la cohabitation de plusieurs mondes sur la même planète. Qu'est-ce qui nous intéresse et nous importe, ici et maintenant ? En quoi ce qui nous intéressait jadis doit-il être abandonné pour que nos intérêts puissent être partagés ? Et si certains échecs étaient le prix à payer pour conserver une Terre habitable ?

Dwell (2025)

You can't dwell on it
You can't dwell on any of it
On any of it

Things they changed
They don't disappear
It's your interest that fades

It's in your interest (2x)
To fail

You can't dwell on it (4x)
You can't dwell on any of it

It's in your interest to fail (4x)

La danse doit ici se faire plus légère, plus hésitante, plus réfléchie, que s'aligner sommairement pour ou contre « la modernité ». À l'heure où les Poutine se déclarent en guerre contre « l'Occident global », les critiques de l'impérialisme et de la colonialité doivent affiner leur cible. Depuis les Trump et Orban jusqu'aux Xi Jinping, en passant par les Bardella, Ventura, Netanyahu et Modi, c'est un certain fondement (*stable grounding*) de souveraineté qui s'affirme, à partir de certaines ethnicités, nations, origines religieuses ou culturelles enracinées dans certaines frontières étatiques. Un refus d'envisager la possibilité même de la chute.

Les paysages politiques se reconfigurent autour d'un clivage ontologique. D'un côté, des promesses rassurantes d'un retour aux stabilités impériales d'antan (MAGA, grande Russie-URSS, Empire du Soleil Levant). De l'autre, des acceptations inconfortables de la précarité entropique immanente à des aventures humaines collectives dénuées de fondations comme de garanties métaphysiques (luttas sans promesse de Grand Soir, améliorations sociales sans perspective d'Avenir Radieux, navigation infinie sans possibilité de retour au port d'attache ni de havre de paix) (Musset 2022 ; Huyghe 2025).

Le danger serait de penser qu'on doit fatalement choisir entre deux ontologies radicalement incompatibles entre elles. Il faut certainement choisir son camp entre agendas progressistes et réactions fascistoïdes. Mais il importe tout autant de reconnaître les soifs légitimes de réassurances collectives, d'un côté, et les arrogances bravaches d'auto-fondations hors-sol, de l'autre. La « désorientation » radicale dont parle Hito Steyerl à travers l'expérience de la chute libre n'est nullement une « désoccidentalisation » : elle est le sous-produit — hautement ambivalent, hautement instable, dangereusement infondé — d'une certaine aspiration d'émancipation individuelle et collective. Et c'est sur la ligne de crête de cette ambivalence qu'il nous faut apprendre à danser, ensemble, à travers les accommodations nécessaires à rendre nos différentes manières d'habiter compatibles entre elles.

En contrepoison aux discours et aux imaginaires effondristes de la décadence, qui restent prisonniers d'une conception étroite de la politique, notre époque propose déjà des *pratiques de cadences* en quête d'autres façons de concevoir, de vivre et de négocier les multiples transformations en cours, qui relèvent parfois de chutes libératrices. Passons-en quelques-unes en revue, rapidement et parmi tant d'autres, à titre d'exemples.

Cadences

Aurélien Gamboni et Sandrine Teixido parcourent le monde depuis une quinzaine d'années en organisant d'éphémères communautés de lecture autour d'un bref récit d'Edgar Allan Poe intitulé *A Descent Into The Maelström* (1841). Au nord de la Norvège, trois frères pêcheurs remontent de leurs filets tellement de poissons que leur avidité de profit leur fait ignorer les signes évidents d'une tempête en formation. Lorsqu'ils décident finalement de rentrer, leur bateau se trouve pris dans un terrible tourbillon qui fait la noire légende du lieu : un énorme maelstrom aspirant vers la mort tout ce qui a eu l'imprudence de rester à proximité. Le récit est porté par le seul frère survivant, qui passe les longues heures de l'engloutissement à essayer de comprendre les lois physico-géométriques du tourbillonnement, et qui parvient à surnager en s'attachant à un tonneau, tandis que le bateau sur lequel sont restés ses frères est fracassé dans l'œil du cyclone inversé.

Aurélien Gamboni et Sandrine Teixido (2025) vont lire ce texte avec des philosophes, des artistes, des survivants d'inondations à Lausanne, Genève (Suisse), Paris (France), Zagreb (Croatie), dans les îles Lofoten (Norvège), à Porto Alegre, Nitéroï (Brésil), Albuquerque ou Buffalo (USA). En faisant de ce *récit* un *outil* (*a tale as a tool*), ils cultivent une

attention littéraire porteuse d'une attention environnementale. La lecture rapprochée de Poe fait comprendre que « c'est en traversant une série d'étapes émotionnelles, qui vont de la terreur à l'espoir en passant par l'admiration et la curiosité, que le marin est conduit à porter une attention particulière à son environnement. En analysant la trajectoire des objets dans le vortex, il comprend notamment que les objets plus petits et de forme cylindrique semblent moins rapidement vers le fond ». Les ateliers mettent en pratiques collectives et réflexives l'art de l'attention (*the art of noticing*) décrit par Anna Tsing (2015) au cœur de son enquête sur le *Champignon de la fin du monde*. Les danseuses stupéfiées emportées dans un système discordant doivent apprendre à en repérer les pulsations, les cadences et les syncopes. Les fluctuations des affects sont aussi importantes que l'accumulation des connaissances, les variations rythmiques aussi décisives que les courbes statistiques.

C'est ce type de cadences indissociablement rythmiques, mélodiques, harmoniques, idéologiques, dissonantes et syncopées, que condense le trio suisse VENTURA dans les chansons brèves et énergiques dont quelques paroles sont insérées au fil de cet article. On peut les écouter comme autant de petites vignettes mettant en scène des postures attentionnelles inconfortables et paradoxales, épinglant des ambivalences sans jamais s'inscrire sous l'horizon rassurant d'une réconciliation finale.

Freeze In Hell (2025)

*The sky is menacing
Those clouds are real (2x)*

*Lightning in the storm
In the middle of the winter
I have never seen that before
There are no more seasons (2x)*

*Soon it's gonna freeze in hell (2x)
It's gonna freeze in hell (4x)*

Ces haïkus postmodernes jouent sur une répétition dont l'éloquence minimaliste témoigne bien de notre bégaiement collectif : voilà bientôt un demi-siècle que nous nous disons qu'« un autre monde est possible », qu'il devient de plus en plus absolument nécessaire d'y bifurquer — et que nos litanies tournent en rond et en boucles comme autant de tubes entrant par une oreille pour sortir par l'autre.

All The Reasons Not To (2010)

*Even though we have no good reason to
Even though we have all the reasons not to*

We made the choice of hoping
We made the choice of nothing

Like we really need each other (2x)

Tout (ou presque) est déjà entendu. Les accords mineurs de la guitare, les distorsions de la basse, le son profond de la batterie rappellent les productions de Steve Albini dans les années 1990, avec une lourdeur et une énergie dignes des meilleurs albums de Shellac, Jesus Lizard ou Silkworm. Les mots sont simples, les phrases réagencent des clichés, comme dans les meilleures collaborations de Pierre Alferi ou Olivier Cadiot avec Rodolphe Burger. La brièveté des textes, leur concision énigmatique, la répétition de segments dont l'insistance fait miroiter la polysémie : cette conjonction unique de sons et de mots, à la fois familiers et étrangés, génère ce que Peter Szendy nous a appris à identifier comme des « vers d'oreilles » — ces airs « qui ne nous lâchent plus, qui sont là sur nos lèvres au réveil, qui rythment nos pas lorsque nous marchons dans la rue ou qui viennent soudain perturber, sans que l'on sache pourquoi, une chaîne de pensées, des rêveries dans notre for intérieur » (Szendy 2008, 11).

Mais les répétitions de ces phrases trop familières génèrent en même temps des effets de variations et de réflexion, de retournements et de doutes. Cet ami qui me veut du bien et promet de me protéger contre les intrus (ou les immigrants) n'est-il pas celui-là même dont je devrais craindre l'intrusion au plus haut point ?

The Intruder (2013)

*I've sent you all these empty letters
Just so you know it isn't over
I've sent you all these empty letters
Just so you know it can't be over*

Did you receive them all? (2x)

*I'll stay here by your front door
I'll take out the intruder (4x)*

Surtout, l'espace-temps, même bref, de la chanson donne l'occasion d'une pause. En concert, VENTURA donne sans doute envie de danser, de bouger, de sauter, parfois vite

pour suivre les battements rapides de la caisse claire. Mais même dans les morceaux les plus énergisants, le retour obsédant de bouts de phrases énigmatiques produit un effet de suspension — comme si le tube avait la propriété magique d’interrompre la chute en plein vol, comme si le monde entier se trouvait suspendu au forage du ver d’oreille.

À plus petite échelle que le maelström de Poe, chacun des petits récits à peine esquissés dans les chansons de VENTURA informe, depuis l’intérieur de la musique, une expérience attentionnelle singulière : nous nous regardons tomber sans vraiment savoir qui nous sommes, ni quelle gravité (ou futilité) nous emporte, ni où sont vraiment le haut et le bas, le bien et le mal. Comme dans les lectures d’Aurélien Gamboni et Sandrine Teixido, l’écoute nous permet ici ou là d’intuitionner quelques-unes des dynamiques qui menacent de nous engloutir. Comme dans la chute libre de Hito Steyerl, l’expérience est enjouée, électrisante, libératrice — réconfortante par son abandon même de toute réassurance transcendante.

Les cadences musicales de ces chansons permettent d’habiter la décadence historique de nos modes de vie dominants, en en mesurant à la fois les précarités et les absurdités, les vulnérabilités et les crimes, mais aussi certaines joies et beautés immanentes. Un changement d’accord mineur, un son de grosse caisse, une inflexion de voix, une accélération du tempo, un Larsen furtif, le retour d’un refrain : autant de petits détails qui rendent une chanson d’abord attachante, puis obsédante, fascinante, imprégnée au plus profond de nous sans même qu’on s’en rende compte — pour l’entendre resurgir de notre mémoire quelques jours plus tard. On continue de danser à un système discordant, mais un peu de stupéfaction en moins, un peu d’« attensité » en plus.

Optimistic (2025)

I’m certain

That I am not certain (2x)

I’m positive (2x)

That’s for sure (2x)

I’m optimistic (7x)

I’m certain

Attensités

Le collectif international The Friends of Attention (2026) vient de faire paraître un Manifeste pour la libération de l’attention intitulé *Attensité !* Ce terme exhumé d’études de psychologie datant du début du XX^e siècle se voit réapproprié pour échapper à la dichotomie manichéenne qui condamne le plus gros de nos discours sur « la crise de

l'attention » à devoir choisir entre une bonne concentration et une mauvaise distraction. Cela implique de revisiter une histoire très complexe, qui peut se résumer grossièrement en quatre grandes phases.

Du XVII^e à la moitié du XIX^e siècle, le lexique de l'attention se stabilise autour du besoin de se contrôler soi-même pour se conformer aux impératifs de la socialité mondaine et de la production économique. Entre 1850 et 1950, la psychologie expérimentale explore de plus en plus finement les mécanismes qui définissent les limites de nos capacités attentionnelles. À partir de 1950, la cybernétique bénéficie d'énormes budgets militaires pour observer et manipuler le branchement de nos capacités attentionnelles sur différents types d'appareillages techniques, qui font de notre concentration une question de vie ou de mort — généralement face à la menace d'attaque nucléaire soviétique (puis de terroristes barbus).

À partir de l'an 2000, deux mouvements se développent en parallèle, apparemment contradictoires, mais en réalité complémentaires. D'un côté, la multiplication des écrans permet au capitalisme numérique de pénétrer chaque seconde de notre temps de veille. Les acquis de la psychologie expérimentale, des neurosciences et du design d'interfaces numériques mettent les plateformes en position de nous soumettre à une *fracturation attentionnelle* qui est l'exact équivalent de la fracturation hydraulique utilisée pour extraire quelques gouttes de pétrole de schiste en ravageant la géologie des terrains exploités. Nos cerveaux sont pilonnés par des assauts parfaitement calculés et difficilement résistibles, qui épuisent et ravagent nos facultés mentales.

D'un autre côté, des protestations de plus en plus nombreuses s'élèvent contre « l'économie de l'attention » qui opère cette fracturation mentale. Elles dénoncent notre distraction généralisée, notre incapacité à nous concentrer et notre alternance bipolaire entre sur-sollicitation et épuisement.

Cette analyse historique désigne donc clairement un adversaire politique : les « frackeurs » qui engrangent des milliards de dollars par la marchandisation effrénée (et destructrice) de nos attentions. Ces frackeurs s'identifient aux grandes plateformes (Alphabet, Apple, Facebook, X, TikTok, OpenAI, etc.), mais aussi, plus largement, à la « classe vectorialiste » : toutes celles et ceux qui sont en position de posséder, contrôler et profiter des « vecteurs » à travers lesquels circulent les data (Wark 2000). Se déconnecter pour quelques jours ou quelques mois de retraite ou de méditation peut faire du bien à Pierre ou Paulette. Mais un véritable activisme attentionnel doit s'organiser sur une base collective.

Une telle lutte contre les frackeurs implique toutefois de se doter d'une autre définition de *ce qu'est* l'attention. En défendant la concentration contre la distraction, les protestations isolées émises durant les deux premières décennies du XXI^e siècle ont souvent perpétué leur oppression en croyant promouvoir leur émancipation. C'est le complexe militaro-industriel qui s'est ingénié à réduire l'extrême diversité de nos pratiques attentionnelles à la seule capacité de concentration. On lui reste soumis dès lors qu'on perpétue le modèle implicite du soldat dûment focalisé sur l'écran de radar susceptible d'annoncer l'attaque nucléaire soviétique. Les contenus ont bien entendu

varié : jeux vidéo, cotations boursières, offre d'emploi, rabais commercial, plan Q. Mais la posture (physique et mentale) reste la même : la tête inclinée sur son écran connecté, dans la peur de rater une menace ou une opportunité.

Cette posture qui identifie étroitement l'attention avec la concentration est porteuse de ce qu'on pourrait appeler une *intensité négative*, caractérisable en quatre points : 1° elle est animée soit par la peur d'une attaque immédiate, soit par l'avidité d'un gain différé ; 2° elle s'accomplit dans l'isolement individuel, qui nous soustrait du partage avec autrui ; 3° elle est strictement régentée par une tâche à réaliser, 4° dont les paramètres échappent généralement au sujet attentif. Un exemple emblématique de cette intensité attentionnelle est fourni par le modèle du « bon élève », dûment concentré sur la parole professorale, par peur de la mauvaise note lors de l'examen, par souci d'acquisition du diplôme promis par la formation, au sein d'une structure scolaire d'individualisation compétitive dont il ne participe à définir ni les enjeux ni les modalités. Au sein de l'histoire sociale de l'intensité bien retracée par Tristan Garcia (2016), cette intensité apparaît comme négative dans la mesure où elle est subie, stressante, isolante et appâtée par une jouissance éternellement différée. Non seulement les danseurs en sortent stupéfiés par un système discordant. Mais ils n'ont même pas vraiment pris plaisir à danser.

C'est contre ce modèle de la « bonne » attention réduite à une concentration porteuse d'intensité négative que les Friends of Attention ressuscitent la notion d'*attensité*, à travers laquelle ils invitent à favoriser « une distraction centripète ». Elle se caractérise par le renversement des quatre dimensions évoquées plus haut : 1° elle n'est pas dirigée vers une tâche unique qui sacrifie le moment présent à un gain à venir (son mouvement ouvert à l'étude constitue un plaisir en soi) ; 2° elle s'insère dans une structure relationnelle que le sujet peut contribuer à redéfinir (au lieu de subir une intensité négative qui s'impose à lui) ; 3° elle pousse à des partages avec autrui (plutôt qu'à l'isolation du sujet) ; 4° elle neutralise l'opposition binaire entre concentration et distraction en favorisant des mouvements attentionnels qui « plient vers l'objet d'attention le cheminement de nos pensées constamment en mouvement, de façon à les y ramener encore et encore » (Friends of Attention 2026, 237).

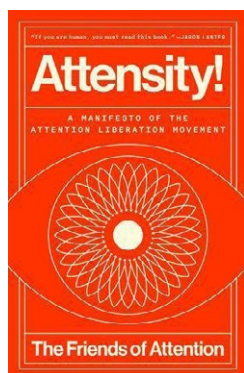


Image 1

Couverture du livre des Friends of Attention, *Attensity!* (2026)

La couverture du livre figure le tracé à la fois centrifuge et centripète de lignes qui ne s'écartent d'un centre attentionnel qui pour y revenir encore et encore. Cette « circularité sans repos » rend justice à « une propension à ne jamais tenir en place » que soulignent constamment les meilleures études sur l'attention, depuis la psychologie de William James jusqu'aux neurosciences de Jean-Philippe Lachaux (2011).

Cela incarne précisément la beauté d'une danse, la beauté d'une ronde — ce tourbillon d'un délicieux grand huit qui nous fait tourner la tête, ce pur jeu de joie vertigineuse. Voilà notre mouvement. Alors venez danser avec nous, dans la *circularité sans repos* de la vraie attention — l'attention qui est *libre*, et qui est *vôtre*, et *pas seulement vôtre*. La véritable liberté d'une attention qui est *nôtre* ! (Friends of Attention 2026, 238)

L'imaginaire de la fleur autour de laquelle papillonne obstinément l'insecte, ou celui d'une danse ne s'éloignant d'un centre que pour y revenir encore et toujours, trahissent toutefois ce qui fait le pluralisme inhérent à l'attensité. Parce qu'elle ne tient jamais en place, l'attention s'aventure vite sur des territoires inexplorés. Elle se fait curiosité : aspiration à sortir du cercle du bien connu. Loin de revenir toujours au même point, son centre se déplace constamment — et c'est précisément cela qui l'emporte dans une dynamique de libération progressive.

Les lectures de la *Descente dans le maelström* répètent certes le déchiffrement du même récit inlassablement revisité. Mais d'Albuquerque à Zagreb, en passant par les îles Lofoten et Porto Alegre, les sens tirés du texte se multiplient et se déplacent incessamment. Les chansons enregistrées par VENTURA se répètent à l'identique chaque fois qu'un doigt presse le bouton *PLAY*. Mais chaque écoute y entend quelque chose d'un peu différent, selon les contextes où elle a lieu (celui fourni par cet article y faisant peut-être miroiter des résonances que l'auteur des paroles, Philippe Henchoz, n'aura peut-être pas eues lui-même en tête en les composant ou en les jouant).

Outre la référence à un certain tempo opératoire imposé par une certaine chaîne d'assemblage au sein d'une structure de travail industrialisée, la *cadence* désigne les moments où « tombent » (*cadere*) les accents d'un certain rythme. Mais, dans la musique classique européenne, la *cadenza* ouvre aussi à une soliste un espace d'improvisation lui permettant de revisiter les thèmes de la composition principale, en y brochant les fioritures qui lui sont inspirées par la singularité du moment de la performance. Toute l'histoire du jazz se tient dans l'exploration de ces espaces d'improvisation ouverts entre le thème initial et le retour du thème de clôture, avec les mouvements de la *free improv* se permettant de faire dériver les compositions instantanées loin de tout centre pré-assigné. On sait peut-être d'où l'on saute, mais on ne sait jamais précisément où l'on retombera — ni à *combien* on s'y retrouvera.

Coïncidances

Les pratiques somatiques relevant de la *contact improvisation* illustrent à merveille la distraction centripète et la circularité sans repos caractéristiques des dynamiques d'attensité : 1° aucune tâche extérieure n'y est pré-assignée, juste le plaisir de bouger ensemble ; 2° aucune structure relationnelle n'est imposée aux participantes, juste les contraintes qu'elles auront choisi de se donner librement ; 3° si chaque membre du collectif peut vouloir se singulariser par un mouvement qui lui soit propre, c'est toujours à partir d'une perception du mouvement commun qu'on contribue à composer ; 4° rien de plus incompatible avec la *contact improvisation* qu'un danseur pleinement concentré sur un objet unique d'attention : le défi est précisément de se distraire aussi bien de sa concentration spontanée sur soi-même que de ses habitudes de focalisation sur une zone perceptive isolée du milieu environnant. L'enjeu en est d'entrer dans un mode attentionnel distribué entre les différents membres du collectif, que Jean-Philippe Lachaux (2015, 175-83) illustre par l'exemple du banc de poisson et fait relever de « la grâce de l'hyperobjet », tandis que Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (1996), en le baptisant *flow*, y voyait une dissolution de la distinction entre sujet et objet. Les cadences sont ici faites d'accentuations rythmiques émergentes ; les *cadenzas* s'improvisent à partir d'une constante remise en jeu du mouvement de chaque membre, selon sa perception évolutive des mouvements des autres membres.

Cette dernière caractérisation s'applique dès le dispositif minimal proposé par Steve Paxton, la « petite danse », où l'invitation à rester debout aussi immobile que possible fait découvrir à chacun à quel point les membres de son corps propre sont en constante et complexe interaction pour assurer l'équilibre de la station verticale. Est-ce un hasard si on caractérise souvent les exercices de *contact improvisation* comme des apprentissages à « tomber ensemble », non seulement sans se faire mal (à soi ou aux autres), mais surtout en y trouvant une forme d'épanouissement dans le présent de la chute collective ? Non tant un antidote ou une compensation envers les affres de l'effondrement, qu'une sublimation qui en inverse le sens : comment devenir plus fortes ensemble, mieux unies et plus attentivement présentes à soi et aux autres, en partageant le défi gravitationnel de ce qui nous attire vers le bas ?

En jouant avec les étymologies, on pourrait caractériser ce type d'exercice d'attention collapsonaute (Citton & Rasmi 2020 ; Citton 2023) par le terme de *coïncidanse*. On y danse ensemble (*co-*) le fait de chuter (*-cadere*) à plusieurs, au sein (*-in-*) d'un environnement conditionné par une certaine gravité (au sens où la gravitation « nous pèse », sur le corps comme sur le moral).

La gravitation effondriste propre à notre époque est celle d'un extractivisme capitaliste mondialisé. Comme l'ont bien analysé des travaux récents d'Alexandre Monnin (2023) et d'Ulysse Lojkin (2025), ce régime associe intimement la *coordination* des tâches dont dépend la reproduction de nos existences à l'*exploitation* de certains segments de la population, ainsi qu'à la *dégradation* de nos milieux de vie. Il devient de plus en

plus clair que ce système discordant nous fait ainsi tomber — ensemble et individuellement — dans des conditions de vie où l'élévation des uns se paie par l'oppression des autres et par l'épuisement de nos ressources communes. La Peur d'une Planète Blanche Morte émane de la prise de conscience d'une *co-in-cidence* historiquement très particulière, au sens d'une chute-commune-dans un milieu en voie de dépérissement du fait même des « progrès » industriels catalysés par la « modernisation ».

Le statut contesté de la notion de coïncidence au sein des discours philosophiques et politiques occidentaux des derniers siècles peut apporter quelques éclairages importants sur les types de mouvements attentionnels à favoriser dans un tel contexte. Pour certains philosophes, l'univers résulte de la constante intersection de chaînes causales largement indépendantes les unes des autres, et l'on appelle *coïncidence* le croisement aléatoire de deux ou plusieurs d'entre elles. Un groupe d'indie rock suisse romand compose des chansons depuis une vingtaine d'années sous le nom de VENTURA ; un politicien portugais nommé André Claro Amaral Ventura fonde en 2019 le parti d'extrême-droite Chega, qui connaît une ascension spectaculaire dans les sondages et les processus électoraux. La coïncidence des deux noms ne peut rien nous apprendre, ni sur les opinions politiques des musiciens suisses, ni sur les goûts musicaux du politicien portugais. Si nous remarquons *certaines* coïncidences — alors qu'en réalité tout est toujours en train de tomber avec, à côté de ou en travers d'autres choses — c'est que cet entrecroisement de chutes semble comporter quelque chose de frappant. Mais le plus souvent (comme dans le cas des deux Ventura), cette impression est superficielle et trompeuse : aucune causalité, même diffuse, n'est à chercher derrière cette corrélation accidentelle, qui relève du pur hasard.

Pour d'autres philosophes, le recours au hasard et à la notion de coïncidence est un cache-misère intellectuel qui sert d'asile à l'ignorance. Des nécessités de structure conditionnent toutes les réalités humaines comme non-humaines. Si quelque chose comme une « liberté » peut être revendiqué, cela ne peut émaner que de la compréhension des relations de causalité qui structurent nos univers. En réalité, « il n'y a pas de hasard » : il n'y a que nos ignorances qui, faute de pouvoir s'élever à l'intelligence des causes, considèrent comme des coïncidences ce dont elles ne peuvent pas saisir les nécessités enchevêtrées.

Plutôt qu'à devoir choisir entre ces deux positions également convaincantes sur l'ontologie des coïncidences, nous avons besoin de coïncidances qui nous apprennent à faire des pas de trois entre leurs vérités apparemment incompatibles, mais profondément complémentaires entre elles. Ces coïncidances peuvent s'improviser en articulant au moins *huit gestes attentionnels*, inhérents à nos mouvements quotidiens, dont le bref survol servira de conclusion à cette réflexion.

Boîte à outils minimale pour attentités bifurcatrices

1. *LE TIERS-INCLUS* : dans toute situation qui semble devoir restreindre le choix à une dichotomie strictement binaire, notre premier mouvement devrait être de laisser flotter nos attentions vers une tierce possibilité réputée inimaginable. Contrairement aux dogmes du tiers-exclus (*tertium non datur*) et du principe de non-contradiction encore prévalents dans nos logiques les plus répandues, nul n'est jamais condamné à choisir uniquement entre un *p* et un *non-p*. Nos situations existentielles sont dotées d'une épaisseur qui les rend irréductibles aux simplifications de rapports purement logiques. Tout relève de coïncidences hasardeuses *ET* tout est structuré par des nécessités inéluctables : l'intelligence consiste précisément à reconnaître les parts de causalités et de rencontres imprévisibles dont résultent chaque état de fait.

2° *LES QUART-ESPACES DE COALITIONS TACTIQUES* : en opposition stratégique aux retours de manivelles fascistoïdes, la priorité est de dégager pour nos attentions collectives des espaces de négociations et de coalitions permettant de dépasser les luttes intestines entre forces progressistes, pour se réunir tactiquement autour de la défense de milieux de vie et de pensée co-habitable. Notre communication politique semble actuellement prisonnière de son incapacité à compter assez loin. Les pratiques autoritaires se contentent d'affirmer la suprématie de l'*Un* (le chef, la nation, la race blanche, la masculinité, la neurotypie). Les polarisations polémiques, exacerbées par l'avidité des frackeurs et l'instrumentalisation des ingénieurs du chaos, nous bornent à devoir choisir entre *Deux* absolus également intenables. Les légitimes revendications des minorités opprimées font surgir des *Tiers* dont les forces se diluent souvent dans une rivalité des victimisations. Pour contenir et combattre les dynamiques réactionnaires qui menacent de submerger notre moment historique, Dominique Quessada propose de parler de « quart-espaces » pour désigner des lieux d'échanges où constituer des coalitions ponctuelles pour préserver et développer la co-habitabilité de nos milieux de vie et de pensée.

3° *L'ATTENTION AUX INFRASTRUCTURES* : au-delà des injustices ponctuelles qui paraissent relever de coïncidences malheureuses, nos attentions gagnent à se tourner vers le soin et la transformation des infrastructures communes qui soutiennent et coordonnent nos existences. Derrière la plupart des coïncidences qui causent nos chutes individuelles et nos effondrements collectifs, on peut reconnaître les effets d'infrastructures dont les opérations sont invisibilisées par nos habitudes comme par des efforts conscients d'occultation (Leigh Star 1999). Toute une gamme de gestes attentionnels mérite d'être déployée dans ce domaine : resituer les hasards apparents de destins (et de crimes) particuliers au sein des attracteurs statistiques qui conditionnent structurellement nos comportements individuels ; identifier et veiller à la maintenance des infrastructures communes qui soutiennent nos existences (Denis & Pontille 2022) ; repérer les effets de « féralité » (Tsing et al. 2021) générés par des « communs négatifs » (Monnin et al. 2023), comme des centrales nucléaires ou des fabriques de plastique jetable, qui ne nourrissent notre présent qu'en pourrissant nos milieux à venir.

4° LA TRADITION IMPROVISATRICE : *derrière les oppositions leurrantes entre traditionalisme et modernisation, l'époque nous appelle à cultiver une attention stéréophonique capable de valoriser à la fois les espaces de liberté ouverts aux improvisations et les ancrages de tels espaces dans des héritages traditionnels à préserver comme des biens communs.* Toute opposition rigide entre danses traditionnelles (répétant servilement des rythmes ancestraux) et improvisations non-idiomatiques (donnant toute liberté aux individualités créatives) est vouée à rater ce qui fait la valeur réelle de nos coïncidences : des alliages toujours différents et toujours nouveaux entre des variations singulières et les fonds communs hérités qui les rendent possibles. Même la *free improv* n'a pu manquer de s'instituer en une certaine tradition, et même les religions les plus traditionalistes ne vivent que de la réinvention et renégociation constante de leurs rituels (Amer Meziane 2023, ch. IV). Pour contrer un libertarianisme colonisateur sans trahir une aspiration pluraliste aux libertés individuelles puissamment portée par la modernité, nous gagnerions à nous demander quels types d'aliénations ont des vertus encapacitantes, plutôt qu'à agiter la bannière d'une émancipation qui oscille trop souvent entre le trompeur et l'oppressif.

5° L'ACTIVISME DE L'ATTENSITÉ : *la résistance contre l'intensité négative exacerbée par le capitalisme de plateforme invite à favoriser toutes les pratiques d'attensité neutralisant la compétition inter-individuelle autour de tâches pré-articulées à la maximisation du profit financier, pour déployer le pluralisme qualitatif de nos attentions collectives en co-présence.* Le manifeste des Friends of Attention nous enrôle toutes et tous dans les rangs dispersés de leur activisme attentionnel, dès lors que nous faisons attention les unes aux autres par des pratiques de soins, de maintenance, d'étude, de curiosités ou d'arts, dont la finalité n'est pas prescrite par des impératifs de rendement, mais reste ouverte à l'écoute d'altérités insoupçonnées. Il invite aussi à la multiplication des « sanctuaires attentionnels », institués comme tels dès lors qu'un rassemblement de personnes réfléchit ensemble aux règles d'écologie attentionnelle dont elles souhaitent se doter pour favoriser le déploiement des attentensités durant leurs réunions.

6° LA QUÊTE D'EFFETS DE LEVIER : *même si l'institution et l'implémentation de droits reste un pilier central de toute ambition démocratique, le recours désormais assumé aux mécanismes de coercition de la part de forces réactionnaires munies de puissances financières inégalées demande à ce que les agendas progressistes prêtent davantage d'attention aux mérites et à la recherche des effets de levier qui ont de tout temps régi les affaires politiques.* Les travaux récents d'Erik Bordeleau (2025) aident à repérer les puissances sociales de mécanismes financiers extractivistes dont certaines propriétés pourraient être détournées à des fins de progrès social. Le *leveraging* financier est par exemple efficient dans la mesure où il parvient à « transformer ses propres risques en dangers pour tous les autres » (Vogl 2014, 53). Autrement dit : « l'effet de levier ne consiste pas seulement à accroître mon exposition au monde, mais aussi à accroître l'exposition du monde au risque que je prends, ainsi que son investissement dans ce risque » (Konings 2018, 16). Voilà peut-être la leçon stratégique la plus cruciale de notre temps. Dans les nouvelles conditions instaurées par l'industrialisation du XIX^e siècle, les ouvriers ont dû inventer cet effet de

levier inédit qu'est devenue la grève — belle forme de coïncidance qui fait respecter ses droits par une rétention provisoire des mouvements (une « petite danse » à la Paxton, mais collective), dont la puissance de *leveraging* repose sur la menace d'effondrement des profits du capital ! Quelles autres coïncidences politiquement effectives notre époque saura-t-elle imaginer ?

7° LA DISPONIBILITÉ AUX ACCIDENTS : en prenant acte des méfaits d'une modernité qui a prétendu maîtriser techno-scientifiquement une nature que ses très imparfaites rationalités ont dévastée, nos attentions gagneront à développer des postures davantage sensibles aux défis de l'écoute des mouvements en train de se faire, plutôt qu'à vouloir incessamment initier des actions transformatrices. Martin Crowley mobilise judicieusement l'oxymore d'une « agentivité accidentelle » pour aider à penser des modes d'interventions politiques non-illusionnés par l'hybris de la souveraineté. Composer des alliances pour faire face ensemble le mieux possible à des accidents qu'on ne prétend pas contrôler, voilà qui requiert une autre attention politique que celle qui programmait l'avenir au nom de certitudes bien établies. L'accident étant, étymologiquement, « ce qui nous tombe dessus » (*ad-cadere*), repenser nos coïncidences autour et à partir de lui suggère une bonne façon de ruser avec la raison effondriste.

8° LE TOUJOURS-DÉJÀ-LÀ : aux appels à imaginer et faire advenir « un autre monde possible », qui ont tant résonné durant le premier quart du XXI^e siècle (sans produire pour l'instant les transformations escomptées), il vaut peut-être mieux préférer l'observation attentive des affirmations et des résistances déjà en train de se faire. Les sept points précédents convergent à suggérer que tout ce dont nous avons besoin est déjà là. Les tiers ne sont jamais complètement exclus, il suffit de repérer où ils se trouvent cachés. Les quart-espaces de coalition ne sont pas à inventer de toutes pièces : ça négocie toujours déjà un peu en sous-main. On a beau se complaire à ignorer les infrastructures et les traditions qui soutiennent l'arrière-plan de nos réalités : la moindre panne ou la plus petite crise les remet au-devant de la scène. Les leviers ne sont efficaces que lorsqu'on a repéré un sol ferme où ils peuvent prendre appui, et ce sol préexiste toujours à nos interventions. Enfin les accidents arrivent sans qu'on songe à les initier : au lieu du *Que faire ?* léniniste, qu'on imagine souvent à partir d'une *tabula rasa*, ils nous confrontent à un *Comment faire face ?* dans un contexte de crise dont les paramètres s'imposent à nous.

Partir du *déjà-là* — en se disant qu'on est *toujours plus-que-un* (et *plus-que-deux*) à s'en trouver conditionnés (Manning 2013) — voilà qui nous allège du poids souvent écrasant de la confiance en soi nécessaire à entreprendre une « Action » (politique). Que se passe-t-il entre le moment où l'on ne se sent pas prêt (*I am not ready*) et celui où l'on doit bien y aller (*I'm ready*) ? On ne commence jamais vraiment à danser : on a toujours-déjà bougé son corps (sans en avoir jamais la maîtrise parfaite). De même pour nos coïncidences. Pas besoin de se sentir prêt pour commencer à se bouger : on est toujours-déjà en mouvementements (Bigé 2023). Pas même besoin d'être convaincu qu'on sait où aller : on est toujours-déjà pris dans une danse (plus ou moins discordante). Et si, pour s'imaginer prêts (ensemble), pour contrer la gravité de nos décadences politiques,

il suffisait d’embrasser une cadence dont on ne saura jamais vraiment si elle nous vient de l’extérieur ou de l’intérieur — comme un ver d’oreille qui nous prépare à une danse trottant depuis toujours dans nos têtes ?

Obviously (2025)

The world

Obviously

Is not

It’s not ready

The world is not ready

And I

Obviously

I’m not

I’m not ready (2x)

I’m ready (2x)

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Relational Attention in Choreography and the Felt Sense of Motor Learning

A Atenção Relacional na Coreografia e a sensação corporal da aprendizagem motora

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Abstract

This paper examines the conceptual foundations of *Rethinking Choreography*, a collaborative research project developed by Jonathan Burrows and Bojana Cvejić through workshops with dancers between 2020 and 2025. Since November 2025, the project has received AHRC funding in the U.K. and continues in collaboration with Guido Orgs, a psychologist specialising in the neuroscience of movement. Combining studio-based experimentation with insights from neuroscience, anthropology, and cognitive philosophy, the research challenges the prevailing distinction in contemporary dance between choreography as an external authorial structure and dance as embodied, spontaneous expression. The project argues that choreography should be understood not as a compositional act imposed upon movement but as an intrinsic human capacity for sequencing, anticipation, and adaptation that underlies all dancing. Workshop prompts invited dancers to reflect on improvisation, set material, and embodied skill, revealing both the persistence of these conceptual binaries and their instability in practice.

This paper is a version of the keynote (“Relational Attention in Choreography and the Felt Sense of Sequenced Behaviour”) that Jonathan Burrows and I presented at the conference “Cadences: Attentional Moves in the Arts and Everyday Life” at the Communication Institute of Universidade Nova on May 29, 2025. It is a revised version of Cvejić’s sections of the lecture, incorporating Burrows’ comments and reflecting on the findings of the project’s preparatory phase (2020–2025) in response to the topic of the conference.

Keywords

choreography | joint attention | motor cognition | movement sequencing | nonconscious and deliberative movement | relational attention

Resumo

Este artigo examina os fundamentos conceptuais de Rethinking Choreography, um projecto de investigação colaborativa desenvolvido por Jonathan Burrows e Bojana Cvejić através de workshops com bailarinos entre 2020 e 2025. Desde novembro de 2025, o projecto passou a receber financiamento do AHRC, no Reino Unido, e prossegue em colaboração com Guido Orgs, psicólogo especializado em neurociência do movimento. Articulando a experimentação em estúdio com contributos da neurociência, da antropologia e da filosofia cognitiva, a investigação questiona a distinção dominante, na dança contemporânea, entre coreografia enquanto estrutura autoral externa e dança enquanto expressão incorporada e espontânea. O projecto defende que a coreografia não deve ser entendida como um acto composicional imposto ao movimento, mas como uma capacidade intrinsecamente humana de sequenciação, de antecipação e de adaptação que subjaz a todo o acto de dançar. As propostas de trabalho feitas nos workshops convidaram os bailarinos a reflectir sobre improvisação, sequências coreografadas (*set material*) e competências incorporadas, revelando na prática tanto a persistência destes binarismos conceptuais como a sua instabilidade.

Este artigo é uma versão da comunicação (*keynote*): “Relational Attention in Choreography and the Felt Sense of Sequenced Behavior”, que apresentei com Jonathan Burrows na conferência *Cadências: Movimentos da Atenção nas Artes e Quotidiano*, na Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Instituto de Comunicação da Universidade NOVA, a 29 de maio de 2025. Trata-se de uma versão revista das secções da palestra da autoria de Cvejić, que integra comentários de Burrows e reflecte sobre os resultados da fase preparatória do projecto (2020-2025), em resposta ao tema da conferência.

Palavras-chave

coreografia | atenção conjunta | cognição motora | sequenciação do movimento | movimento não consciente e deliberativo | atenção relacional

Mapping the Assumptions Underlying the Choreography–Dance Distinction

Since 2020, Jonathan Burrows and I have been preparing the ground for the research “Rethinking Choreography” through a series of workshops that we held at dance schools (P.A.R.T.S. Brussels, KhIO Oslo) and other contexts (Impulstanz 2024, and Forum Dança 2025). These workshops provided an opportunity for reading a varied selection of research papers in neuroscience, cognitive philosophy and anthropology by Andy Clark (Clark 2013), Greg Downey (Downey 2010), Tim Ingold (Ingold 1997 and 2018), Stephanie Bunn (Bunn 1999), Mauro Adenzato and Francesca Garbarini (Adenzato and Garbarini 2006), and others. Drawing on these texts, Jonathan and I queried dancers about their innate experience of choreography in both spontaneous and rehearsed movement through studio prompts. Dancers were asked to work alone on the prompts based on a task and a question, and then record their observations in writing. Their responses provided crucial

evidence for us to flesh out empirically the assumptions that led us to this research. In other words, the dancers justified our intuition about the necessity of rethinking choreography beyond the perennial divide between dancing spontaneously and structuring dance. The last instance of our work, just before we embarked on “Rethinking Choreography” with Guido Orgs, took place at the conference “Cadences: Attentional Moves in the Arts and Everyday Life” (hosted by the Communication Institute of Universidade Nova de Lisboa, FCSH, and Culturgest in Lisbon, Portugal), at the invitation of Sílvia Pinto Coelho *et al* in May 2025. We presented our theses, including the insights we collected through workshops, in a shared lecture for an international gathering of researchers, in the presence of the media theorist Yves Citton, whose book *The Ecology of Attention* (Citton 2017) was one of the conceptual cues for the conference.

Jonathan explained first why choreography merits a new understanding, as an ‘innate experience felt by all who dance’: “An image of something that’s so lived and repeated and mapped so often, and connects so strongly to memory and anticipation, that it becomes a feeling. That’s how I experience choreography, and that is a form of embodiment” (Burrows and Cvejić 2025). Shifting the question from what is choreography to where is it located, Jonathan asked how the temporal sequencing that is processed in the brain might relate to the sequences of movement that dancers experience as something intuitive and complex; and whether sequencing in the brain and the bodily movement alike should be regarded as a manifestation of an intrinsic human capacity. If that is the case, our understanding of choreography fundamentally shifts from an authorial decision-making process to an inherent property of all dancing.

Part of the reason for re-conceptualising choreography as it intersects with neuroscientific findings on sequencing lies in the context of Western contemporary dance and in the prominent notions of dance and choreography circulating among a younger generation of makers today. These assumptions arise around labour, authority and authenticity in dance-making processes; they separate choreography and dance in a charged opposition. Choreography, and especially the choreographer, are notions built on a postconceptual legacy of disembodied authorship executed through concepts and decisions that are deemed to colonise bodies. Choreographers, after all, don’t have to be dancers; they can direct movement without embodying it themselves — or so we have learnt through the definition of ‘expanded choreography,’ a term under which several MA programs in Northern Europe have been shaped. In a conversation with ‘Funmi Adewole, a dancer and scholar associated with “Rethinking Choreography,” ‘Funmi unfolded the genealogy of the choreographer in contemporary transnational dance practice. Adewole contended that ‘choreographer’ in a credited role was established in late Western modernity to match the authorial status of composers and visual artists. Until then, choreographers mainly referred to themselves as being dancers in the first place (recall Martha Graham’s “I am a dancer”). In the context of West African dance, choreographers have opted for this title in order to distinguish their work, expertise and status from social or traditional dance.

In a more concise version, choreography here means a structural blueprint that harnesses dancing bodies, whereas dance improvisation provides privileged access to the body, where one can locate and feel oneself — the experience of oneself in the body being understood as true. No longer an expression of ‘homo ludens,’ where the dancer exercises playfulness and surprising consciousness, improvisation has regained currency as a template for an individual’s expression of free will. As a preferred mode of genesis of material, it reformulates composition as a live nonconscious action, rather than a deliberative, pre-formed decision. In the most orthodox approach, somatic practitioners often claim the exclusive right to the sensing body as prior to movement, which has two consequences: motor action is considered an effect, or an ‘afterthought,’ of sensation and is thus rendered secondary; and the priority granted to the sensing body leads to a devaluation of form as a secondary, imposed mediation.

In response to a prompt that starts from free improvisation and then asks the dancer to learn and set the movement, a student from an M.A. program in dance, Mooni Van Tichel, reported:

Setting movement, I feel, is something of the past; moving against it I come across difficulty; the movement is wild and needs that aesthetic, falling and things that go wrong; difficulties when I try to set that. At a certain moment, I had to do justice to set movement. What is the version of this set phrase in this body today rather than the formality (the ideal phrase). The attitude from the improvisation into the set movement is to apply the feeling right now. (recorded during P.A.R.T.S. workshop, 2020).

Jonathan and I took the informal expressions of self-understanding of the dance practitioners in our context seriously. Even if jargonised, they are important because they illustrate not only the notions but also the faith and passion with which dance makers invest themselves. Our research is directed to these practitioners, or to many different forms and traditions encompassed by the field today.

Where dance happens: dance studio and the social worlds of dance practice

The division between the notions of choreography and dance discussed above further maps onto the environments in which dance emerges and is cultivated. The studio is pitted against places in which dance is lived as a social practice. A seat for experimentation in Western dance tradition, the studio is synonymous with separation and isolation, sterility and luxury; novelty arising from the disruption of tradition and discontinuity; individuals training to acquire a skill or technique (more often a versatile combination of several techniques) or to reject a technique and dismantle it; the arresting of movement, and stillness or slowness as interruptions of flow. These are some of the attitudes that have shaped contemporary dance in Europe over the past three decades and have led dance

makers today to question the studio as an apparatus of decontextualization. By contrast, lived traditions are understood as environments that host a community: they are imbued with spirit and belief, and the community grants permission to individuals as it transmits knowledge from predecessors or ancestors to newcomers.

In a prompt, we asked the dancers to: “Practice a dance you love, and while you practice allow yourself to experience it as empty movement and then allow yourself to feel it as meaningful movement.” In response to this prompt, Stanley Ollivier, a dancer trained (B.A. and M.A.) in contemporary dance at P.A.R.T.S. (Brussels) and a prominent performer in *Ninja House* in Paris, wrote the following:

I did it with vogue: vogue is urban, underground, performative. What is empty for me — abstract dance, contemporary, incomprehensible and pointless; to erase the feeling of self-love and full presence, it became a dead body; I was gesticulating as an amateur, made another character of myself, making the real voguer invisible; erasing face, gaze, slowing down the movement; the emptier it was, more concentration on the somatic aspect of the movement. What made it meaningful: sensual and sexual, to have the spirit of the culture; imagining that you are at the ball; already in the studio it is a different environment.

In another prompt, where we asked the dancers to play a short complex dance in a style that is unfamiliar and to imitate it as closely as possible in real time as they are watching, Stanley wrote:

I chose house dance — took the time to understand the steps and the flow and the rhythm; I could do it because I could feel the spirit (because of the past spirits, I think); conscious of movement (of not having skills, meaning of it) but nonconscious, not informed about the style. There is experience of danger in the community; you are always in the process of actively arriving into the community; only as long as you do the work (the same goes for contemporary dance).

Stanley’s remarks testify to the ground of the practice and the importance of the contextual registers of social liveness (in the case of vogue and house, ‘process of arriving’, the ‘danger’ of community, the ‘sexual’, ‘sensual’ and ‘spiritual’), in which motor cognition acquires meaning as feeling. Or as Funmi put it in a studio session (May 16, 2026): “It’s about the body attitude of the form”; where attitude or feeling is both motivated by and motivates the form of the dance.

Attention and practice in the motor learning of dance movement

Rethinking Choreography began by challenging the assumption that perception precedes motor action: that the body first receives sensations, which are then translated

into mental representations (i.e., ideas in the brain), which in turn result in movement. According to this input-output schema, movement is a reaction, an afterthought of sensation as the primary source of inhabiting the world. By prioritising sensation over movement, this approach has led somatic practices in dance to privilege listening over motor action as a way of perceiving and being in the world, represented in the following works (Bainbridge Cohen, 2008; Fraleigh, 2015).

In learning about how the input-output schema has been challenged in neuroscience in the last three decades — especially György Buzsáki's *The Brain from Inside Out* (Oxford, 2019) — Jonathan underlined the following, quoting Buzsáki: "We connect to the world not through our sensors (although they are essential), but through our actions" (Buzsáki 2019, 59). Movement coincides with perception, and it is through movement that we perceive, connect to, and anticipate the environment we inhabit. We found this proposition in Alva Noë's *Action in Perception* (Noë 2004), in which he draws on cognitive science and the philosophy of mind to argue that movement provides our experiential grounding in the world, enabling perception to register and become meaningful.

What path must we follow to examine this proposition in dialogue with the dancers in the studio? At this early, preliminary stage of our research, during which the workshop at Forum Dança, Lisbon took place (May 26-27, 2025), our method consisted of prompts based on an exercise and a question for reflection. To articulate the felt sense of choreography, we asked dancers to examine the passage between familiar and unfamiliar movement, set and improvised movement, learnt improvisation and spontaneous improvisation, and to use binaries to distinguish between 'conscious' and 'nonconscious,' 'empty' and 'meaningful,' 'superficial' and 'embodied' movement. The findings revealed contradictions in the dancers' responses. For some, 'conscious' referred to familiar, grounded, and effortless movement they could understand, and thus carried a positive connotation. 'Nonconscious,' by contrast, was associated with doubt, insecurity, and confusion, and was perceived negatively. Other dancers reported the exact opposite: 'conscious' carried negative connotations of unfamiliarity, constructedness, and a lack of grounding, while 'nonconscious' was understood positively—as moving with momentum, mastering movement, and feeling at home in a deeper, more layered way.

While it was difficult to draw any clear knowledge from these reports, however rich and intriguingly contradictory they were, we became more interested in understanding how acquiring motor skills leads to the nonconscious feeling of movement. Yves Citton provided us with the concept of 'automatic recognition', which usefully approximates the nonconscious feeling of movement:

Automatic attention within which — in a complex relationship of suggestion, attenuation, reinforcement, and filtering with the other cerebral systems — a 'perceptive system' engages in an initial labour of identification without intention, without consciousness and without apparent effort from the subject. (Citton 2017, 33-34)

We tested this kind of attention in a prompt where we asked the dancers to describe a dance they ‘know by heart.’ A Danish dancer in a workshop at Impulstanz in Vienna reported:

When I was young, hip-hop dance always worked for me, which reminds me of the Danish phrase ‘I can do it without anything’.

Knowing something by heart = knowing without anything = effortless.

Hip-Hop dance is me; it isn’t something that has become me, but isn’t inside of me because it feels like cooking or doing the dishes. I would never forget the steps, but I would forget that I know them. (Anton Skaaning Thomsen, July 23, 2023)

Notice the words the dancer uses here to describe the process of identification: the movement literally passes into his body, which absorbs it without allowing him to isolate it or create distance through observation.

Where does dance go when it disappears into the background — in other words, when it becomes so internalised that the dancer knows it by heart without being conscious of that knowledge? Does it become part of the dancer’s personal capacity or does it point to something more generic and social about motor learning?

Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* promised to explain how skills shape practice as a socially rooted embodiment in his famous definition:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce the habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations. (Bourdieu 1977, 72)

In “Practice without theory: a neuroanthropological perspective on embodied learning” (2010), anthropologist and dancer Greg Downey revisits *habitus* through the learning process in capoeira from a Brazilian master:

What is ‘learned by body’ is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be branched, but something that one is [...] Imitation isn’t reproduction of something external, but immediate identification” [...] Practitioners repeatedly asserted that learning capoeira movements affected a person’s kinaesthetic style, social interactions, and perceptions outside of the game. (Downey 2010, S24–S25)

Following Bourdieu, though arguing for a vaguer and less structuralist notion of *habitus* as ‘embodied knowledge,’ Downey understood the acquisition of motor skills to have broader consequences that spill over into the dancer’s life — physical, neurological, and psychological. Learning begins with imitation, but over time, through the honing of skills, mastery yields a sense of emergence rather than mere copying. For Tim

Ingold, the anthropologist under whose supervision Downey presented his research on capoeira, the education of attention through imitation is key to motor learning. Rereading Bourdieu with Ingold, we are inclined to adjust the claim that the nonconscious movement generated by *habitus* is automatic. Following Tim Ingold's "Five Questions of Skill" (Ingold 2018), we became wary of using the attribute 'automatic' for the non-conscious movement, since it implies a pathway from sensation to motor action that excludes the creative aspects of cognition that must be in place in motor learning. Ingold writes:

Somewhere out there, perhaps in fields of cognitive or educational psychology, there may still be scholars who remain convinced that skill is the poor relation of knowledge, that its acquisition is 'merely' imitative, that it resides in the body rather than the mind and that its application is more or less automatic, running from sensory input to motor response while bypassing the realms of thought or imagination. (Ingold 2018, 7)

As Ingold argues, skill is not "automatic, running from sensory input to motor response while bypassing the realms of thought or imagination"; rather, skilled action involves an attentive engagement of perception, movement, and environment.

Returning to an earlier seminal paper by Ingold that frames this orientation, "From the transmission of representations to the education of attention" (1997), we found his account of what happens in motor learning from an anthropological perspective to be crucial.

In every case, the particular capacities of perception and action constituting the motor skill are developmentally embodied into the *modus operandi* of the human organism through practice and training, under the guidance of already accomplished practitioners, in an environment characterised by its own textures and topography, and littered with the products of previous human activity. (Ingold 1997, 446)

Ingold singles out three elements here: practice and training, the guidance of "masters" (to use a term that is nowadays unpopular in contemporary dance), and an environment that transmits previously acquired knowledge.

To show something to someone is to cause it to be made present for that person, so that he or she can apprehend it directly, whether by looking, listening or feeling. Here, the role of the tutor is to set up situations in which the novice is afforded the possibility of such unmediated experience. (Ingold 1997, 450)

The situation he describes is similar to Citton's account of 'joint attention': co-presence in a shared space without necessarily implying symmetry among all participants, for example, dancers. In the learning situation, observation and dancing are coordinated and

sometimes even short-circuited. When a dancer observes another person's movement, their observation implies a computation of that movement, which is sometimes visible in shadowing, i.e., echoing by copying the movement in a marked way. This means that even before trying the movement, the dancer is simulating it while watching it. Observation depends on relational attention, on empathy or affection, and on the transmission of a world rather than simply a skill. In Citton's notion, joint attention arises from interaction, dialogue, synchronisation, and affective harmonisation in a situation. He also refers to it as 'crossed attention' or 'presential attention.' From his account, what we retain as important for motor learning in dance is the role of emotional connection.

Downey suggested that imitating the capoeira master can be understood as a game of belief and a search for approval, while also possibly pointing to kinaesthetic empathy, informed by the then-current interest in the discovery of 'mirror neurons' (in 2010). In a recent conversation, he acknowledged that 'mirror neurons' are no longer thought to underpin empathetic movement responses. Empathy might be the word to describe the emotional connection, as in Citton's statement above; although movement is mirrored through imitative learning, it remains unclear whether mirror neurons are responsible for it.

Choreography: remembering forward in and with environment

Let us now move to the third element in Ingold's account of 'educating attention': the environment. We will see how the agency of the environment makes every instance of practice always already a performance. An apprentice does not simply reproduce or execute a retained phrase. Because of continual readjustment to the environment — and for dancers, the floor and performance situation, who is watching the dance, are always different — there is always an element of improvisation in copying, which gives it an emergent quality in experience. Ingold writes in the same paper: "The essence of dexterity lies not in bodily movements themselves but in the tuning of the movements to an emergent task, whose surrounding conditions are never precisely the same from one moment to the next". (Ingold 1997, 447). Attunement is essential to attention, to which he attributes movement:

The movement of the skilled practitioner, by contrast, is continually and fluently responsive to perturbations of the perceived environment. This is possible because the practitioner's bodily movement is, at one and the same time, a movement of attention; because he watches, listens and feels even as he works. (Ingold 1997, 448)

The sensorimotor apparatus of an experienced mover is attuned to picking up critical features of the environment that the novice simply won't be able to notice. Recall Stanley Ollivier's reflection in the earlier example about being a novice when he was learning *House* as an unfamiliar movement, yet relying on his practice of *vogue*. Part of

attention is to be able to anticipate specific moves based on something that is not immediately perceived and available, and yet it is as if this ‘something’ were somehow already present.

What Jonathan and I found here is that the ability to anticipate movement, and the feeling of anticipation that is retroactively coded as (spontaneous) emergence, demonstrates choreography. As our research speculatively proposes, 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. And this might apply to any dance idiom or tradition in practice, as we have subsequently investigated in the studio with dancers specialised in a wider variety of dance traditions: Bharatanatyam, West African theatre dance, Popping, contemporary score-based dance, and contemporary improvisation.

How does memory tie in with anticipation to qualify the motor skill as choreographic? Ingold gave us a poetic metaphor of whistling a tune as remembering:

I would now argue that recall and performance are one and the same: that whistling a tune is remembering it. This [...] is to understand remembering not as the accessing of a complex structure, but as the unfolding of a complex process. To whistle a tune or tell a story that you have heard before is like taking a walk in the country along a route that you previously travelled in the company of someone else. [...] Just as to follow someone is to cover the same ground through the world of lived experience, so to remember is to retrace one's steps. But each retracing is an original movement, not a replica. (Ingold 1997, 452)

Aptness, grounded in motor skill in the moment of moving, implies that memory is enacted through the necessary variations that arise from adapting to a new environment. This begs the question of where the skill or aptness lies. Are they properties of the dancer, as Western disciplinary training claims? — one learns by heart by learning ‘by hard’? — to quote a Greek dancer from a workshop in Vienna (2024). Or, to pose a different question: does the situation shape the performance more than the dancer's capacity? Cognitive philosopher Andy Clark formulated the problem as follows:

It makes no sense to ask whether the capacity to climb lies with the climber or the ladder, or whether the capacity to play the piano resides in the pianist or the instrument. These capacities exist neither ‘inside’ the body and brain of the practitioner nor ‘outside’ in the environment. They are rather properties of environmentally extended systems that cross-cut the boundaries of body and brain. (Clark 1997, 222).

The body-brain-environment forms an ecosystem where both action and perception occur in-between and through the three elements.

The environment introduces an in-between space that connects the body and the brain in relation to other bodies and minds, within a space larger than the mind-body

dichotomy: a social, biological, and also psychological and historically framed, transindividual space. By transindividual here I mean two things: the transmission of the memory of the species through tools as external memory supports, and a generic base that each individual individuates in relation to others. The external memory support discussed here may take the form of a method that a dancer employs while teaching or performing. It transmits knowledge across bodies and generations while manifesting in each body as a singular variation. The individuation of movement is always more than an individualised skill possessed by a practitioner. The performance of skill is inherently relational and variable, emerging through the ongoing development of practice and its environmental or contextual conditions of belonging or estrangement.

In closing this paper, which considers studio-based findings through a transdisciplinary framework of concepts on motor learning from neuroscience, anthropology, and cognitive philosophy, two conclusions can be drawn. First, the research remains speculative in its intention; in other words, it hypothesises a correlation between dancers' understanding of embodied movement learning and motor cognition as a way of perceiving, anticipating, and inhabiting the environment. Second, this speculative effort provides the ground for rethinking choreography in a broader sense and with wider applicability across a variety of dance traditions, beyond current assumptions in Western contemporary dance that separate choreography from dance.

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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.

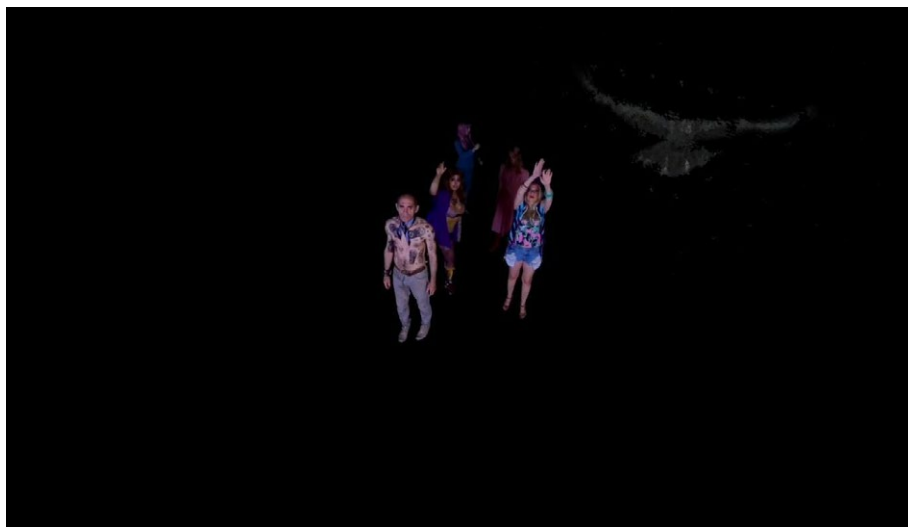


Image 5

“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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Aesthetic Attention Laboratory: Poetic Propositions for the Decolonisation of Attention

Laboratório Estético de Atenção: Proposições Poéticas para a Descolonização da Atenção

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Abstract

Due to the massive coupling with digital technologies and social networks, the colonisation of attention in current times has been discussed by various authors (Stiegler 2008; Crary 2014, 2023). The objective of this article is to analyse strategies developed in an aesthetic laboratory of attention, where the wager is that poetic propositions can create conditions for the displacement of the regimes of alert, vigilance, and dispersion, and for the cultivation of a joint attention open to the plane of affects. Based on the approach of the ecology of attention (Citton 2014, 2018) and inventive cognition (Kastrup 2009; Kastrup and Caliman 2023, 2025), the study proposes an expanded concept of attention, beyond the individual gesture of paying attention and the regime of focalization. It takes as its field of analysis the experience of an aesthetic laboratory of attention (LAB) held with university students gathered in regular meetings at the Institute of Psychology of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil. The research conducted is based on the cartographic method (Passos, Kastrup, and Escossia 2009; Passos, Kastrup, and Tedesco 2014). The analysis relies on the use of field notes and written accounts from participants. As a result, the research indicates that aesthetic experience in a group situation is capable of displacing colonised and naturalised forms of attention, which are hegemonic in current times. Moreover, it concludes that the cultivation of joint attention produces as effects the sustaining of

Keywords

attention, the formation of groupality, and the experience of rest.
ecology of attention | aesthetic laboratory of attention | colonisation | aesthetic experience | joint attention

Resumo

Em função do acoplamento maciço com as tecnologias digitais e com as redes sociais, a colonização da atenção na atualidade tem sido discutida por diversos autores (Stiegler 2008; Crary 2014, 2023). O objetivo deste artigo é analisar estratégias desenvolvidas em um laboratório estético de atenção, onde a aposta é que proposições poéticas podem criar condições para o deslocamento dos regimes de alerta, vigilância e dispersão e para o cultivo de uma atenção conjunta aberta ao plano dos afetos. Baseado na abordagem da ecologia da atenção (Citton 2014, 2018) e da cognição inventiva (Kastrup 2009; Kastrup and Caliman 2023, 2025), o estudo propõe um conceito de atenção ampliado, para além do gesto individual de prestar atenção e do regime de focalização. Toma como campo de análise a experiência de um laboratório estético de atenção (LAB) realizado com estudantes universitários reunidos em encontros regulares no Instituto de Psicologia da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, no Brasil. A pesquisa realizada inspira-se no método cartográfico (Passos, Kastrup, and Escossia 2009; Passos, Kastrup, and Tedesco 2014). A análise baseia-se na utilização de diários de campo e em relatos escritos dos participantes. Como resultado, indica que a experiência estética em situação grupal é capaz de deslocar formas colonizadas e naturalizadas de atenção, que são hegemônicas na atualidade. Além disso, conclui que cultivar a atenção conjunta produz como efeitos a sustentação da atenção, a formação de grupalidade e a experiência de descanso.

Palavras-chave

ecologia da atenção | laboratório estético de atenção | colonização | experiência estética | atenção conjunta

I. The colonisation of attention: critiques and displacements

Attentional problems have occupied a prominent place in the educational field, as well as in the sphere of work and daily life. Most of the time, complaints revolve around difficulties in focusing and paying attention to a task, and suspicions fall upon the diagnostic and individual explanation. For some time now, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has become a popular diagnosis, in rapid expansion across the globe, as has the pharmacological treatment almost always linked to it (Bergey et al. 2018; Caliman, Citton, and Prado 2023; Caliman and Prado 2019, 2020). In studies and research

on ADHD, the hegemonic cognitivist perspective predominates, supported by the biomedical and cerebral model, in which attention is considered as an individual mental process that operates on the binary logic 0-1, attention-inattention. In a certain sense, the predominance of the cognitivist perspective in studies on ADHD reveals a process of epistemological colonisation internal to attention studies that obscures the political and collective dimension of attentional processes, as well as their diversity, complexity, and joint aspect. Such an understanding has received a series of consistent critiques and has been the object of intense problematization (Kastrup and Caliman 2023; Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 2003; Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch 2003, 2006; Depraz 2010, 2015; Crary 2013, 2014, 2023; Citton 2014, 2018).

According to critical studies of the cognitivist model of attention (the enaction, inventive cognition, and ecology of attention approaches), attention is a complex process that is not reduced to the gesture of paying attention and focalization. Distraction is not a lack of attention, but one of its regimes. Concentration cannot be confused with focalization, and many other attentional gestures can be experienced (Kastrup and Caliman 2023, 2025). Attention is not an individual process, but an individuating one (Citton 2014). It is not simply a condition for learning processes, but it can be learned, cultivated, and educated (Ingold 2010, 2015, 2020; Lachaux 2013).

In line with the studies and research guiding this article, the understanding of attention is based on the concept of the production of subjectivity, proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1997), and is, therefore, always collective, produced by material, technological, aesthetic, economic, and political vectors. As Citton (2014) demonstrates, in addition to being collective, it also possesses a joint aspect insofar as we are influenced by the attentional exchanges that sustain the group relations in which we are embedded.

Thus, the ubiquity of attentional problems and their epistemological colonisation by cognitivist studies require, first of all, a broader and more complex diagnosis of attention in contemporaneity, capable of analysing what Kenneth Rogers (2024) calls the attention complex. It is a regime of power that brings together diverse fields of knowledge, digital technologies, the pharmaceutical industry, economic interests, ideological agendas, and pedagogical and health policies. In the attentional mille-feuille indicated by Citton (2014), it can be said that the attention complex makes explicit its collective aspect (collective attention). Maintaining close relations with the world of capital, the logic of colonialism, patriarchy, and ableism, the attention complex conditions what must be seen and valued collectively and individually. At the same time, it bears directly upon the constitution of hegemonic attentional regimes and gestures that in current times are strongly characterised by dispersion, alertness, and vigilance.

In the article herein, when addressing the collective side of attention, we give prominence to the analysis of its crossings by digital technologies, whose presence has become a dominant vector in the processes of subjectivation, producing notable effects on contemporary cognition. Not by chance, in his latest book, Jonathan Crary (2023), one of the great current thinkers on attention, conducts a thorough analysis of the effects of

the “internet complex” on perception. For Crary, the problem of online life is not merely the creation of consumer profiles and the production of continuous surveillance. In his view, the extreme speed of online connections fuels individualism and indifference to public and common life outside the screens. Relationships between people and the world become crossed by the monotony of digital systems, producing what Bernard Stiegler (2008) calls the colonisation of consciousness, the homogenization of experience, and the anaesthesia of the senses. It is, above all, a process of colonisation and incessant regulation of attention, whose effects directly interfere with our capacity for the constitution of a common and diverse life.

The gaze, the voice, and the face are particularly affected by the internet complex described by Crary. In the online world, simple and homogeneous forms and pasteurised colours colonise the gaze. Crary (2023, 148) states that paradoxically, the visual object capable of capturing the gaze corresponds to the one that is shallow and devoid of complexity. The ambiguous, strange, or problematic object finds no place. Everything must be of easy and immediate apprehension, allowing no room for uncertainty. Constituted by easy-to-use interfaces that demand almost no effort, in which scrolling is infinite and click-driven, online platforms channel our visual engagement from one point of fixation to the next. The objective is to generate predictable and routinised responses. Furthermore, it is a gaze isolated from the other senses and from embodied experience.

The capacity to listen to the other is also modulated and affected by the uses of online platforms, especially when the voice assumes a slower, hesitant, and reflective rhythm. The singular speed of a film or a voice message left on *WhatsApp*, with its spaces of silence and pauses, comes to be seen as unnecessary and uninteresting. The use of 2.0 speed prevails, creating an accelerated mode of listening and speaking.

For Crary (2023), we are also altering our capacity to see a face in its temporal nuances and its emotional expressiveness, especially when marked by ambiguity and the ambivalence of feelings. Emotions, in the age of the *emoji*, are almost always shared in a stereotypical manner. In the colonisation of facial perception and its expressivities, it becomes increasingly difficult to be sensitive to a strange expression that does not fit into a pre-defined and recognitive category.

In a certain sense, in the colonisation of attention, whether through the gaze, the voice, or the face and its emotions, it concerns the transformation of our relationship with alterity and with difference. In our view, the colonisation of attention by the informational complex described by Crary is an important source for understanding the multitude of lonely individuals, immersed in their screens, and, at the same time, the growing disinterest in community and face-to-face relations in public spaces. Crary is emphatic. It is, ultimately, a risk to democracy and to public and shared life, to the necessary cultivation of the common through practices of collaboration and solidarity.

The diagnosis of the collective aspect of attention resituates the understanding of attentional problems in current times and demands that we be able to construct exits distinct from the cognitivist interventions and perspectives that understand attention

as an individual capacity, which reinforce and fuel the individualism that, in turn, is one of the main effects of the colonisation of attention. It is in this direction that the concept of joint attention offers possibilities of displacement and resistance in the creation of new possibilities, especially in its articulation with aesthetic experience.

The notion of joint attention emerges in developmental psychology in the 1970s (Scaife and Bruner 1975). It describes a tendency in infants, at the end of the first year of life, to follow the mother's gaze when she shifts her gaze from the child to observe something in the space that both occupy. Recently, the concept has been expanded and used in other fields of knowledge, being understood as a phenomenon that accompanies us throughout life (Kastrup and Caliman 2023, 2025). For Yves Citton (2014), joint attention is what occurs when there are attentional exchanges in a situation of co-presence, of attentional reciprocity, and of affective attunement. It takes place between people, but also between people, things, and phenomena, opening space for the transformation of subjects and worlds.

The objective of this article is to analyse strategies developed in an aesthetic laboratory of attention, where the hypothesis is that poetic propositions can create conditions for the displacement of the regimes of alert, vigilance, and dispersion and for the cultivation of joint attention, open to the plane of affects. Based on the approach of the ecology of attention (Citton 2014, 2018) and inventive cognition (Kastrup and Caliman 2023, 2025), the study proposes an expanded concept of attention, beyond the individual gesture of paying attention and the regime of focalization. It takes as its field of analysis the experience of an aesthetic laboratory of attention held with university students gathered in regular meetings at the Institute of Psychology of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil. Throughout this article, we will present the proposal of the laboratory and, through the cartographic research with the analysis of participants' accounts, we will discuss some of its effects.

II. The Aesthetic Laboratory of Attention (LAB): an invitation to the experimentation of concepts

Seeking to resist hegemonic regimes and produce displacements regarding the problems of attention present in contemporary subjectivity, we created the Aesthetic Laboratory of Attention as a course open to the community at the Institute of Psychology of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, in 2022. It was a course with 12 meeting classes, lasting 2 hours each. The Laboratory's objective was to study and practice attention, with a view to the experimentation of concepts and the cultivation of different gestures and regimes of attention, beyond those that predominate and are valued in contemporary subjectivities, such as paying attention and focusing, and the regimes of alert and vigilance. It was conceived and conducted by professors and proposers who possessed some proximity to artistic practices and familiarity with aesthetic experience in literature, visual arts, music, and corporal practices.

The concept of the Aesthetic Laboratory of Attention (LAB) finds inspiration in the work of Yves Citton (2014) and in the way he understands aesthetic laboratories, which are at the centre of interest of the ecology of attention. A museum, a cinema, a book, or a performance hall can be aesthetic laboratories of attention when they are lived as attentional ecosystems that favour immersion in the aesthetic experience. The term “laboratory” evokes a scientific research apparatus in physics, chemistry, biology, or experimental psychology, being also used in the field of art. The laboratory is characterised by an attitude of joint experimentation. It is a space of investigation temporarily isolated from everyday life, where we test and surpass the limits of knowledge, of what can be perceived, felt, thought, and discovered. The aesthetic laboratory of attention aims to elicit an attitude of experimentation and encounters that produce dissonance in relation to the hegemonic regimes of attention in contemporaneity.

Citton (2014) evokes the etymology of the word laboratory, which initially includes *labour* — work. The aesthetic laboratory requires a working attitude — of the artist, the object itself, and the onlooker — who can be the listener or reader of a poem, the artist, or the appreciator of a show or performance, etc. In the case of the aesthetic laboratory of attention, it concerns, in the first place, an attentional work on the part of the participants, for an effort is needed not to yield to the seduction of easy categorisation, of recognition. It requires a work on oneself, on sensibility and affects, involving suspension, delay, deceleration, and the opening of attention. It also involves an effort by the proposers and the proposed activities to summon the participants’ attention and sustain it, as well as causing the crossing of attentions in their joint dimension. In the aesthetic laboratory, the proposers must be aware of the unpredictability of the experimentation process and the effects that will be produced. Citton (2014) also mentions a *praying attitude*. The laboratory is a *labour* oriented by prayer, insofar as we pray that some unlikely and random encounter takes place and that communion is possible, or rather, the creation of a common that leads us to experience a more ethical, free, and singular form of existence, connecting us with something that is greater than us and that expands us.

The notion of the aesthetic laboratory is developed by Citton (2014) when discussing the work of an international collective called the *Order of the Third Bird*, a group of people who, in different places around the world, dedicate themselves to a certain type of *attentional performance* in art museums. Its mission is to cultivate the attentional capacity and aesthetic experience of the group members through the sustaining of their gazes and bodies before a work that is contemplated jointly. Through the attention granted to it, the work gains value. This joint attention/value invites other gazes and attentions, thus multiplying the existence and value of the work, sometimes forgotten in a less noble space of the museum. More recently, this experience was unfolded and expanded by the creation of an *attentional activism* network named *Friends of Attention*¹,

¹ An important part of the production of this collective can be accessed at: <https://www.friendsofattention.net/about>.

which, in a similar direction, continues the proposition of attentional practices in their relation to aesthetic experience. In a certain sense, the *Order of the Third Bird* and the meetings held by the *Friends of Attention* are experiences that dialogue with the LAB and find resonances with it.

The Aesthetic Laboratory of Attention articulated two objectives. The first was to cultivate concentrated and open joint attention through practices with poetic propositions. The second was to hold face-to-face group meetings in an attentional ecosystem conducive to the relationship between bodies in their multisensory dimension. It aimed to create conditions for an encounter of bodies in their diversity, activating processes of embodied joint attention.

It is necessary to highlight that the poetic proposition is not a task. The distinction between a task and a proposition is that the task has expected, predefined results, right or wrong answers, while propositions produce effects with a margin for inventiveness, unpredictability, and openness to multiple layers of meaning. Propositions create conditions for aesthetic experience. In turn, aesthetic experience is understood as an experience of problematization. Indistinction, ambiguity, uncertainty, and estrangement are constitutive of it. It is distinguished from the experience of recognition, where the form is directly recognised and followed by categorisation. Estrangement, disturbance, shock, discomfort, surprise, astonishment, admiration, fright, and curiosity are expressions of the experience of problematization and modes of embodiment of aesthetic experience (Kastrup 2012; Bishop 2024). We can say that, running counter to the sensorimotor immediacy that is hegemonic in contemporaneity, aesthetic experience operates the permeability between perception, memory, and creative imagination. Without fitting into a single meaning and into a preformed category, it summons us to produce meaning, or rather, multiple layers of meaning.

Thus, aesthetic experience suspends the experience of recognition and automatic responses, characteristics of the mechanical stimulus-response functioning. A dissonance occurs between what I perceive and the categories available to me, suspending the experience of recognition and eliciting an attentional style that Jean-Marie Schaeffer (2015) describes as a delay of categorisation. This delay in categorisation, this hiatus in memory and prior knowledge, gives way to a back-and-forth movement between what I perceive in the present and what I am led to think, remember, feel, and imagine. By this path, aesthetic experience slows down experience and gives rise to the dimension of self-attention and reflected attention. There is a back-and-forth between the attention that turns to the object or situation and consults its limits and the self-attention, opening conditions of possibility for other modes of feeling, perceiving, thinking, and acting. In this sense, attention in aesthetic experience plays a role in the production of subjectivity and in the processes of individuation.

Regarding group aesthetic experience, we recall that we never pay attention alone (Citton 2014). We are interfered with by a collective dimension that conditions our attentional habits, such as the “internet complex” described by Cray (2023) and the

attention complex analysed by Kenneth Rogers (2024). However, as seen previously, in addition to being collective, attention is also joint. We are at the core of joint attention when we are in co-presence and cultivate relationships marked by *reciprocity* (without symmetry), by the effort of affective attunement, and by improvisation-invention. In the LAB, the cultivation of joint attentional relationality is joined by the proposal to slow down, to “waste time”, to activate spontaneous and unprogrammed modes of being together. We experience a form of attentive relationality, marked by an embodied, concentrated, and open joint attention, capable of inaugurating a singular attentional experience, less hostage to its homogenising, collective, and recognitive aspect.

The wager was that group aesthetic experience, the body-to-body encounter, and the cultivation of joint attention have the potential to activate modes of attention that are being constantly limited and inhibited in online relations and even in many of our face-to-face ecosystems. Hence the idea of promoting meeting classes, going beyond the verbal transmission of information about theories of attention. In the LAB, we inquired: Is the experience of estrangement and suspension facilitated when lived in an ecosystem of groupality and joint attention? Is it transformed? In which directions? What are its effects?

The LAB ecosystem

The concept of ecosystem has as its starting point Félix Guattari’s (1990) three ecologies: environmental, social, and subjective. We conceive the aesthetic laboratory of attention as an ecosystem favourable to the experimentation of attentional gestures and regimes in a situation of joint attention, implicated in the poetic invention of self and world. There is special care with the prior arrangement of the classroom in which the meetings will be held. Initially, in the classroom, there were chairs arranged in rows and the teacher’s desk at the front. After all, we were in a university, where the hierarchized model of teaching still prevails, centred on the figure of the teacher and based on the transmission of information. It was necessary, therefore, to start by reorganising the spatial dimension of the ecosystem, making it more conducive to the realisation of practices of attention cultivation. Most of the time, the chairs were moved aside, making room for the movement of bodies and other ways of inhabiting the room. We formed circles and, depending on the activity, we made use of beach sarongs, papers, speakers, and other objects, which came to form part of the ecosystem. In other situations, the proposition led us to go out and wander through the university campus.

Furthermore, in each practice, the careful management of the proposing duo was guided by the cultivation of relationality, of the participants’ joint attention to each other, but also to the materiality of the poetic proposition in progress — the text read or performed; the image observed and expanded in imagination; the various experiments with the body and its multisensory nature. In all these dimensions, our belief is that

cultivating joint attention can facilitate access to the aesthetic experience in its potential for producing subjectivity, just as openness to the relational plane of affects can create favourable conditions for the invention of shared existential territories.

The group and the dynamics of the work

The group was composed of 16 regular participants, including undergraduate and graduate students in psychology, as well as a postdoctoral fellow. One of the graduate students was visually impaired, which brought an interesting direction to the joint work, requiring everyone to displace visuocentrism, a quite naturalised cognitive policy in our everyday practices. To this extent, the concern with touch, hearing, and the sensitive activation of the multisensory body gained special inflexion and crossed throughout the work. The group also comprised three professors and four proposers responsible for the conception, conducting, and handling of the meeting classes.

The initial 4 meeting classes were dedicated to providing a theoretical basis for the practices that would follow. A diagnosis of attention in contemporaneity was presented, its hegemonic characteristics, and the limits of the cognitivist approach. We discussed the concept of attention, taking into account its different gestures, regimes, and modes of being attentive. We presented the traditional conception of attention and the displacements operated by the approach of inventive cognition and the ecology of attention. We also discussed the concepts of aesthetic experience and of the Aesthetic Laboratory of Attention.

From that point on, 8 meeting classes based on a guiding poetic proposition were conducted by a proposer pair, always involving bodily experimentation and articulated with a theoretical reference text. The earlier reading of the text was part of preparing the body for the class. These meeting classes began with a warm-up practice that we named “arriving” (chegança), aiming at cognitive deceleration and making the multisensory body more available. It was requested that cell phones be turned off, and then the proposition of the day was presented. At the end, a conversation circle was held for the exchange of experiences, which could include the reading aloud of fragments of the reference text and comments that related the text and the practice of the day. At the conclusion of the course, the proposal also included the writing of accounts of the experience by students and proposers, to be prepared at home and shared on the drive that had been made available. We sought to produce an ecosystem conducive to sensitive and poetic communication.

The “arriving” (chegança) and poetic propositions

Every meeting class dedicated to the experimentation of a poetic proposition began with a practice we named “arriving” (chegança). The “arriving” proposes activities to *arrive* in the classroom, to *arrive* in one’s own body, and to *arrive* with/in the group, given that, with the acceleration of everyday life, we are not always truly *present* to the experience. The purpose was to produce a cognitive deceleration and to experience the opening of bodies to their multisensoriality. The “arriving” was fundamental in the production of availability for the aesthetic experiences that would be lived and for the cultivation of groupality. Subsequently, the group was guided and invited to the experimentation of the poetic propositions.

The first meeting class was based on the shared reading aloud of poems and short prose texts, followed by the recording on paper of words emerging from the experience and the production of an improvised collective narrative, mobilising the joint dimension of attention and creation. The second meeting, in turn, had as its proposition the sustaining of attention to an enigma-image, in pairs and in silence, followed by sharing through the verbalisation of the experience, guided by the problem of the sustaining of joint attention.

The third meeting class brought the proposition of mobilising attention to ourselves — to body, movements, voice and joint attention — using a set of sound production activities through one’s own body. Traversing *back-and-forth* movements of attention, directing it “inward” and “outward,” it was possible to create an “in-between” and a common rhythm. A melody, a collective voice, *took shape*, giving life to an ecosystem of attention. The *acting* that assembles the composition of *joint acting/feeling* constituted the core of this practice.

In the following week, the group was invited to leave the classroom and experience another attentional ecosystem. Its proposition was to go out wandering through the university campus in small groups, experimenting with singular modes of walking, observing body and attention in movement. The experience of wandering and getting distracted in a *joint walk* opened space for the noticing of *things never perceived before*, to stop at them and observe them in greater detail.

Another proposition was for each participant to pay attention to their experience at breakfast, as well as to describe it in a written account, to be read and shared with the group in the following class. The activity would be carried out at home and without the presence of the group. It especially summoned a process of self-attention, a cultivation of attention to attention that offers a path and possibility for the knowledge and management of one’s own attention. Self-observation here assumed the dimension of self-production.

In the sixth meeting class, the proposition was to cultivate attention in the listening of sound compositions in three attentional dispositions directed towards: 1) *the source of the sound*, 2) *the heard sound*, and 3) *the felt sound*. Each sound composition was played

through a portable speaker, and the experimentation sought to diversify and expand the repertoires of sensibility. Participants were invited to notice the effects of such attentional dispositions on the listening experience and describe them in writing at the next moment, by exercising self-explanation. At the end of the activity, the accounts were shared with the group in a conversation circle. The practice suggests that the cultivation of self-attention — unfocused, peripheral, and receptive — can favour contact with the resonances that certain sound stimuli produce in us and that can produce inquiries regarding some micropolitical effects in the experience of self and of the world.

The seventh meeting class had as its proposition to cultivate a sensitive attention to micromovements, directed at the same time to self and to the other. The proposition was conducted in three moments. The first, of cultivation of self-attention, through a standing meditation called the *Small Dance*, practised in the context of Contact Improvisation dance (Paxton 1977). The second, of cultivation of joint attention, through the experimentation, in pairs, of an attentional disposition towards somatic touch, which invites tactile listening. The third, of creation of an attentional ecosystem for the collective experimentation of the work *Outragem*, an object that enables the encounter of two bodies in a state of listening. We sought in this practice to cultivate an attention situated in the zone of passage between self-attention and joint attention, to sensitise the body in its encounter with the other — the attentional experience of self in relation, a self in a state of tactile listening, in the encounter, in an ecosystem.

The last meeting worked with the proposition of paying attention to the other, at the same time as the other pays attention to us, through the practice of attentional sustaining. It was constituted on a non-verbal relational plane open to the duration of the meeting, slowing down and suspending the utilitarian and everyday habit of identifying and naming the other. In a state of reciprocity, the attention directed to the other coexists with a layer of self-attention, to one's own participation and function in this relation. Sustained attention to the other co-emerges with the attention sustained by the other.

III. Methodological strategies and effects

Methodological strategies

With a view to tracking the LAB process and analysing its effects, the course was accompanied by a research based on cartographic method (Deleuze and Guattari 1997; Rolnik 2006; Passos, Kastrup, and Escossia 2009; Passos, Kastrup, and Tedesco 2014). The method of cartography provides interesting clues, starting with the one of the cartographer-researcher's attention (Kastrup 2009), which defines it as concentrated and open to the collective plane of forces (Escossia and Tedesco 2009) and which is mobilised by aesthetic experience. Throughout the realisation of the LAB, we undertook the writing of field notes with a cartographic orientation—an embodied writing,

from within the experience (Gurgel 2023; Passos and Benevides 2009; Kastrup 2023).

The propositions conducted during the LAB meetings were accompanied by a constant exercise of writing. Initially, writing gave textual form to the aesthetic propositions and instructions. The proposing pair wrote an open protocol of what the day's practice would be, and this was shared with the research group. Writing took place during the meetings, by the proposing pair in field notes. Sometimes, the LAB's proposal for that day also included a writing session, in which participants were invited to engage in written recording. In the final stage, we asked students to write about their experiences during the 12 LAB meetings, highlighting a practice that had particularly touched them throughout the process, emphasising its effects. It was based on all these textual records that the research and the effects of the LAB were analysed. All participants authorised the use of their accounts in the writing and publication of scientific articles. The research analysis was based on content analysis and cartographic understanding of the analysis process (Bardin 1977; Barros and Barros 2013).

Effects — sustaining, groupality, and rest

The articulation of the two lines that configure the Aesthetic Laboratory of Attention — eliciting aesthetic experience through poetic propositions and offering a face-to-face ecosystem that favours joint attention and its cultivation — wagers on the potency of group aesthetic experience to face the challenge of transposing the limits that circumscribe contemporary subjectivity. The poetic propositions aim exactly to elicit the suspension of recognition and its immediate response. They enable the experience of problematization, produce a pause, and demand a slowing down of perception. It is necessary to pause in the movement. Faced with this, the invitation is for participants to arrive gradually, slow down, and reconnect with themselves, with the people, and with the elements and affects that constitute the ecosystem. The regularity of the meeting classes did not lead to mechanicity, to immediatism, and to a greater speed of attention to deal efficiently in a multitasking regime, but gave way to a differential and inventive repetition that opens gaps, suspends recognition, frequents the not-knowing, accepts estrangement, and welcomes the unusual. The three attitudes sustained in the laboratory — joint experimentation, work of cultivation, and the wager on the creation of an always unpredictable common — give body to the idea of producing modes of attention capable of resisting hegemonic regimes (alertness, dispersion, vigilance, and multitasking) and cultivating joint attention in times of digital addiction and exacerbated individualism. The challenge was not small.

Problematizing and critiquing the generalised medicalisation of attention is important. But even more important is to offer other possible paths (Caliman, César and Kastrup 2020). The aesthetic laboratory of attention points in the direction of art and aesthetic experience to operate bifurcations and paths that are at the same time gentler,

lighter, careful, and potent. Faced with the experience of problematization elicited by the poetic proposition, distraction is welcome and composes with memory and imagination for the production of multiple layers of meaning. Sustained, concentrated, and open attention to forces and affects was widely and repeatedly experienced. Practices with literature, with sounds, with the body, and with visual images offer conditions for multisensory aesthetic experience.

From the beginning and throughout the experimentation, we wagered on the potency of aesthetic experience in its relation to joint attention. The work carried out allows us to affirm that the feeling-with accessed in situations of joint attention facilitates and invites the experience of shared sustaining. If we identified that one of the problems of contemporary subjectivity is its difficulty in maintaining sustained, concentrated, and open attention, we expanded the understanding of this problem and indicated some ways out. We realised that the sustaining of attention is a joint work and emerges with the conditions of resonance established in a given relation. Affective attunement, as the sharing of a rhythm, a conjunction of proximity and intensity between bodies that meet, enables the duration and the sustaining of attention and presence. The affective bond sustains. To a certain extent, sustained attention to the other co-emerges with the attention sustained by the other and by the shared attentional ecosystem.

We realised that aesthetic experience, by inciting the suspension of automatisms and inviting access to the plane of sensible forces, places us in a disposition of openness that can be sustained and expanded when lived in conjunction with others who also embark on the experience. There is, then, sustaining and support. What is sustained is the openness, the active receptivity, and the expansion of the field of observation that open concentration enables. Sustained, at the same time, is the back-and-forth movement of self-attention and attention to the world, permeated by access to corporality and sensoriality. Sustaining here approaches the notion of duration. The experience of time appeared in several accounts throughout the practices. The invitation to duration in aesthetic experience — duration in the encounter — was a characteristic present in all practices.

Based on the accounts of the participants and of the proposer group itself, the work carried out in the Aesthetic Laboratory of Attention produced, therefore, effects of joint sustaining of attention, but also of formation of groupality and the experience of rest. Although the question of group aesthetic experience was present since the beginning of the work, the degree of proximity that would mark the relationship between the participants had not been foreseen. At the beginning of the work, there were 16 participants and 7 proposers, totalling 23 individuals. But a set of individuals is not yet a group (Lage 2021). With the continuity of the meetings, it was possible to perceive that the welcoming of the aesthetic experience and of the participants themselves triggered affective relations that connect the participants, enabling the formation of groupality as proximity, intimacy, and mutual care. It takes concrete form through the exercise of a peculiar form of reciprocal attention, with openness and availability towards the other, a touching and letting oneself be touched, responding attentively to this call. It necessarily

involves an attitude of correspondence, highlighting the relationship between attention and care (Campo 2024).

The third effect was the experience of rest and relaxation narrated by several participants in their accounts. It is necessary to remember that hegemonic contemporary subjectivities suffer from what is known today as digital fatigue. It is a matter of an experience of permanent tiredness, felt even by young people at different moments of the day, often already upon waking up. The phenomenon is attributed to the difficulty of living with the pause and silence, even when the body asks for rest. After a long day of work, study, and commuting in the city on often slow and crowded transport, recourse to the company of the cellphone is almost inevitable. Even when we lie down in bed, the cellphone comes with us and with it a multitude of news, posts, and random information. There is no true pause. Even the hours of sleep are invaded and stolen by social networks (Crary 2014). The effects of digital fatigue on attention still need to be better studied, but we know that it interferes directly with our capacity for concentration.

In the laboratory, we agreed that everyone would turn off their cellphones or not consult them during classes. For our part, there was an initial concern as to whether such an agreement would be kept, but it soon dissipated. There were a few students who consulted them from time to time. Some of them, more attached to the device, abandoned the course in the first classes. Soon, cellphones disappeared definitively from the LAB ecosystem. The agreement also applied to us, the group of proposers, and this was one of the reasons for the LAB not having photographic records. The account of the experience of rest and relaxation was also present at the end of many classes. Several times, participants made sounds with their mouths, yawned, stretched their bodies, and stretched out. We heard phrases such as “I arrived so tired, but it seems I rested here...”, “I came running, arrived late, but when I entered and saw the dimly lit environment, I already felt the atmosphere of the class, much lighter than outside”. It was unusual for us that the poetic propositions and the cultivation of joint attention would produce rest and relaxation in the so-called “rush” of everyday life. A feeling that also speaks of the relaxation of the hard and stiffened lines of an exacerbated individualism that distances us from alterity in us and in the world. To be able to relax and let one’s guard down at the University is not a trivial gesture. Often experienced as an ecosystem of evaluation, judgment, meritocracy, and ableism, the university can scrutinise, separate, and classify, in addition to automating and naturalising this functioning. To experience it as an attentional ecosystem that welcomes and allows one to be and to exist was also an effect of the work experimented.

Conclusion

The Aesthetic Laboratory of Attention starts from the realisation that one of the most important problems that attention faces in contemporaneity is the colonisation, by digital

platforms and social networks, of visual perception, auditory perception, and the perception of the emotions of a face. The tendency is for attention to be able to tolerate only objects, images, and texts whose meaning is instantly apprehended and the reaction is immediate. The problem of attention in contemporary subjectivity is not reduced to a lack of focus. We seek to highlight the importance of another problem that demands a critical discussion: the difficulty in maintaining sustained, concentrated, and open attention in the face of objects, images, and texts that carry some degree of ambiguity and uncertainty. The colonisation of the gaze, of the voice, and of faces provoked by the massive coupling with social networks and the entire internet complex reinforces individualism, creating obstacles to dealing with real people distinct from those who inhabit the digital universe. It is a matter, above all, of our relationship with alterity — in us and in the world — an ethico-political and clinical problem. Cognitive acceleration is also one of the perverse effects of capitalism and of the productivism that it incites.

This study was based on the ecological approach to attention (Citton 2014) and the inventive cognition approach (Kastrup and Caliman 2023). Its aim was to analyse the effects of attentional ecosystems that work with poetic propositions and the experimentation of concepts through bodily and multisensory practices carried out in groups. Articulating the three ecologies proposed by Guattari (1990) — environmental, social, and subjective — these ecosystems proved favourable to the cultivation of joint attention and the formation of group dynamics, as well as to the cultivation of sustained attention and the experience of rest. Poetic propositions create conditions for the deceleration of cognition, hegemonic in contemporary times, and for sustained attention, insofar as the aesthetic experience requires pause and a slower time for the experience of problematization, which does not fit into the immediacy of recognition. In this sense, the Aesthetic Attention Laboratory (LAB) proposes a new pedagogical policy — based on poetic propositions and not on tasks — contributing to the decolonisation of attention.

Finally, the study appears to yield interesting and promising results regarding the power of aesthetic experience and the experimentation of concepts in pedagogical ecosystems more conducive to improvisation and invention. It was based on cartographic research that followed a course on the theme of attention with university students of psychology and related fields at a Brazilian public university. We hope that the study can inspire other investigations that explore the use of aesthetic propositions and their effects on subjectivation at different levels of schooling, in diverse pedagogical contexts.

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Both authors contributed to all stages of this study.

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AI tools Ferramentas de IA

No AI tools were used.

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Rhythm and Self-perception — Performatively Disrupting the Self by Paying Attention to Attention

***Ritmo e auto-percepção —
Performativamente perturbando
o Eu prestando atenção à atenção***

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Abstract

The contemporary discussion about attention is often inextricably connected with moral judgments about how, and to what, we should pay attention — and with a recurrent vilification of media technologies. Through a shift from a critique of the economy of attention to the ecology of attention, and by considering the poststructuralist debate on the ontotechnology of humans, we show that there is a central concern with the loss of control over the self and an emphasis on differentiation, order, and systematicity. This can be understood as a preoccupation with the rhythm of attention, life, and mediation processes. Art, on the other hand, can

be thought of as a particular type of space, where experimentation with attention can happen beyond everyday assumptions and hegemonic understandings of how attention should manifest. By engaging with an existing artistic piece, *Bad Touch*, and building on it a series of technologically-driven feedback loop systems that are particularly sensitive to an embodied process of focusing on attention itself, we show how the voluntary loss of control — assisted by technology purportedly aimed at ensuring control — can better help us reflect on attention itself, and on how binary logics of dis/attention, un/control, or in/human fall flat within certain contexts; how the loss of rhythm can hold creative potency precisely because it can be derived from a wilful foregoing of instrumental control. We end by reflecting on what this illuminates in terms of the human/machine, body/mind, artist/artwork dichotomies, and how it can better help us value alterity as a precondition for sameness, and for attention as a system of valuing alterity.

Keywords

practice as research | biofeedback | technomediation | performance arts | ecologies of attention

Resumo

A discussão contemporânea sobre a atenção está frequentemente e intrinsecamente ligada a julgamentos morais sobre como e em relação ao quê devemos prestar atenção — e à vilificação recorrente das tecnologias de mediação. Através da passagem da crítica à economia da atenção, para um olhar sobre a ecologia da atenção, e considerando o debate pós-estruturalista sobre a ontotecnologia dos seres humanos, compreendemos a centralidade que a preocupação com a perda de controle sobre o Eu ocupa, bem como uma busca pela ênfase sobre a alteridade, ordem e sistematicidade. Isso pode ser visto como uma preocupação com o ritmo da atenção, da vida e dos processos de mediação. A arte, por outro lado, pode ser pensada como um tipo específico de espaço, onde a experimentação com a atenção pode ocorrer, para além dos pressupostos quotidianos e das compreensões hegemónicas sobre como a atenção se deve manifestar. Partindo de uma peça existente, *Bad Touch*, e construindo sobre ela uma série de sistemas de *feedback* tecnologicamente orientados que são particularmente sensíveis a um processo corporal de foco na própria atenção, demonstramos como a perda voluntária de controle — assistida por tecnologias supostamente destinadas a garantir o controle — pode apoiar a nossa reflexão sobre a própria atenção, e sobre como as lógicas binárias em torno de des/atenção, des/control e des/humanidade falham em certos contextos; como a perda de ritmo pode ter potencial criativo precisamente porque pode ser derivada de uma recusa deliberada face ao controlo instrumental. Por fim, procuramos refletir sobre o que este trabalho artístico clarifica, no que toca às dicotomias humano/máquina, corpo/mente, artista/obra de arte, e como isso pode reconfigurar o valor da alteridade, encarando-a como uma condição prévia para a mesmidade, e a atenção como um sistema de valorização da alteridade.

Palavras-chave

prática como investigação | biofeedback | tecnomediação | artes performativas | ecologias da atenção

Introduction

In contemporary artistic and performative practices, attention is no longer understood as a static cognitive resource, but rather as a dynamic and distributed ecological phenomenon (Citton 2017). Attention is not fixed; it can be felt as fully absorbing our immediate sensory experience at one moment, and seem like it drifts away the next. Driven by signals from the body, technology, and the surrounding environment, it is a process made of flows, shifts, and transformation. This paper explores how such attentional dynamics emerge in a live, heartbeat-driven performance.

This paper is based on our experimental performance project, *The (heart)Beat*, which explores how technology, acting as a supplement to the body, intervenes in a heartbeat-driven interactive music performance and shapes the performer's awareness of their own attention. We examine how the inherent instability of the performance triggers attentional shifts, redirecting the performer's focus from the predetermined musical structure toward an awareness of their own bodily states and internal rhythms. In our exploration, we used Casey Cangelosi's *Bad Touch*, a piece characterised by strong rhythm and a body-centred focus, to explore its interaction with real-time bio-feedback visualisation. Besides the visual dramaturgy associated with the pre-recorded music, the heartbeat rhythm runs throughout the piece and is continuously visualised, producing partially uncontrollable graphical effects that emerge from the performer's physiological state.

Coming from a Practice as Research approach (Nelson 2022), our experiment also explores how the intervention of sensors and other digital technologies may influence performers' attention and bodily experiences. Therefore, the central question of this study is: how does technology become part of the performers' attention and bodily experience of performing? And also, how can artistic practice be mobilised to produce new insights about the role of media technologies in today's sociopolitical landscape?

Performing arts have long since made use of computers, sensors, code and other emerging technologies, often adapting corporate products aimed at the general consumer, with varying levels of critical self-awareness towards that same technology and corporate culture (Birringer 2008; Goto 1999). Our contribution adds to this ongoing dialogue not only through its practical articulation of technology, but also through our reflection on it, and its relevance is renewed in light of recent discussions around so-called 'Artificial Intelligence' (AI).

This paper begins with a brief overview of how the concept of attention has evolved in the context of communication studies, to then integrate it in an artistic framework. Next, it explores how the body is inseparable from technology, and how artistic practices can help us reflect on that connection, starting from the embodied perception of the authors' own bodies in their own musical experiences. Then, it explains how integrating the performers' biosignals in the artistic creative process can highlight how performance arts form their own contextual ecologies of attention. In the section that

follows, we explain how these ideas came together in our reinterpretation of Cangelosi's percussion piece, *Bad Touch*, how, in this process, technology helped attend to our attention in unexpected ways, and what theoretical considerations about ethics, values, and nonduality we can derive from that.

Attention and mediation

Media studies have long focused on different ways in which attention is mobilised, co-opted, transformed, and more. Some of the earliest studies on the role of mainstream, or mass, media have precisely to do with the political and social impacts that come from engaging with media; and their attempt to understand their *influence* (Esteves 2009).

However, at the centre of these studies and debates often sits a somewhat techno-determinist approach to how we interact with media, fuelling old and new media panics about loss of culture, intelligence, mental ability and more (McRobbie and Thornton 1995). More so, these media panics are not only visible in mainstream discourse, but also in academic publications.

The recent rise in profile of large language generative models (LLMs) has made this debate all the more salient when it comes to artistic studies. As Lev Manovich and Emanuele Arielli (2025) duly note, framing artistic endeavour as a quintessentially human characteristic or skill seems increasingly difficult to do. On the other side of the artistic process (i.e., the audience), the loss of focus and ability to concentrate, or the capturing of our psyche and brains, are common leitmotifs.

As Dylan White (2024) remarks, behind such debates is a whole different issue — namely, agency, self-determination, and ultimately, *control*. However, such dichotomies often fail to attend to the material realities of how attention operates, what it is, or how multifaceted and non-deterministic it presents itself. Ironically enough, the critique of capitalist “attention economies” tends to assume, and thus validate, an intrinsically economist ontology of attention.

Etymologically, the word comes from the Latin “*attendere*”, meaning ‘to stretch towards’. Such an origin can help us understand why Citton (2017) says that “attention” is a doing — it is an action or process, rather than an object that can be accumulated, spent, hoarded or traded. It is also a process that requires a dislocation of self towards something else, and thus an orientation, but does not require a specific type of (metaphorical) orientator.

While it is outside the scope of this paper to give a full account of the different theories or empirical research on attention — as well as the ensuing critiques — we wish to emphasise several important characteristics here: the interpersonal, historical, situational, and embodied nature of attention.

As White (2024, 10) wrote, “what we attend to will affect our values and subsequent self-control decisions [...] [and just] as what we attend to will shape our values,

[...] our values similarly shape what we choose to attend to”. Attention is never neutral nor non-contextual and, since values impact the choices that shape our attention, and those values are historically and interpersonally (re)produced and contested, no full account of attention can be fully centred on any individual subject. Furthermore, because values are also deployed in different ways at different times, there is no possible way in which we can develop objectivist descriptions of how attention will operate in a given — abstract, theoretical — context, for a hypothesised subject.

Regardless, the experiencing of attention is often done individually (e.g., ‘I feel that my attention was grabbed’, or ‘I feel like I want to pay attention to something’) and, in fact, just like there is no way of thinking through attention by isolating subjectivity, there is also no way of doing it by abstracting the subject away. Rather than framing this, as is often done, as a case of quasi-economic depleting resources that the subject undergoes, we instead align with White in that “trade-offs among expected reward, cognitive effort, incentive structures, and values dictate where and when we *choose* to attend and exert self-control” (2024, 15, italics in original).

Arts as a laboratory of attention

Part of those trade-offs relate to how we *feel*, both when paying attention and when not — since *not* paying attention is something that can happen volitionally, rather than just being the result of the *failure* of something to make us extend ourselves in its direction; this is particularly evident when it comes to wilful ignorance (Posey 2021; Jones et al. 2023; Williams 2021; Abondio 2024). This means that, as Citton (2017) argues, drawing on Aspe, we should pay attention to the resonances present in attention.

We can understand resonance as an “affective dynamic”, as Paasonen (2011) calls it. Appropriately, Paasonen also uses “attention” to address how certain contents seem to have a bodily impact on us, and how that in turn shifts what we choose to attend, in ways that are “intimately connected with the technological horizons of possibility — that is, different media technologies afford and enable some activities and not others” (2011, 258). Resonance is not about sameness or identity:

To resonate with one another, objects and people do not need to be similar, but they need to relate and connect to one another. Resonance encompasses the emotional and cognitive as well as the sensory and affective, and it points to the considerable effort involved in separating the two (Paasonen 2011, 16).

Such an analysis, then, foregrounds the importance of situating — historically, technically, culturally, situationally, materially, physically — any given attentional dynamic, and the pitfalls and potentials that can there and then manifest, as well as which ones actually do and do not. As we note further on, one of the most important ways of paying

attention — of being in an affective dynamic with others — is empathy. Empathy has been centrally addressed in the context of artistic thinking since the early 19th century, as a way to understand how a subject can perceive something as being beautiful (Clohesy 2013, 11); and later was seen as a prerequisite for the development of morality itself, standing at the centre of the connection between Self and Other (Clohesy 2013, 17). However, the *ability* to have empathy does not suffice: for the Other to be seen as worthy of empathy, it must first be recognized as an Other in a way that does not result in ontic injustice (Jenkins 2023, 24) — thus requiring that the Self pays proper moral attention to it, and that the *conditions* for the enacting of that attention exist in the first place.

The importance of considering the context in which we *do* attention is why Citton (2017) shifts from considering an economy of attention to an *ecology* of attention, and thus to a multilayered non-deterministic and non-binary approach to how some people (do not) stretch towards something. After all, the concept of ecology arose precisely to address the “interdependency between [an] organism and its environment” (Pasquinelli 2026, 5).

For Citton (2017), artistic practices can act as valorisation laboratories: times and spaces where our values (and their subsequent trade-offs) are different from those we deploy in our everyday lives, and especially in the context of hyper-accelerated capitalism. In this way, then — and since valorisation is the centre of moral intersubjectivity — these laboratories can open up space for embodied, reflexive empathy in and through the arts.

Not only, as he notes, there is a particularly strong resonance in watching and/or performing live — the possibility of failure, disappointment, and success creating uncertainty about what the experience will be until it already was — but that resonance is also enmeshed in other people’s experience of being there with us; what Citton (2017) calls “meta-attentional engagement”. The audience present at an event is there with each other, and never only with the artist(s) or work(s) presented. Likewise, in live performance contexts, those who are performing are doing so in the presence of others, and may feel more (or less) in resonance with them, which then impacts how they attend to what they are doing.

Taken together, our approach breaks up facile dichotomies — namely between subject and object (“attention should be thought of as an interface: it is what links a subject to the object it has selected in something external to it [and so] it is irrelevant to wonder if it should be situated on one side rather than the other” (Citton 2017, 174–75)), or the derived author/work, performer/audience, watched/watching, immediate/mediated dualities. Therefore, as we later explore in more depth, our laboratory is set up to draw attention *to* attention, recursively, and to thus deploy technical control systems to *choose* to relinquish control over the exact manifestation of the aesthetic product being presented, in ways that integrate the resonance of the audience over the performer while denying both the audience and the performer the ability to control how that resonance manifests.

Integrating Technology

According to Sloterdijk's ([1993] 2024, [2004] 2016, [2001] 2017; Pavanini and Lemmens 2023) philosophy of technology, there is no — and never has been any — divide between human and technology. Anthropogenesis is anthropotechnical. It is precisely the feedback effect of our technical practices that creates us. Our drive towards mutual protection, pampering and safeguarding — what he calls luxuriation — shapes our environment, which, in turn, shapes us. Our biological evolution is then a consequence of this technological deployment, not its cause. On a similar note, Bruce Mazlish (1995) talks about how discontinuities were produced as strategies for creating anthropocentric superiority (the one between human and machine is one such discontinuity), but those discontinuities keep being undone, leading him to talk about humans and machines as “co-produced”.

That is not to say that there is no tension between people's subjective experiences and technology, or between technology and the environment — Heidegger (1999) famously distinguishes different forms of technology precisely by thinking through the ways in which these three things connect. As with anything else, there are always ambivalences.

The current discourse around so-called AI illustrates this well: since its recent widespread accessibility, it has become commonplace to perceive it as a convenient and powerful tool to be used in their work and day-to-day life. Yet, even disregarding ethical considerations, it is undeniable that the massive data centres required to run it are already straining local water supplies and power grids and heavily polluting the communities surrounding them, disproportionately affecting marginalised people, and impacting their health (Smith 2026), thus directing and influencing their bodies and behaviours.

Relying on an LLM to find information quicker is different, but no less technologically mediated than going to a library to look things up in physical books. Technology, according to Pavanini and Lemmens' (2023, 18) reading of Sloterdijk, is “an interstitial and irreducible third within the traditional dichotomy between spirit, mind or form, on the one hand, and matter, body or substance, on the other” (see also Sloterdijk ([2001] 2017, [2004] 2016)). More recently, Matteo Pasquinelli (2026) has argued that LLMs sit at the confluence of two historic conceptual mergers — that of bodies and machines, and that of language and machines — resulting in the attempt to automate “the relational structures historically produced by human cooperation” (p. 9), thus endangering our ability and potential for empathy — not via distraction, but rather via an embodied *unlearning* of empathy and connection, and a disregarding of the ethical, aesthetic, and epistemic confluences between technology and embodiment.

To reiterate, our embodied existence cannot be described as purely biological. We constantly supplement ourselves with technology. Leder (1995, 20) calls this cyclical process “incorporation”, describing how it (trans)forms bodies: “a skill is finally and fully learned when something that once was extrinsic [...] now comes to pervade my

own corporality”. Once a musician learns their instrument, it mostly disappears into their perception and becomes as much a part of them as their hands. However, as White notes, there is no contradiction between this seeming automatism and attention and control: “automaticity is a form of control [...], dual-process accounts which distinguish voluntary, intentional control from automatic, reflexive behaviour are untenable” (White 2024, 10). That automaticity only comes from the choice of attempting to master the instrument, not in spite of or besides it.

Bodies are also socially and politically defined. It is only in contrast with the Other that one can become fully aware of their own body and construct their self-image. Self-understanding is, in part, shaped by the collection of experiences of others gazing upon us, perceiving and judging us in certain ways. In fact, and in connection to our previous point about empathy and the Other, alterity is a precondition for the self to exist (Ricoeur 2015). Through empathy, the process of mutual incorporation can take place (Leder 1995). Empathy deploys difference, and this articulation can be felt as dangerous:

an empathic experience of difference, in giving us a *lived* sense that our lives represent only one way of being in the world, and by giving us a *lived* sense of the violence we commit to Difference in order to sustain the unity of our identities, has profound ethical implications (Clohesy 2013, 25; italics in the original).

Deploying attention to these processes of empathy can then be a mindful, ethical approach to engaging with alterity in an embodied way.

Two jazz musicians at a jam session supplement each other through communication, through intentionally placing their attention on the other’s body language and sounds they produce, mutually opening to new musical possibilities. Likewise, an audience is invited to pay attention to what is happening on stage, to share a common experience with the people in the seats next to them, and they can perceive things they otherwise could not. Their perspective is enriched. As Citton puts it, “the intensity of a live performance does not only come from this live temporality, but also from the sharing of the same space which puts spectators in the localised presence of the performers” (Citton 2017, 101).

This bidirectional incorporation means that the performers themselves are, in turn, often aware of the audience’s dedicated attention. There is a feedback loop between them, which is why performing for a live audience tends to be a wholly different experience to the lone practice of collective rehearsing.

The above can better help us understand how the body is an *assemblage*¹, as understood by Deleuze and Guattari (2007). As Currier explains, “assemblages are functional

¹ We use here the English term, but we would also like to note that this translation is somewhat misleading. The original term, “*agencement*”, clearly points out that there are processes of subjectification and identification central to this coming together of disparate elements, and that we can, yet again, see a concern with agency and wilful action (Nail, 2017).

conglomerations of elements but, importantly, the component elements are not taken to be unified, stable or self-identical entities or objects” (Currier 2003, 325). Bodies are constantly constructed and negotiated in their supposed naturalness (Cardoso and Scarcelli 2021).

As two out of three of us are musicians ourselves, we turn to our artistic practice to make sense of these concepts. Some we knew in an embodied, implicit way well before we tried to put them into words, or found authors and their theories to explain them. Some, we only recognised after theory gave us a structured framework to analyse our own experiences. We realised, mostly in a non-reflexive way, that when playing musical instruments, in a so-called “flow state” (Mark 2023), the perception we had of our own bodies somehow included the instruments themselves. We knew that drawing the line between human and machine wasn’t such a straightforward affair, as Turing (1950) himself demonstrated by creating a hypothetical situation where humans could very well fail to be recognised as humans.

Methodology

We follow here the basic principles of Practice as Research (Nelson 2022) and its epistemic stance, and mark ourselves as constructivist, inasmuch as we focus on how elements like ‘attention’, ‘experience’ and ‘perception’ are construed in ways that do not fit the nature/nurture or mind/body dichotomies (Huffer 2009). Thus, we draw on a wide range of influences that highlight how knowledge-making is a situated (Haraway 1988) and embodied (Butler 1993) process, and consider that it is by focusing on those elements that we can better attain strong objectivity (Harding 2015). We also note that such an epistemic stance needs to be explicitly political (Alcoff 1993), especially considering how art is political in itself (Benjamin [1936] 2010).

Our methodological approach is intimately enmeshed with our techno-artistic practice. It is through it that we found ways to explore our research questions. We believe that fluidity is a necessary part of any creative endeavour, and one which can deeply enrich academic research as well. Following the principles of Practice as Research, we set out to “*attend differently*” (Nelson 2022, 38) (paying attention to our attention) to our artistic practice through an academic lens, self-critically and self-reflexively, focusing on experiential modes of knowing, and employing a multi-modal enquiry process.

For reasons of theoretical coherence, here too we see knowing as a sociotechnical process — which is why we draw on the concept of “*poiesis*”, understood as everything that encompasses an artistic process capable of “open(nig) up new territories of being” (Whitehead 2003, 3) for both artist and recipient. Thus it becomes a research method in and of itself: “practical *poiesis* becomes for the artist a means of knowing when and how to incline or induce the self-presencing of things, things let be of their own innermost need” (Whitehead 2003, 11).

Here too, empathy is what allows this faithfulness to come into fruition. It is by attending to how the “gift of art” (Whitehead 2003, 11) can be deeply moving that we can analyse the “essential solidarity and common ground” (Agamben 1999, 102) in, and between, artists and observers. Furthermore, this assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 2007) of artists-artwork-receiver highlights the embodiedness of poiesis, since it is also an experience of “bidirectional incorporation” (Leder 1995, 88), where someone simultaneously feels the body of the artwork as part of their own materiality, and their own body as part of the artwork’s materiality. This approach is well suited to address our research questions since, on the one hand, it keeps the focus on the embodied experience of the artist/performer, allowing us to explore how technology affects it. On the other hand, because it illustrates how experiencing the gift of art can foster empathy and appeal to the common ground between people, it helps us understand how and why our insights remain relevant to look at the role of technology in today’s socio-political stage.

By utilising digital technologies, namely sensors, software to manipulate and generate graphics in real time based on the sensor data and audio recording devices, we sought to visually further externalise the corporeal, biological process that is the heart-beat in a way that explicitly attempts to value it and, through that, orient attention to it. Not only the performers’, but also that of the audience. Thus, this technological mediation becomes part of the ecological context in which attention can be mobilised, in the context of this performance. Biofeedback becomes central to the creative and artistic process, and can be used to reflect on the experiences of embodiment that arise in this context; a form of work similar to what Citton calls an “attentional performance [...] the production of a joint co-presential attention to the work, an attention which is itself raised to the level of artistic activity” (Citton 2017, 153).

The careful documentation of the performance, namely in its video recording, extended the creative process past the moment of its capture, allowing for space to include Daniel Cardoso’s feedback and artistic sensibility in the video editing phase. Furthermore, the option of playing it back at will allows for deeper self-reflection not only by Yi Huang and Gabriela Marramaque, but especially in the joint author discussions, where Daniel Cardoso’s more specifically academic contribution was particularly fruitful. Finally, we applied a very pragmatic poiesis to the end, approaching the academic writing itself with the same fluidity we dedicated to the rest of the creative process, aware it too became part of the ecological system of attention we set out to explore.

Biofeedback, Attention, and Bodily Awareness in Interactive Performance

Biofeedback refers to the use of technological systems to monitor physiological signals — such as heart rate, respiration, or muscle activity — and translate² them into perceptible forms of feedback, supporting users' awareness and self-regulation of bodily states, particularly within contemporary interactive and musical interfaces (Yu et al. 2018). When physiological signals are integrated into interactive systems, they are indeed translated into feedback that is perceived differently than what the participants are used to, effectively externalising part of their own embodied experience. This allows for a space where participants' physiological states influence system outputs. In turn, the system's feedback affects participants' attention and mental state, forming a continuous feedback loop in which attention is repeatedly redirected between bodily signals and system responses (Kaushal 2019).

In both clinical settings and music performance research, biofeedback is commonly used to support emotional regulation, reduce performance anxiety, and help performers maintain a more stable and regulated attentional state (Borges et al. 2023). In music performance research, heart rate variability (HRV) biofeedback has been shown to help performers maintain bodily balance while recalibrating their sense of rhythm, while also enhancing their awareness of breathing and heartbeat fluctuations (Thurber et al. 2010).

In the context of artistic and interactive performance, the role of biofeedback extends beyond a mere self-regulation tool, gradually becoming a creative medium in which participants' physiological states directly shape the generation and perceptual experience of the work (Ortiz et al. 2011). By externalising internal physiological signals into auditory or visual feedback, the performer's bodily state becomes an integral part of the performance, rendering bodily processes perceptible within the performance itself. While this integration enables performers to perceive their bodily conditions more clearly, their engagement with the system and the environment can lead to dynamic, continuously shifting experiences of bodily awareness and attention.

As described earlier, in our experimental performance, heart rate signals were captured in real time and translated into visual feedback. Using a contact microphone attached to the performer's body with an elastic necklace, we amplified subtle internal rhythms that are normally difficult to notice. By turning these physiological signals into

2 While it is outside the scope of this paper to go in depth into translation theory, we would still like to clarify that, following Susan Bassnett (2005, 86–87) and her mobilization of feminist and postcolonial theory within translation studies, our use of 'translate' does not deal with "equivalence, premised on binary oppositions between source and target" — which she equates with a traditionalist approach to translation —, but rather a "plurivocal site" where "Otherness [...] is rather seen as a component element in the field of negotiation [of meaning]", characterized by "boundarylessness, of movement in-between and across as a metaphor for contemporary world transactions". Any process of translation is a process of transformation, creating both familiarity and estrangement, literally transforming (i.e., changing the form of) things in ways that allow for more ways of engaging with them.

visible feedback, the performer could more easily sense changes in her bodily state during the performance and adjust her movements and timing accordingly, while also experiencing firsthand how bodily sensations and musical structures influence each other. Such bodily engagement resonates with Coelho's (2017) discussion of attention practices (in the original, "práticas de atenção"), where embodied practice allows performers to perceive subtle internal rhythms, make moment-to-moment decisions, and respond to the dynamics of a performance environment. By engaging bodily awareness in this way, performers experience how attention, perception, and movement continuously interact in choreographic practice.

Building on this, we selected a rhythmically strong, body-centred piece, which caused performers' attention to continually shift between the fixed musical rhythm, heart rate feedback, and bodily sensations, producing an open and dynamically unstable attentional state. This fluctuation resonates with theoretical perspectives in Claire Bishop's *Disordered Attention* (2024), where attention in contemporary art and performance is described as mutable, variable, and shaped by mediated and immersive conditions. Notably, because the heartbeat feedback was amplified so strongly, the performer sometimes unconsciously followed it too closely, which disrupted the original musical rhythm. In contrast, in versions without biofeedback, performances were rhythmically more stable and precise.

Furthermore, in interactive music performance, biofeedback not only provides performers with real-time perception of their internal bodily rhythms but also influences their attention. This externalisation of these typically unnoticeable bodily rhythms reflects the ecological and distributed nature of attention, where focus emerges from interactions among body, technology, and environment (Citton 2017). It also aligns with Citton's (2018) discussion of attention in mediated and technological environments, illustrating how virtualised feedback can influence attentional distribution.

In our performance, however, biofeedback was not introduced to improve self-regulation. Instead, it brought normally unnoticed bodily processes into the foreground of Yi Huang's experience. The heightened awareness of heartbeat, breathing, and muscular tension continually redirected attention away from the musical structure and back toward her body. This did not make the performance more stable. Instead, it revealed attention as something embodied, relational, and constantly changing.

In the next section, we explain the last point of contact in this cyclic process — the original piece, and why and how we mobilised its characteristics in the context of our work.

Bad Touch by Casey Cangelosi

Casey Cangelosi is an American percussionist, composer, and educator. His work focuses on rhythm and bodily awareness, often combining music, movement, and performance in ways that highlight the performer's physical presence, a concept explored in performance studies literature as the phenomenal body through which performers

engage and affect audiences (Fischer-Lichte 2024). Unlike traditional percussion pieces that primarily focus on sound or pitch, Cangelosi's compositions treat the body and its interaction with space as an integral part of the musical structure. His work explores how performers align rhythm within a fixed temporal framework through body awareness and controlled movement, making attention, bodily perception, and musical timing central elements of the performance.

One of his notable works, *Bad Touch* (2013), illustrates this approach well. Commissioned by the Thai percussionist Paopun Mu Amnatham, the piece is written for a solo performer with playback, meaning all sounds come from pre-recorded audio rather than live instruments. The work is divided into several distinct sections, each requiring the performer to precisely coordinate movements with the recorded track and maintain tight synchronisation within the fixed timing of the piece. The physical materials needed are minimal — handheld LED lights, a lamp, an extension cable with a foot switch, and a single drumstick — but the performance relies heavily on careful coordination between movement, light, and audio. In our rendition, we replaced both the LEDs and lamp with a video projection, and the manipulation of it was given to the second performer, Gabriela Marramaque, the one responsible for the technical operation. Performances are typically presented in dim or nearly dark spaces, which enhances the visual impact of the light effects and makes the relationship between movement and rhythm more apparent. Each movement directly corresponds to the audio, shifting the focus of rhythm from instruments to the performer's body itself, providing a clear, hands-on context for studying rhythm perception and bodily experience.

We chose *Bad Touch* for our experiment because it places rhythm, bodily awareness, and attention at the centre, making shifts in attention easier to observe and directly relevant to the performance outcome. Unlike traditional percussion performances, which use physical instruments to produce rhythm through the sound they make, this piece generates rhythm through the performer's bodily movements, which are precisely synchronised to a pre-recorded playback track. Without directly producing sound live, the performer's sense of timing, movement precision, and internal rhythm become essential for realising the work, which also makes attention more visible.

In our experiment, we added real-time heartbeat biofeedback visualisation to the original piece. By highlighting the heartbeat in this way, Yi Huang and Gabriela Marramaque could both perceive changes in the internal rhythm of Yi Huang, the percussionist. This intervention introduced a new kind of tension, making small deviations between bodily rhythm and musical timing more noticeable, as we later explore.

Because the original piece already integrates movement, music, and performance, this addition did not disrupt its core concept. It provided instead another way to explore the performer's awareness of their own body and sense of rhythm. In this sense, for us, *Bad Touch* is not only a musical work, but also a framework for experimentation, allowing attention to be observed and studied as an ecological, distributed, and dynamically unfolding process.

A separate track is used to both reproduce the instrumental piece and feed it to VS2 for further interactive video manipulation. The MIDI controller is set up to allow for the manipulation of some of VS2's parameters during the performance. The contact microphone is run through a Direct Injection box (DI box)⁴ to better avoid noise contamination. The processing chain applied to the heartbeat in the DAW ensures the signal that is sent to VS2 is going to produce the desired effect on the video generation, namely, equalization to highlight the frequencies that better represent the signal, and compression, to ensure audio signal peaks that are loud and even enough. VS2 outputs the video stream at 1080×1920 resolution using Spout (a real-time video routing system for Windows), which is sent to a dedicated receiver, allowing for the graphics to be projected with minimal latency.

The performance was recorded with two cameras, in multiple takes, and later edited in Da Vinci Resolve, producing a video which documents our final results.

Two of the authors, Yi Huang, as the percussionist, and Gabriela Marramaque, responsible for the technical operation, were also the performers.

Yi Huang's body, connected to the sensor, served as the core of the performance. The use of biological signals did not function merely as an auxiliary element; they actively shaped attention and rhythmic perception. *Bad Touch* is characterized by a pronounced rhythm and strong physical engagement, making it particularly suitable for real-time visualization of heartbeat data. Its intense rhythm heightens performers' sensitivity to changes in their movements and on the beat, so that even slight disruptions — such as shifts in attention or fluctuations in heartbeat — can immediately alter the flow of the performance.

The following observations are grounded in Yi Huang's embodied experience during the performance, and in the reflections that emerged while revisiting the video documentation after the performance with the other two authors. Yi Huang's heartbeat was captured in real time and the graphics that help visualize it were projected onto the back of the stage. Although Yi Huang did not directly view the projection, the sensations it amplified still influenced the performance. The physical sensation provoked by the elastic necklace used to hold the microphone further drew performer Yi Huang's attention to her heartbeat. As the performance unfolded, Yi Huang became increasingly aware of other normally unnoticed bodily sensations, such as breathing, swallowing, and muscular tension, all of which began to compete with the musical structure for attention. The awareness that even the slightest movement would be accidentally picked up by the microphone, adding noise to the heartbeat signal, served to further amplify the sensation of instability, making every movement and breath acutely vivid. This conscious awareness became a driving force, shaping how the performer moved and, interestingly, actually disturbing her internal sense of rhythm and motor coordination.

⁴ A device that takes a high-impedance signal and makes it compatible with low-impedance inputs.

Rather than stabilizing the music, this biofeedback occasionally disrupted the rhythm: fluctuations in heartbeat pulled attention away from the music, subtly altering the perception of timing and flow.

Yi Huang later reflected that, at several moments during the performance, attention became almost equally divided between listening to the heartbeat and following the playback track, creating a tension between the body's internal rhythm and the external musical rhythm. Attention oscillated between the musical structure and the body's monitored rhythm, creating a highly sensitive yet somewhat uncontrolled state of mind. Yi Huang also later noted that this oscillation was experienced not as distraction, but as a continual negotiation between the intended musical actions and the body's persistent demand for attention. Thus, introducing biological signals did not give performers greater control over the rhythm; on the contrary, it added another layer of unpredictability.

By translating internal physiological signals into visual or auditory feedback, the performer could observe their own physiological responses. As these perceptions were amplified, performers became more attuned to the subtle interactions between their body and the music, positioning attention as a fluctuating and distributed process rather than a fixed focus. Upon revisiting the video documentation, Yi Huang realised that attention had never been directed toward a single object. Instead, it continuously shifted between the playback, bodily sensations, the imagined visualisation of the heartbeat, and the awareness of performing in front of the recording devices. Biofeedback thus created a continuous loop in which performers monitored their physiological signals, adjusted their actions accordingly, and observed how these adjustments influenced the overall musical output.

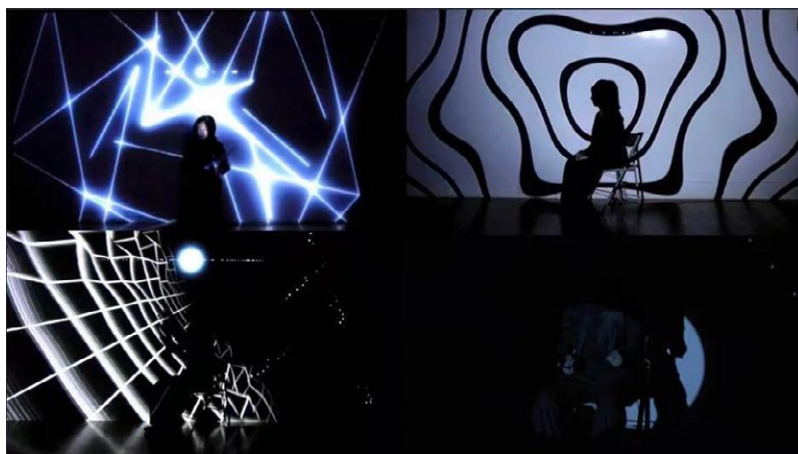


Image 2

Selected frames from the video documenting our performance of Bad Touch. © Image by Gabriela Marramaque and Yi Huang, 2026.

In addition, live technical operation also affected attention. During the performance, Gabriela Marramaque continuously monitored Yi Huang's heartbeat data and her movements on stage, and accompanied them by adjusting visual effects, transitions, changes in brightness, or zooming in and out. As a result, attention was not focused solely on Yi Huang's body: she had to concentrate on her own bodily movement and sense of rhythm, while the technical system translated both her heartbeat and the music itself into the real-time audio-reactive graphics that were being projected, and which Gabriela Marramaque further manipulated according to their own perception of the performance's rhythm, and to their own reactions to Yi Huang's movements. In this sense, and following Heidegger's (1999) and Sloterdijk's ([1993] 2024, [2004] 2016, [2001] 2017; Pavanini and Lemmens 2023) lead, we can see the technical system as a third agent (alongside Yi Huang and Gabriela Marramaque) in this process of co-creation. These three agents simultaneously influenced each other within (and, at times, beyond) pre-defined levels of unpredictability, responding and adapting in real time. This performance lives in its technomediatedness, technology becoming the interstitial third, mindfully and intentionally deployed to destabilise the ways in which Yi Huang and Gabriela Marramaque typically attend to their attention during artistic production.

While Yi Huang's role can be seen as corresponding to the commonsense definition of 'performer', Gabriela Marramaque's role is perhaps closer to that of a player in a jazz ensemble improvising alongside other musicians, seeking to co-construct a pleasant, engaging and interesting aesthetic experience. However, unlike with a jazz ensemble, Gabriela Marramaque was engaging with multimodal techniques which were partially outside of their control, with their own dynamics to which they had to respond; furthermore, those dynamics, and Gabriela Marramaque's response to them, could also retroact on Yi Huang, creating a situation of multiple potentially escalating situations of affective excess or depletion. If Yi Huang's attention was focused on how her own body interacted with the music and the scenic space, Gabriela Marramaque was focused on how the scenic space interacted with Yi Huang and the music — in a triangular relation where no one vertex was able to overdetermine the other two.

In fact, Yi Huang's attention was constantly jumping between the heartbeat, the music, and the (refracted) visual projections. This shifting focus was not a sign of distraction, but rather a form of attentional movement. As Citton (2017, 36) notes: "The peculiar work of attention consists in precisely this: paying enough attention — to still unnoticed details, to still overlooked nuances, to still unexpected implications." This, in turn, can also be seen as a powerful way of fostering empathy through the opening up of venues for resonance to be developed and attended to.

Bishop also points out that "the hybrid spectatorship of performance exhibitions does not represent a dilution of attention, but a return to an oscillating focus" (2024, 265). The performers' attention did not scatter; rather, it continuously shifted and reorganised across multiple channels of perception. Furthermore, the performers were, at once, performers *and* audience, not only of each other, but of the agentic presence of the *teknê* involved.

From an artistic perspective, these shifts are not considered mistakes; rather, they are an integral part of the performance. As Coelho (2017) notes, in the context of choreographic practice and attention, performance does not rely on a stable rhythm or strict formal control; instead, it unfolds through constant correction, selection, and response. Attention moves across different levels of perception, allowing the performer to continually reposition themselves in relation to changes in rhythm, the environment, and relationships. The performance created a situation where attention was constantly interrupted, reshuffled, and refocused. The goal of the piece was not to make attention steady or to perfectly sync the body with technology; instead, it was to set up conditions where attention wobbles and shifts, reappearing in new ways.

Attention is not something a performer can fully control; rather, it is constantly pulled, guided, and reorganised at the nexus formed by the body, technology, the environment, and the attendant streams of information (Citton 2018). Movements cannot just be carried out according to a plan, they happen through constant adjustments, small experiments, and tiny shifts influenced by many factors. Attention does not stay fixed, it moves back and forth, side to side, and reshapes itself with a rhythm that cannot be fully predetermined but which was, nonetheless, chosen in its indeterminacy. The whole performance felt, then, especially to Yi Huang and Gabriela Marramaque, (and, in a different way, also to Daniel Cardoso), like a process of exploration, where bodies were guided and being guided along, rather than fully under the performer's control, and attention to attention (made concrete via the translation of a heartbeat into a synthetic image) was the loop that made the experience possible.

At the time of writing, we have not yet had the chance to present our reworking of *Bad Touch* to a broader live audience. Ultimately, because the result of this performance was its video recording, the camera was part of the audiencing process, which means the feedback loop between audience and artists previously alluded to still manifested itself, albeit in different ways, and with a temporal dimension to it.

In fact, the knowledge that the recording was being made, the pressure of having to complete the recording under a strict deadline, and more, were all elements that became part of the (ecological) context in which our attention was employed. The editing process for the video thus became yet another way to creatively deploy attention. Which shots to cut and which to keep, how long each one should last, how the colour grading should look were all decisions all three authors contributed to, borne of how, even through the same framing, each one would pay attention to the recording in different ways. Re-watching them/ourselves was also an opportunity to reflect together on the experience, where their/our attention kept being drawn towards, and in this dialogue, many of the ideas for this paper emerged, particularly in how much of the end result came from the unpredictability of technology, both intentional and not.

The multiplicity of roles the performers could occupy because of creating a video, as artists, as editors, as a/synchronous audience, as researchers, further calls into question the preconceived dualities around technology. The existence of this video also allowed for

the authors to more embodiedly reflect upon this experimental piece, their own attention drawn to different aspects of the images, allowing their perception to resonate constructively towards co-writing the present document. Daniel Cardoso's aesthetic sensibility, in the form of valuable feedback, came to shape the final video as well, allowing them a deeper involvement in the performance itself. The technological mediation was a fundamental part of how all these elements could be (re)articulated towards artistic creation and knowledge pursuit.

Conclusion

Through this performance, we explored the relationship between performer attention, technomediated embodiment, (loss of) control and empathetic resonance.

Against what previous research showed (Thurber et al. 2010), and in line with what authors like Citton (2017) and White (2024) note, biofeedback systems can create irregularities and loss of control, thus operating almost as non-cybernetic systems. While loss of agency is often rhetorically tied with lack of attention, and it with negative moral judgments (White 2024), we showed here that treating attention as a process means considering the whole of the elements that play into it, as well as how it links with sociohistorical and interpersonal valuing, ethical decisions, and (non-)resonant affects; how it allows for an opening up of selfhood and agency to alterity, and to the potency of failure (Halberstam 2011).

The tension between external musical time and internal physiological signals made external helped produce shifts in the orientation of attention (felt as distraction, loss of focus, or re-engagement), and to make them more noticeable, literally visible in timing and movement. In this situation, biofeedback does not make the performance more “stable”; instead, it amplifies subtle changes in bodily state, making variations in attention easier to perceive.

From the performers' perspective, the explicit enmeshing of technology within the artistic and performative process changes the experience of bodily control and self-determination, in ways that frustrate any possibility of an absolute control over attention *through* its orientation towards values of empathy and non-certainty. The visualisation of the heartbeat is not only a display of physiological data, but a process of perceiving time, movement, and bodily rhythm during the performance.

By drawing on and reshaping *Bad Touch*, we hope to have made clear how artistic practices can be mobilised as attentional laboratories (Citton 2017), well suited for reflecting on how body, technology, and attention interact. Through biofeedback, attention can be made more visibly understood as a distributed and embodied emergent process, where temporality is an inescapable determinant, as change over the course of the performance produces yet more change. This approach offers a unique, yet theoretically grounded, perspective on how attention shifts, disperses, and refocuses in live performance settings, and how such a reframing of attention can speak to matters of agency, empathy and alterity.

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Authors contributions Contribuições dos autores

Conceptualisation: GM, YH, DC; Methodology: GM, YH, DC; Formal analysis: GM, YH, DC; Investigation: GM, YH; Resources: GM, YH; Data Curation: GM, DC; Writing: GM, DC, YH; Reviewing: DC, GM, YH; Visualisation: YH, GM; Supervision: DC; Project administration: GM, YH. All others: not applicable.

Data availability statement Declaração de disponibilidade de dados

Biosensor data is non-anonymous in this instance, and therefore cannot be shared. Programming configurations and code generated for this project are protected by IP and copyright legislation and cannot be made available without a prior justified request, to be evaluated on a per-case basis. The video of the performance will be made available after publication via the first author's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/@Queer_Gabe. It can also be made available upon request, via email.

AI tools Ferramentas de IA

LLMs were used to help with syntactic and grammatical accuracy in English. No content was wholly or partially reproduced from any LLM output, nor were they used for the conceptual, theoretical, or structural development of this article or any of its components.

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Filmography Filmografia

Bad Touch. Casey Cangelosi. Commissioned by Paopun Mu Amnatham, 2013. 8:45 mins.

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Posesas: Artes de la atención como gestos cinematográficos, pedagógicos y de cuidado

Possessed: Arts of attention as cinematic, pedagogical, and caring gestures

Possessas: Artes da atenção como gestos cinematográficos, pedagógicos e de cuidado

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Resumen

A partir del proceso contra-colonial de co-creación audiovisual *Posesas*, que hemos llevado a cabo desde la composición de contra-imágenes performativas y somáticas con cinco adolescentes mujeres de la periferia y zona limítrofe entre las ciudades de Medellín y Bello — Colombia, buscamos explorar y problematizar las maneras como las artes de la atención emergen en medio de gestos cinematográficos, pedagógicos y de cuidado. Las cadencias, modulaciones y sintonizaciones entre estos gestos, como veremos, ocurren en la inmanencia de *investigar con la vida misma* como acto de una ética radical de la existencia que resiste a las opresiones que perduran desde tiempos coloniales y que exigen posicionamientos interseccionales y emancipatorios, donde los movimientos de la atención redefinen valores al abrir devenires en los cuerpos.

Palabras clave

artes de la atención | co-creación audiovisual | pedagogías emancipadoras | ética del cuidado y zona crítica

Abstract

Based on the counter-colonial process of audiovisual co-creation, *Possessed*, which we have carried out through the composition of performative and somatic counter-images with five young women from the outskirts and border area between the cities of Medellín and Bello, Colombia, we seek to explore and problematize how the arts of attention emerge amid cinematic, pedagogical, and caring gestures. The cadences, modulations, and attunements between these gestures, as we shall see, occur in the immanence of *researching with life itself* as an act of radical ethics of existence that resists the oppressions that have persisted since colonial times and that demand intersectional and emancipatory positions, where movements of attention redefine values by opening up possibilities in bodies.

Keywords

arts of attention | audiovisual co-creation | emancipatory pedagogies | ethics of care and critical zone

Resumo

A partir do processo contra-colonial de co-criação audiovisual *Possessas*, que realizámos a partir da composição de contra-imagens performativas e somáticas com cinco adolescentes mulheres da periferia e zona limítrofe entre as cidades de Medellín e Bello, Colômbia, procuramos explorar e problematizar as formas como as artes da atenção emergem no meio de gestos cinematográficos, pedagógicos e de cuidado. As cadências, modulações e sintonizações entre esses gestos, como veremos, ocorrem na imanência de *pesquisar com a própria vida* como ato de uma ética radical da existência que resiste às opressões que perduram desde os tempos coloniais e que exigem posicionamentos interseccionais e emancipatórios, onde os movimentos da atenção redefinem valores ao abrir devires nos corpos.

Palavras-chave

artes da atenção | co-criação audiovisual | pedagogias emancipadoras | ética do cuidado e zona crítica

Introducción

Movilizados por un impulso vitalista que insiste en afirmar la vida cuando esta se ve vulnerada, emprendimos un proceso de co-creación audiovisual titulado *Poesas*, como resistencia contra-colonial (Bispo dos Santos 2023) frente a opresiones estructurales que viven jóvenes adolescentes mujeres de la periferia y zona limítrofe entre las ciudades de Medellín y Bello — Colombia. Este proceso, desde una ética radical de la existencia, exigió posicionamientos interseccionales y emancipatorios (hooks 2021), así como la instauración de una ecología de prácticas (Stengers 2021) que constituye un entramado singular de artes de la atención inmanente en medio de gestos cinematográficos, pedagógicos y de cuidado.

Según Stengers (Savransky y Stengers 2018; Stengers 2015), nos referimos, por lo tanto, a las artes como modos cultivables y aprendibles de prestar atención a situaciones problemáticas, en las que aprender dichas artes implica tener un discernimiento ante lo que exige la situación y cómo ello afecta a los implicados, cuidando y asumiendo las consecuencias que de allí se desprenden. Por lo tanto, los gestos que aquí presentaremos son, inevitable y gratamente, cada uno a su manera, gestos de desaceleración que permiten hacer perceptible lo que habitualmente perdemos de vista. Allí, intersticios pueden tomar lugar y la vida misma puede acechar en ellos como lo inesperado e inadvertido de un acontecimiento por venir. En otras palabras, aprender sin garantías o sumisiones a atender lo que pide y es inherente e inmanente a la situación, cuya respuesta situada es el proceso de co-creación audiovisual que aquí nos convoca, como una ocasión que se hace refugio ante las lógicas de la estabilidad para que una atención a lo que acecha pueda ser dada y pueda germinar.

En consecuencia, nunca se trató aquí solo de producir colectivamente una película, sino, y sobre todo, de notar y sostener de manera más profunda la ocasión y situación en cuestión como una procesualidad compartida, como una zona crítica (Latour y Weibel 2020; Etelain 2025), autónoma y temporaria (Bey 2003) de experimentación *vital colectiva* agenciada por gestos cinematográficos, pedagógicos y de cuidado.

Esta tarea y el deseo de sostener dicha zona nos hicieron converger a los cineastas Sebastian Wiedemann y Daniel Cortés con SEFILIA — *Semillero de Filosofía, Literatura y Arte*¹, liderado por el profesor, John Echavarría Cañas y con el proyecto autónomo *Úteras Vibrantes*², liderado por la terapeuta y educadora menstrual, Verónica Naranjo-Quintero. Triada que sostiene los tres modos de gestos de atención, que en este texto queremos desplegar de manera polifónica y caleidoscópica como veremos a continuación en la voz del cineasta, el profesor y la terapeuta³.

Posesas, como proceso de co-creación audiovisual, encuentra su inspiración en una lectura crítica y a contrapelo de la figura histórica de Javiera Londoño — mujer hacendada del siglo XVIII que supuestamente contribuyó a la abolición de la esclavitud en la región

- 1 SEFILIA — Semillero de Filosofía, Literatura y Arte, fundado en 2016. Funciona como un espacio formativo y de investigación-creación extracurricular para estudiantes de la Institución Educativa Federico Sierra Arango del barrio Zamora del municipio de Bello, Antioquia (Colombia). Ver Instagram: @se_filia / @catsefilia_
- 2 Úteras Vibrantes es un proyecto autónomo creado en 2022, desde el cual se acompañan procesos individuales y comunitarios para la emancipación del dolor menstrual en barrios periféricos desde una ética integrativa del cuidado.
- 3 Una primera aproximación a la ecología de prácticas que componen estas tres agencias puede ser escuchada en el programa de radio “Agenda Territorial: Voces desde hábitat diversos” de Radio UNAL en su emisión del 09 de julio de 2025 titulada “Pedagogías de la percepción y de la imaginación: POSESAS memorias de un proceso de co-creación audiovisual”. Agradecemos a la profesora Elizabeth Arboleda Guzmán por la invitación. Escuchar aquí: <https://radio.unal.edu.co/detalle/pedagogias-de-la-percepcion-y-de-la-imaginacion>

de Antioquia — Colombia⁴. No obstante, y sin ser el propósito de este texto, detenerse en la historia de Javiera Londoño desde una lectura antirracista o en dar cuenta pormenorizada del proceso de co-creación audiovisual, lo que hemos buscado ha sido resituar el foco de atención para dar lugar a la composición de contra-imágenes, que abren líneas de fuga (Deleuze y Guattari 1994) frente a una historia oficial que dice más del drama personal de una mujer blanca privilegiada en tiempos coloniales y menos de esos cuerpos — los esclavizados, que no tienen derecho a una historia. No solo a contarla dándole atención a lo que sus perspectivas singulares perciben, sino que también a reescribirla.

Dicha reescritura — sin duda antirracista y en este caso cinematográfica y especulativa, es lo que da forma a *Posesas* como un ritual audiovisual en el cual cinco jóvenes mujeres encarnan modos de resistir a las opresiones que continúan existiendo desde tiempos coloniales por más que cambien sus modos de aparecer. En medio de atmósferas de extrema sensorialidad y evocación espectral, la película propone una serie de contra-imágenes somáticas, donde de manera interseccional estos cinco cuerpos entran en estados de posesión y en devenires (Deleuze y Guattari 1994) siempre frágiles y provisorios en los que grados de libertad son ensayados. *Posesas*, una película performativa contra-colonial, como espacio ritual de cuidado y emancipación⁵.

Tres conceptos articulan transversalmente nuestro argumento: las artes de la atención (Savransky y Stengers 2018), entendidas como modos cultivables de discernimiento ante situaciones problemáticas; la zona crítica (Latour y Weibel 2020), que retomamos y expandimos con Etelain (2025) como entorno heterogéneo donde la vida se hace posible, y con Bey (2003) en su dimensión autónoma y temporaria; y la co-creación audiovisual como práctica de investigación-creación que opera desde la composición de contra-imágenes performativas y somáticas.

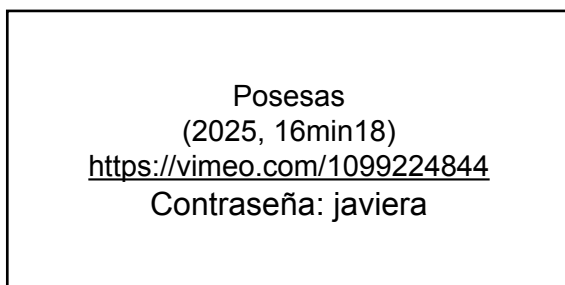
Es pertinente señalar que el proceso de co-creación audiovisual se desarrolló bajo protocolos éticos rigurosos, gestionados directamente por el equipo de investigación. Se obtuvo consentimiento informado de las participantes y asentimiento de sus representantes legales para la participación en las sesiones de experimentación, el registro audiovisual y el uso de imagen con fines artísticos e investigativos, incluyendo la cesión de derechos de imagen para la circulación pública del cortometraje. Los criterios de participación, los modos de registro de las sesiones y los procedimientos de cuidado

4 Para una mayor comprensión de este personaje, se recomienda escuchar a la historiadora María Eugenia Chaves en el podcast “Archivo a la carta. EP. 3. Sobre Javiera Londoño y las versiones oficiales” producido por el Laboratorio de Fuentes Históricas de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia y emitido el 26 de octubre de 2023. Escuchar aquí: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/7lUNx7KLwrrzcgaHiGvHZr>

5 El cortometraje *Posesas* (2025, 16min18) fue dirigido por Sebastian Wiedemann y Daniel Cortés, protagonizado por Deisi Granda Toro, Juliana Montoya Hincapié, Nicole Tamayo Páez, Valeria Ortega Muñoz y Ximena Saldarriaga Silva. En la producción de la película y la coordinación del Semillero SEFILIA, John Echavarría Cañas; en la asesoría en perspectiva de género y cuidado, Verónica Naranjo Quintero; y en la asesoría de cuerpo, Jenny Fonseca Tovar.

fueron contruidos colectivamente a lo largo del proceso, como se detalla en las secciones siguientes.

En este sentido, apelamos a una cierta performatividad intersemiótica e invitamos al lector a ser también espectador, ver y escuchar la película en cuestión antes de continuar leyendo. Ya que en última instancia lo que desplegaremos seguidamente son las condiciones de posibilidad como ecología de prácticas situadas y entramadas que sostienen a *Posesas*, más que como película, como *zona crítica, autónoma y temporaria de experimentación vital colectiva* en la que ensayamos dar respuesta a la pregunta siguiente: **¿Cómo las artes de la atención emergen en medio de gestos cinematográficos, pedagógicos y de cuidado?**



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Cuadro 1.

Acceso al cortometraje *Posesas*

Gestos cinematográficos

Tras haber visto y escuchado la película *Posesas*, podríamos decir que los gestos que aquí convocamos y sobre todo los cinematográficos se encuentran subordinados a un fin. Como si la película fuera la teleología que nos motiva a encarar un proceso o donde las partes rinden cuentas a un todo, que se hace llamar cortometraje. No obstante, se ha tratado de todo lo contrario y lo que hemos visto bajo la forma de una película, son los vestigios y rastros de un delicado proceso de prestar atención a los modos como la vida acecha y se cuela en los intersticios que una situación cinematográfica habilita.

No es un proceso de producción o aún peor de ejecución de un plan, es en todo caso la instauración de una ocasión para el pensamiento, el trazado de un plano de composición de bloques de sensación (Deleuze 2009), donde modos de experiencia cinematográficos (Wiedemann 2023) son producidos y experimentados por cuerpos a partir de un detonador atencional — la figura de Javier Londoño. Estos cuerpos buscan modos de actualización cristalina (Deleuze 2015) y contra-colonial que les permitan otras reescrituras somáticas y de sí mismos.

Enfocados en la atención y no en la narración o en algún tipo de lógica de causalidad representacional, el proceso de co-creación audiovisual se detiene en cinco imágenes en parte dogmáticas y en parte colonialistas. Es decir, crean una cierta estagnación y ausencia de movimiento vital. El barco negrero; el retrato penetrante de Javiera Londoño; la mina de aluvión; la falsa libertad, pues esta se fabrica y no es otorgada; y, finalmente, la iglesia. La proposición que hace funcionar a la ocasión solo en apariencia es simple. Mover estas cinco imágenes, y para ello es necesario inventar movimientos inauditos en los cuerpos que para su cometido encarnan y se dejan poseer por estas cinco imágenes como punto de partida para una performatividad (Soto Calderón 2020) no solo de ellas, sino también de sus propias subjetividades. Mover dichas imágenes implica un cierto movimiento espiritual derivado de aprender a prestar atención a los montajes, desmontajes y remontajes del propio cuerpo, donde estos y el cine son llevados al límite para que la gestualidad de los modos de experiencia cinematográficos pueda tomar lugar a la vez que es instaurada una *zona crítica, autónoma y temporaria de experimentación vital colectiva*.

Para ello, fue necesaria una serie de operaciones que permitieran la sintonización de la atención. La primera de ellas, la creación de un espacio potencial, que a su vez crea una disposición diferenciadora en los cuerpos. Dicho espacio potencial, también podría ser pensado como una zona si evocamos a *Stalker* de Andrei Tarkovsky (1979) y retomamos algunas ideas de Jeanne Etelain (2025). Emerge una zona gracias a una temporalización singular del espacio que hace posible el dispositivo cinematográfico al crear una escena como recorte y marco, que en nuestro caso hace que entendamos al cine como constructivismo cinematográfico radical orientado al acontecimiento que busca suspender el nudo representación-identidad.

La zona-*Poesas* como espacio transformador tiene una serie de prerrogativas. Es un espacio cualquiera, indeterminado, no mensurable y dinámico que funciona como atmósfera intensiva. Para ello la cámara genera un margen, pero dicho margen es todo el tiempo desbordado gracias a que los cinco cuerpos implicados siempre tienen los ojos vendados. Es decir, ellos saben que la cámara delimita, encuadra, pero no saben qué y cómo lo hace. De esta manera, las imágenes que emergen de la posesión de los cuerpos no son para la cámara, sino para ellos mismos. La cámara, en última instancia, acompaña el montaje de imágenes que ya ocurre en los propios cuerpos, ya que se podría decir que la primera pantalla es el propio cuerpo. Los cuerpos se des-orientan en el espacio, para poder así crear coordenadas propias que desde la colectividad relacional permitan que ellos sacudan las cinco imágenes de partida con contra-imágenes encarnadas, que siempre ganan un frágil y provisorio contorno. Imágenes somáticas montadas en el propio cuerpo que no representan y no quieren transmitir nada, pero que en todo caso acompañan atentamente las modulaciones de impulsos vitales. La escucha atenta de gestos menores (Manning 2016) en micro-zonas corporales con las que la cámara resuena y que no busca fijar.



 Imagen 1.

Fotograma de Posesas. 2025. | © Autoría nuestra.

Las imágenes que emergen no se pueden calcular, ni medir. De allí que se digan improvisaciones evanescentes y fantasmagóricas. Las sesiones de experimentación pudieron ir al infinito o como ocurrió, hasta que una cierta consistencia gestual no replicable, pero sí evocable, fuese alcanzada. No sabíamos cuánto tiempo nos tomaría y abiertos a las cadencias inesperadas de una procesualidad compartida, sin advertirlo, el proceso de co-creación, que a su vez fue el tiempo que duró la *zona crítica, autónoma y temporaria de experimentación vital* que instauramos colectivamente, ocurrió por dos años entre 2023 y 2025. Lo que dice de la complejidad y detenimiento que implican las artes de la atención aquí en juego.

De esta manera la *zona-Posesas* como espacio para transformaciones inesperadas en medio de modos de experiencia cinematográficos encarnados por los cuerpos de las jóvenes mujeres, lejos de ser un paisaje de fondo, era participación, activa, de y en los devenires. Con ello la propia zona devino en espacio problemático que nos obliga a pensar, a prestar atención a cada afecto y memoria que los cuerpos destilaban y a cómo estos colisionaban con las imágenes iniciales.

En medio de la indeterminación, habitar un barco negrero, sentirse en el fondo del mar, en el útero de mamá, sentirse ahogada, pero también en compañía de afectos entrañables, aunque desconocidos, morir, revivir, sobrevivir, naufragar en memorias asfixiantes, así como dar fin a la travesía. Encarar a Javiera Londoño, a los que nos oprimen y no tienen rostro, llorar, flaquear, gritar, hacerse más fuerte, ser porque somos, sostenerse mutuamente. Aguantar el peso del trabajo, de la mina, del dolor, de lo que

nos imponen, de lo que nos quitan, de lo que nos falta, compartir la respiración, el peso, el dolor, casi caer, sostener. Estar amarradas, arder de rabia, forcejear, estilar, tensar, desgastar, rasgar, quemar, intentar, insistir, desfallecer, volver a intentar, volver a arder. Darle la espalda a la iglesia, burlar sus puertas, fabricarse una libertad en el propio cuerpo, bailar, reventarlo todo, celebrarlo todo hasta perder el contorno, devenir colectivamente un cuerpo sin órganos (Deleuze y Guattari 1994), una monstruosidad fulgurante por haberse hecho somateca de una y de todas (Preciado 2020).

Los gestos cinematográficos insisten en devenir espacio de encuentro para los afectos, para imágenes diferenciadoras, de sí y de la historia, para que el acontecimiento pueda tomar lugar. Entre la des-marcación que crea la escena cinematográfica y la pérdida del rostro de los cuerpos que hace posible un cine sin órganos, la zona-*Poesas* produce una realidad fluida y móvil. Allí lo cinematográfico que des-encuadra no crea marcos de referencia, sino de diferencia para el movimiento que siempre está en constante interacción con el mundo. Toda una relacionalidad intensiva que pone en entredicho lo extra-cinematográfico, pues los modos de experiencia cinematográficos están todo el tiempo abriendo intersticios en los cuerpos, haciendo de ellos lugares de pasaje para nuevos flujos vitales.

De esta manera, las artes de la atención en juego son siempre un desplazamiento perceptivo que desafía la concepción de un espacio homogéneo y uniforme, haciendo posible en su lugar una zona crítica (Etelain 2025), entendida como el entorno heterogéneo, donde la vida se hace posible. Es en esa zona donde las subjetividades de las cinco jóvenes mujeres ensayan otras maneras de devenir gracias al agenciamiento cinematográfico que se ha puesto en marcha y donde es importante señalar que las partes tienen autonomía en relación con el todo-película e incluso estas por su singularidad, por su capacidad de acción son más importantes que el todo. Siempre a cada sesión de experimentación, podíamos parar, tomar una nueva dirección, trazar un nuevo plano o hasta abandonar el proceso. La película, en último término, como las memorias dispersas de haber ensayado habitar cinematográficamente una *zona crítica, autónoma y temporaria de experimentación vital colectiva*.

El giro que estos gestos cinematográficos proponen es prestar atención a las cadencias, a los ritmos y modulaciones que nos permiten afirmar que el acontecimiento es lo que debe tener lugar para suceder, así como la zona es lo que debe tener tiempo para suceder. En este orden de ideas, la zona actúa como catalizador para pensar en un espacio creativo y en evolución y en las diversas interacciones de coexistencia que lo pueblan. Es allí donde puede tomar lugar ese cine menor y a contracorriente que hemos definido como constructivismo cinematográfico radical orientado al acontecimiento.

Una serie de gestos que prestan atención a las fuerzas antes que a las formas. Por ello, nunca invitamos a las cinco jóvenes mujeres a aprender una lengua cinematográfica previamente preestablecida y por lo tanto mayoritaria. La misma que la cultura audiovisual de masas nos impone al robarnos la capacidad de prestar atención en medio de una vorágine de signos sobre procesados y saturados. En su lugar, las invitamos a

experimentar y a aprender modos de hacer emerger una lengua menor (Deleuze y Guattari 1978), en este caso cinematográfica, que lentamente se improvisa y colectivamente se defiende en el propio cuerpo. Un cine sin proyección o que en su límite ocurre en el propio cuerpo y que, por lo tanto, tendría la capacidad de ocurrir más allá de la escena cinematográfica al desbordarse en la vida misma.

De esta manera, los gestos cinematográficos más que poner en juego la realización de una película, abren la posibilidad de hacerse a una zona a defender (Etelain 2025) vital, donde los cuerpos, transversalmente al encuentro que enfrentan con la figura de Javiera Londoño y con fuerzas y fantasmas coloniales, pudiesen de manera intempestiva problematizar sus imágenes de sí. Es decir, hacer funcionar los gestos cinematográficos como espacios para prestar atención a los propios procesos de subjetivación. Proceso de co-creación audiovisual, como proceso de individuación y subjetivación continuo. *Posesas*, un ritual cinematográfico, donde la propia vida se pone en juego. De allí que ellas mismas afirmen que después de haber aprendido a prestar atención a sus propios devenires por medio de los modos de experiencia cinematográficos que encarnaron, sus vidas no volvieron a ser las mismas.

Prueba de ello y que sintetiza de manera contundente lo que movilizaron estos gestos, fue la situación cuando acompañamos y grabamos la experimentación final de la confrontación a la figura de Javiera Londoño, en la que casi todas ellas se quebraron emocionalmente y pensamos que el proyecto no continuaría y finalizaría en ese instante. Lo que en contraparte ya decía de cómo los gestos cinematográficos expandían la atención a un campo vital más amplio, pues al final de cuentas y bajo el principio de indeterminación que marcó el proceso de co-creación audiovisual, nunca se trató solo de una confrontación a la figura de Javiera Londoño. Antes y, sobre todo, se trató de hacerse a una vida cinematográfica en el sentido de aprender a movilizar y remontar las propias imágenes de sí en busca de aumentar la potencia de obrar de sus cuerpos. Finalmente, *Posesas* es un medio para insistir cinematográficamente en la pregunta de Spinoza acerca de lo que puede y de lo que es capaz un cuerpo. Se trata de una zona a defender vital en la cual experimentar esta pregunta.

Gestos pedagógicos

Nos resulta de una incomodidad pasmosa proliferar en el ejercicio pedagógico las relaciones convencionales que durante décadas se han establecido en el espacio escolar, en tanto encuentro entre lo humano y lo no humano. No es nuestra intención validar epistemologías dadas de antemano como verdades irrefutables. En cuanto a las artes de la atención, enhorabuena, *la colectividad*, como una condición humana de creación y búsqueda de la libertad, se constituyó en *Posesas* en parte fundamental de un proceso compartido que vinculó los dolores colectivos y singulares.

En este orden de ideas, proponemos las siguientes preguntas como mecanismo de indagación y reflexión, dejando claro que, toda posible respuesta no debe tomarse como un modelo a seguir ni como una verdad incuestionable, sino como una provocación que, en todo caso, debe pasar por la experiencia singular y colectiva de quienes deseen poner en tensión las relaciones convencionales de quienes habitan el espacio escolar y que, en tal sentido, nos resulta de sumo interés que sea la propia investigación la que pueda decir qué podría considerarse artes de la atención y cómo estas pueden emerger en medio de gestos pedagógicos y de aprendizajes. Preguntémonos entonces: ¿Cómo lo pedagógico y los aprendizajes cultivan o permiten la emergencia de las artes de la atención?, y ¿cómo sostener la atención en el cuidado de sí mismo y de los otros humanos y no humanos? Para abordar estos interrogantes, proponemos tres campos conceptuales que fueron relevantes en estas reflexiones pedagógicas, estos son: *Contra aula*; *minorización*; y, *escrituras disidentes*.

Contra aula

Como ya se explicitó en un apartado anterior, *Posesas* toma como base el proceso formativo del semillero SEFILIA en su laboratorio de experimentación corporal en la Institución Educativa Federico Sierra Arango del municipio de Bello y la noción de que este espacio pedagógico es una respuesta política que pretende fracturar los muros del aula convencional para fugarse a la vida concreta de las múltiples realidades de quienes habitamos el espacio escolar, digamos, crear un territorio y zona propia para las necesidades particulares. Si seguimos algunas referencias teóricas de Despret, hacer un territorio implica desplegar e instaurar nuevos regímenes de atención (Despret 2022), por supuesto, nos interesa que estos sean cuidadosos con la vida, sus ritmos y sus propios tiempos existenciales.

Así entonces, una contra aula que no habita el tiempo institucional, lo hace desde micro cronologías vitales que concebimos en el hálito y ritmo de la cadencia de cada cuerpo; y, es importante pensarla de ese modo, porque nuestros tiempos vitales no se acompañan ni se articulan con los tiempos institucionales y escolares. En contraste, la realidad escolar tiende a ser una parodia de la vida, pues aún sigue vigente la escuela moderna que fue pensada al servicio de las lógicas del mundo capitalista. En los tiempos que corren, esto nos pone en evidencia la precarización de las vidas humanas y no humanas, así como el éxito de un modelo económico y político que ha desplegado a nivel planetario un tipo de *subjetividad capitalista* como un modo generalizador para pensar, ser y actuar (Guattari y Rolnik 2006), que a todas luces, resulta axiomático explicar lo improcedente de este modelo para el cuidado de la vida en el planeta y cada una de las especies que lo habitamos, asimismo, lo inadecuado para el cultivo de las artes de la atención como una escucha especial del mundo desde la criticidad y el cuidado sobre lo que se necesita e importa en contextos específicos o situados.

Con base en lo anterior, la escuela tradicional ha sido un artificio preponderante para la obnubilación del pensamiento y para la aniquilación de la singularidad, la diferencia, la multiplicidad y la creación, entendida esta última como una reflexión estética inherente de las experiencias y de los procesos vitales y crítica con el énfasis en lo *preestablecido, los resultados y los productos*. De esta manera, la película *Posesas*, no fue concebida como lo más importante; por el contrario, sí lo fue y sigue siéndolo, el proceso, las experiencias y los aprendizajes de quienes participamos; aquello que transitó en nuestras propias pieles y que permitió, entre otras cosas, vivir la investigación-creación en la propia carne (Echavarría 2021).

En esta línea de pensamiento, lo pedagógico en el territorio contra aula dice de la vida misma, o sea es una filosofía vitalista. No se trata pues de una simulación, de una metáfora muerta de la existencia si le seguimos las pistas teóricas a Ricoeur (2013), sino de una realidad de carne en el encuentro con el otro en la cotidianidad y que preciso por eso, requiere que las preguntas y las posibles respuestas que circulen en dicho espacio giren en torno de la singularidad de quienes lo habitan: una educación en clave filosófica siempre es singular y situada.

Con base en lo anterior, es necesario pensar en las tensiones históricas que se cierran como fuerzas poderosas de subjetivación sobre la escuela señalada, esto es, la producción de los modos de ser y de pensar. Esta escuela desde las estructuras hegemónicas y dominantes se ha propuesto incentivar lo homogéneo, imposibilitando con ello, el despliegue de la multiplicidad y de las singularidades (Souriau 2017). En tal sentido, es imperativo pensar en aquello que en palabras de Raymond Williams (1980) convoca la cultura de masas y las voces de los silenciados por y en la historia para que la formación acontezca en estos espacios desde la tensión de aquello que *debería* habitar la escuela y lo *emergente*; sin duda, una necesidad en medio de las fuerzas destructivas de la vitalidad del mundo en la actualidad.

Es urgente una mirada crítica a estas fuerzas desplegadas desde el antropoceno, que en clave *cosmopolítica* (Stengers 2014), nos permite una *ética y estética* de cuidado en los modos en que nos relacionamos con las tramas históricas (Rancière 2014) y con los espacios educativos. Desde la misma criticidad, la defensa de la diferencia es necesaria para hacer de la escuela un espacio que supere la enseñanza de temas, contenidos y lo memorístico, para ver en ella un lugar de producción del pensamiento desde las multiplicidades y con ello poner en crisis *la normalidad* (Foucault 2023) como un modo de poner en tensión los discursos instalados en los metarrelatos que imposibilitan el cultivo de personas con la escucha y la atención para cuidar y ver en el otro y lo otro del otro nuestra única manera de no caer en la barbarie que implica el exterminio del planeta y todo lo que lo habita.

Minorización

La *minorización*, desde lo que nos proponen Carmelo Bene y Gilles Deleuze (2020), es una micropolítica necesaria en estos tiempos actuales del mundo capitalista donde la estandarización, la homogenización y las competencias han colonizado a la experiencia, la educación, lo educativo y todo aquello que sea susceptible de ser pensado desde lo formativo. Minorizar es resistir a las verdades históricas y dominantes y en ello abrir constantemente las preguntas que indagan en las formas de vida precarizadas e invisibilizadas de la sociedad. En conexión con lo anterior, una minorización de la escuela es necesaria para singularizar, así como lo propone en su noción sobre una *educación menor*, Silvio Gallo (2002), quien, desde el despliegue del pensamiento de Deleuze, piensa en una educación más justa con los procesos singulares, situados, colectivos y, ante todo, que luche contra el olvido. Minorizar la educación es preponderante para poner en tensión lo instituido y para que lo institucional no tenga la última palabra en la semántica de los conocidos y manoseados pilares de la educación que nos demanda el deber *ser, hacer, conocer y con-vivir*.

Una educación menor se caracteriza porque invita a que en los espacios educativos escolares y no escolares, habite la diferencia, la multiplicidad, la extrañeza y todo aquello que no cabe en los metarrelatos instituidos social e históricamente. En contraste y a modo de ejemplo, la inclusión como suele pensarse en las instituciones educativas es vista con sospecha en la medida en que, pareciera que esta se ha convertido en un modo actual y sutil de colonización que, desde las políticas públicas, aun no garantiza que nadie se quede por fuera del sistema de derechos vitales, a saber: salud, alimentación, vivienda, educación y cultura. Desde esta perspectiva, lo institucional se pone en crisis a la hora de pensar en la vigencia de una filosofía del cuidado o en la formación de personas sensibles con este modo de pensar y por ello, como lo sugiere Téllez “la institucionalización no es indispensable para la difusión y persistencia de la filosofía” (2011, 35) y desde esa óptica, tampoco es imprescindible para arriesgarnos en el ejercicio del pensamiento y del cultivo de la atención.

Así las cosas, minorizar la escuela, los planes de estudio, las prácticas de enseñanza-aprendizaje, la evaluación, los procesos creativos, al fin de cuentas, la vida misma, se constituye para nosotros en una acción necesaria para desplegar y cultivar las artes de la atención. Allí, *Poesas* operó desde una dimensión de escucha que dejó de lado las relaciones tradicionales de la escuela, para centrarse en el encuentro de una colectividad conformada por una mayoría de jóvenes mujeres que desde la doloridad (Piedade 2021) encontramos las maneras de escuchar(nos) así mismas y entre nosotras a la vez que nos fue posible hacernos un cuerpo colectivo en posesión.

Escrituras disidentes

Varias mujeres artistas fueron importantes en el proceso de aprendizaje, reflexión y co-creación audiovisual de *Posesas*. De manera especial, queremos agradecer la presencia de las escritoras y poetas Gloria Anzaldúa (1988), Victoria Santa Cruz (2021) y Vilma Piedade (2021). Estas mujeres tienen en común que acercaron sus vidas a la composición de la palabra poética desde zonas críticas y de criticidad. Hacerse cuerpo entre mujeres fue fundamental para las *cuerpas* de *Posesas*, robusteciendo la experiencia con estas voces femeninas y feministas y con ello dislocar los cánones empobrecidos que la escuela tradicional suele presentar en sus planes de estudio, sin duda, una acción fundamental para soslayar las trampas históricas de esta escuela en cuestión. En concreto, las artes de la atención desde nuestra propia experiencia, nos permitió escuchar con la apertura de la vida y en la propia piel a otras mujeres que desde sus propias existencias nos propiciaron encuentros con la palabra que, en la composición en clave de un cine menor, hizo posible la continuidad por otros medios posibles las conexiones entre las artes literarias y corporales. Nos dice la poeta chicana, Anzaldúa:

“Escribe con tus ojos de pintor, con oídos de músico, con pies de danzantes. Tú eres la profeta con pluma y antorcha. Escribe con lengua de fuego. No dejes que la pluma te destierre de ti misma. No dejes que la tinta se coagule en el bolígrafo. No dejes que el censor apague la chispa, ni que las mordazas te callen la voz. Pon tu mierda en el papel. No estamos reconciliadas con los opresores que afilan su gemido con nuestro lamento.” (1988, 227)

Desde esta perspectiva, la escritura, en tanto gesto pedagógico y detonador atencional, activó nuestros modos de escuchar y de ver en la singularización y la colectividad. Esta estuvo presente y permitió en bitácoras y cuadernos personales la experimentación de la vida y la revelación de las subjetividades. No fue solo estar por estar, fueron encuentros desde el cuerpo y la palabra. Anzaldúa nos mostró una escritura de entrañas fundamental en la creación colectiva de un cine menor, experimental, que requirió de una disposición especial para no imitar la vida, sino permitir que esta se manifestara desde la espontaneidad, la sinceridad y el cuidado. Esto es desde nuestra propia experiencia.

Por su parte, Victoria Santa Cruz en su canto como un grito disidente, con su canción-poema “Me gritaron negra”⁶ nos ayudó a entender que el devenir cimarrón no se reduce solo a la racialidad, en tanto construcción social e histórica, sino que va más allá del color de la piel, pues nos vincula desde las vulnerabilidades, las injusticias y los dolores singulares y colectivos. A propósito de la doloridad, nos encontramos con este concepto de la pensadora, Vilma Piedade (2021), el cual es fundamental para establecer

6 La canción-poema “Me gritaron negra” compuesta en 1960 puede ser escuchada y vista en una visceral performance aquí: <https://youtu.be/cHr8DTNRZdg?si=vCcElzHGTPqsnGi>

relaciones de cuidado más allá de la empatía entre quienes hicimos parte de la experiencia, pues nos conecta con asuntos encarnados en profundidades vitales, normalmente, poco explorados en espacios institucionales. La doloridad nos resulta un concepto fundamental que en nuestras propias vidas nos permitió vincular acontecimientos vitales singulares de otros tiempos de vida, las infancias, por ejemplo, con el proceso de composición de la película, pero también como parte de lo que nos puede suceder a quienes nos aventuramos en estas tramas de indagación e investigación-creación con las artes. Digamos en últimas que *Posesas* como proceso, singularidad y creación cinematográfica, es el modo particular y situado de los cuerpos implicados, por intentar dar respuesta a la incomodidad generada por las verdades hegemónicas que han saeteado por décadas a la escuela, las familias, la historia y a la sociedad en general. Es decir, fue y sigue siendo nuestra manera de hacer y vivir el arte para escuchar(nos) e incomodar(nos).

Gestos de cuidado

Como ya se mencionó, el proceso de co-creación audiovisual se consolidó con cinco mujeres jóvenes. A partir de ello, el enfoque que asumimos fue desde una perspectiva de género tanto por decisión metodológica como por la propia petición de las participantes, ya que en cada sesión de experimentación aparecían en ellas reminiscencias de violencias estructurales y sistemáticas que vivieron sus familias y ellas mismas por tener un cuerpo con vulva, senos y útero. Algo que se hace notar con claridad en el texto que ellas mismas escribieron para confrontar a la figura de Javiera Londoño, cuando le dicen y escuchamos lo que ellas sienten y viven:

“Nuestro cuerpo es reprimido, al igual que antes. Por tocarnos y explorarnos. Por tener senos. Por tener vulva. Por mancharnos. Por quejarnos. Por callarnos. Por no ser de aquí. Por amar. Por ser una y todas. Por querer ser libres ¡POR SER MUJERES! Señora Javiera ¡ESCÚCHENOS!” (2024).

El anterior fragmento escrito colectivamente por ellas deja percibir cómo hay una denuncia que pasa por lo que se ha pensado históricamente de los cuerpos con vulva. Su ritmo y cadencia hacen notar un sistema de biopoder (Foucault 2017) que trae consigo historias repetitivas de sumisión, maltrato, misoginia y tabú menstrual. Esto no solo convierte este fragmento, sino las otras partes que componen este monólogo colectivo, en una potencia coral como voz común que se pronuncia a manera de una cartografía afectiva y reivindicación frente a las violencias sistemáticamente vividas por ellas que invisibilizan sus historias por tener cuerpos feminizados.

En este sentido, la figura de Javiera Londoño se convierte en un pretexto para liberar los deseos contenidos de ellas por ocupar un espacio-tiempo singular a partir de un cuerpo que sigue estando cooptado. De allí que quienes acompañamos el proceso,

decidiéramos abrazar sus sentires y emocionalidades desde una perspectiva amplia frente a lo que sigue ocurriendo en los cuerpos feminizados. Para lograr atender a lo anterior decidimos dejarnos guiar por lo que posibilitan ciertos interrogantes feministas, tal cual como lo atribuye Adriana Guzmán Arroyo:

“Una de las razones para pensar que el feminismo occidental, es una teoría incompleta es que lo hayan reducido a la lucha de las mujeres contra las opresiones que ejercen los hombres sobre ellas, es decir pensar el feminismo para acabar con las relaciones de género, que a la vez reduce el patriarcado también al género, pero las mujeres no sólo vivimos esta opresión, sino también la de raza, sexo, clase y otras”. (2019, 39)

Este interés de reconocer la interseccionalidad de quienes configuramos el proyecto ayudó a saber que todo gesto en sus cuerpos surgía desde los avasallamientos que el mismo contexto suscitaba y que en este caso estaba lleno de violencia, desigualdad, abuso y toda una serie de situaciones que se pueden comprender por la herencia androcéntrica. Pero, como se aludió en la anterior cita, también se dejó percibir la vulnerabilidad de raza, sexo, clase y muchas más, ocasionando que nos encontráramos en una apuesta de lucha por reconstruirse a una misma y sanar los sustos productos de heridas, traumas, racismo y otros actos de violación que hacen pedazos nuestras almas, nos dividen, disuelven nuestras energías y nos acechan (Anzaldúa 2021), causando lo anterior, episodios de vulnerabilidad en los cuerpos de ellas que a su vez atravesaron los nuestros.

En este orden de ideas, todos los cuerpos que estábamos en este espacio de co-creación nos encontrábamos afectados por lo que ocurría en cada sesión de experimentación. No eran solo ellas sintiendo, éramos todas y todos en una misma sinergia y enmarañado afectivo. Lo que alguna expresaba en movimientos, palabras o silencios se convertía en una proyección de lo sensible para todas y todos. Siendo así, las emociones y lágrimas no hacían parte del ámbito de lo privado o de maneras de llevar a cabo un proceso de investigación-creación patriarcal. Antes bien, los sentires eran el ritmo que indicaba las cadencias y modulaciones por dónde seguir.

Nuestra postura fue no tomar distancia y aunque ellas eran las que estaban en el centro de las experimentaciones, ensayos y grabaciones, al dar inicio y al finalizar cada sesión, siempre estábamos con ellas co-creando. El iniciar ocurría desde la práctica del yoga y el cerrar desde un círculo de la palabra acompañado de alimentación y en algunos casos de mediaciones simbólicas que nos permitían tener un tejido de cuidado ante lo ocurrido en sus cuerpos y que siempre era mucho. Ellas entraban en estados de conexión profunda con la situación y al tener sus ojos vendados lograban expresar con sus movimientos corporales todo un repertorio afectivo y emocional imbricado con la historia de sus familiares, de su escuela, de su barrio, nuestras historias contadas en el círculo de la palabra y sus historias propias. Fue una zona de cuidado que concretó una confianza infranqueable con lo acontecido al interior de ella. Sus cuerpos en posesión no contaban con un libreto o movimientos planificados, sino con la expresión de lo que

sentían y pedía pasaje (Rolnik 2018). Esto devenía acontecimiento desde la atención prestada a la propia vida que brotaba todo el tiempo desde el movimiento interior de las subjetividades y que se revelaba a partir de

“Los pensamientos que pasa[ban] como ondas a través de su[s] cuerpo[s], haciendo que un músculo se tense por aquí, se afloje por allá. Todo pasa por la piel, los ojos, los oídos. Ella[s] experimenta[ban] la realidad físicamente. No existe una acción por fuera de lo físico. Toda acción es el resultado de una decisión, de un conflicto interno, una lucha, resolución o estancamiento. El cuerpo siempre refleja actividad interior”. (Anzaldúa 2021)

El cuerpo se convirtió en el gran vehículo para tener una escucha profunda y lograr estar presentes y atentas. Para llegar a ese estado implementamos una serie de gestos de cuidado a modo de protocolo atencional en todas las sesiones: preparación corporal, respiración consciente, cierre a modo de círculo de la palabra, entre otros. Estos ayudaron para que cuando ellas tuvieran los ojos vendados, activaran la atención necesaria en el encuentro con sus pensamientos-imágenes para lograr expresar las sensaciones que les posibilitaban dar lugar a nuevos movimientos, ritmos y cadencias en sus cuerpos. Podríamos decir que de lo que se trataba era de un modo de entrar en conexión-poseción con lo que Anzaldúa define como *naguala*.

“Me guía el espíritu de la imagen. Mi naguala (*daimon* o espíritu guía) es una sensibilidad interna que guía mi vida — una imagen, una acción, o una experiencia interna. Mi imaginación y mi naguala están conectadas, son aspectos del mismo proceso, de la creatividad.” (2023)

Un modo de cultivar la atención que como advierte Anzaldúa puede ser cuestionable para una academia tradicional, pero que justamente nos permite prestar atención a lo que acecha, a esa creatividad más que humana y que hacemos cuestión de mencionar, pues no valorarla sería no estar a la altura de lo que nos pide la ocasión que nos convoca a pensar y a todo lo que se manifestó como acontecimiento en el proceso de co-creación de *Posesas*.

Es necesario subrayar que el movimiento entre el cuerpo y la creación desde el interior de las subjetividades se lograba dar por los gestos de cuidado que todo el tiempo disponíamos a manera, como ya lo dijimos, de protocolos atencionales. Esos gestos de cuidado pasaban por la práctica del yoga, realizar ejercicios de respiración consciente, uso de aceites esenciales, lecturas y ejercicios para atender vulnerabilidades que iban apareciendo en las sesiones. Y, lo más importante, una atención y conciencia constante de poner el cuerpo como centro donde todo acontece. Lo que nos hace coincidir con Anzaldúa cuando dice que su “feminismo se basa en realidades corporales, no en abstracciones incorpóreas. El cuerpo material es el centro, y es central. El cuerpo es la base del pensamiento” (2021).

Es desde el cuerpo, donde se posibilitaba atender las necesidades reales de la vida para así llevar estos gestos de cuidado a un estado de atención con la propia vida. Para ello, insistimos en una

“Ética del cuidado [que] está estrechamente ligada con la posibilidad genuina del encuentro y la comprensión de que estamos en una trama de interrelaciones, que nuestros actos afectan no solo nuestra realidad cercana, sino también aquella lejana, nuestra influencia, por pequeña que sea, es poderosa”. (Castillo-Cedeño et al. 2015, 11)

Siendo así, lo vivido en cada sesión de experimentación devino en escucha profunda y la posibilidad de detenernos para desde las artes de la atención entender las necesidades de los cuerpos. Lo que nos hace distanciarnos de lógicas productivistas e instrumentales, donde se debe cumplir un cronograma para finalizar prontamente los cometidos. Tanto así, que no había una tensión si no llegábamos a tener la creación cinematográfica lista. Pues lo que era importante, como hemos reiterado, era el sentir y bienestar de todas y todos y cuidar de aquello que emergía de los intersticios de cada sesión y ocasión de experimentación.

En ese detenerse con atención, en ese desacelerar de los procesos, apareció el dolor en sus cuerpos, en sus extremidades y repetidamente en sus úteros, allí fue importante la práctica de yoga al iniciar las sesiones y también implementamos masajes, ungüentos calientes y un constante llamado al autocuidado no solo durante, sino también después de las sesiones en sus casas. Adicional a ello dedicamos varias sesiones para prestar atención al ciclo ovulatorio menstrual y así permitir que ellas logaran comprender según su singularidad corporal con qué energía contaban en cada sesión según la fase (ovulatoria, premenstrual, menstrual, preovulatoria) que estuvieran viviendo y cómo desde esta se podía estar presentes en el movimiento que implicaba cada sesión. Es decir, aprender a componer conscientemente con el ciclo ovulatorio como modular afirmativo de la atención en la ocasión que igualmente se veía transformada por este y otras variables.

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Imagen 2
Práctica de yoga.
2025. | © Autoría
nuestra.



“El estudio del ciclo menstrual se hace muy necesario para comprender el ritmo de vida, de concentración y de ánimos que la mujer puede tener en determinados momentos del mes, además, cómo esta comprensión e interpretación del cuerpo biológico de la mujer puede ser de utilidad en varios campos, entre ellos el deporte”. (Naranjo-Quintero y Muñoz Argel 2017, 212).

Lo anterior fue muy importante para entender que no todos los días estaban en la misma disposición para realizar ejercicios de piso con sus cuerpos, para cargar a otro cuerpo o para hablar en voz alta. De este modo lograban aceptar sus propios ritmos y comprender sin juicios a sus propios cuerpos y desde allí estar presentes y prestar atención a lo que la situación exigía al tener claro que no siempre tenían que responder y atender de la misma manera. Así mismo, esta consciencia ayudaba a que ellas mismas comprendieran cómo se encontraban sus otras compañeras y de esa manera pudieran ser apoyo mutuo en medio de los ensayos y sesiones.

Aprender a atender y a prestar atención a la ciclicidad de cada una se lograba por medio de una breve consulta que se realizaba en un grupo de WhatsApp que lo llamamos “Cuidados Posesas”. En este grupo se preguntaba en qué fase estaban y si había alguna emoción o dolor en el cuerpo para tenerlo presente en la jornada, apareciendo frases como: “Estoy desmotivada. Estoy entusiasmada. He tenido dolor menstrual. Me duele la lumbar; etc.”. Todo este diálogo previo, como detonador atencional, ayudaba a generar herramientas de cuidado y también a pensar en cómo darle continuidad a estas disposiciones. Tener presente sus emociones, dolores, ciclicidad, fue una manera de romper lógicas productivistas e instrumentales que consideran que no hay por qué prestar atención a lo que ocurre en el cuerpo y más aún si es algo que socialmente no siempre se le ha dado lugar como es el decir libremente que se está desmotivada o que se tiene dolor menstrual. Y precisamente partir de esto ya hacía que ellas mismas sintieran que estaban descolonizando sus propias experiencias, puesto que “nuestros cuerpos han sido colonizados, domesticados, silenciados y blanqueados con productos de ideologías puritanas, sociedades sin pensamiento crítico y también de herencias filosóficas y teológicas con teorías dualistas de nuestra corporalidad” (Naranjo-Quintero 2023) donde se ha negado el integrar el dolor físico y emocional en las propias dinámicas de la vida.

De este modo las artes de la atención que a su vez también pueden ser las artes del cuidado, por todo lo dicho anteriormente, todo el tiempo estuvieron latentes para “permitir prestar atención a las relaciones afectivas y, por ende, fomentar compromisos y responsabilidades colectivas y horizontales que [promovieran] el cuidado mutuo y la conexión en los vínculos” (Moreno Mahecha y García Becerra 2024, 9). Fue entonces este cuidado de los vínculos el vehículo que fortaleció y dio consistencia a la ecología de prácticas que aquí venimos tejiendo y que permitió llevar a cabo el proceso de co-creación audiovisual; que fue emergiendo desde la escucha atenta y profunda a los cuerpos, su preparación al iniciar cada sesión, el círculo de la palabra para finalizar, y

la constante pregunta por los estudios de género, el cuidado de los afectos, el yoga, la respiración, la alimentación, así como la comprensión del ciclo *Posesas* como proceso de co-creación vital, más que audiovisual.

Consideraciones finales

Como es notorio, inevitable y gratamente, *Posesas* continúa por otros medios más allá de la finalización del proceso de co-creación audiovisual, ya que los procesos vitales son constantes. Ellas: Juliana, Deisi, Nicole, Valeria y Ximena, más allá de la trayectoria del proyecto y de la película, a su manera, siguen investigando-experimentando con la vida misma en la medida en que sus propias vidas se los permite. Lo anterior es posible gracias a la procesualidad compartida que cultivamos y cuidamos a lo largo del tiempo que duró esta ocasión de encuentro y pensamiento, donde firmemente entendimos que la creatividad es siempre colectiva y se sustenta a partir de una ecología de prácticas que implicó los gestos que hemos mencionado y, por supuesto, otros posibles.

Quizá uno de los aprendizajes más relevantes que nos dejaron estas artes de la atención, fue el hecho de aprender a instaurar y cuidar una *zona crítica, autónoma y temporaria de experimentación vital colectiva*. Es decir, y en parte, a hacernos a un refugio donde la vida más allá de las opresiones, vulnerabilidades e injusticias pueda germinar y regenerarse. Allí no solo germinaron y se regeneraron de manera impensada la vida de ellas, sino que también las nuestras como cineastas, profesores y terapeutas en medio de flujos vitales que también excedieron a *Posesas*. En otras palabras, aprendimos a desbordar nuestras prácticas de modo inadvertido al sintonizar nuestra atención de manera singular con la vida al habernos dejado atravesar por este proceso de co-creación audiovisual.

Por último, nos parece oportuno señalar que desde *Posesas* encarnamos las artes de la atención como una pregunta constante por los gestos de cuidado, los cuales siempre permearon a los gestos cinematográficos y pedagógicos. Así, atención y cuidado fueron reafirmandose e imbricándose en la medida en que se manifestaban de forma latente y constante en cada espacio, situación y ocasión haciendo de cada vida —y de sus cuerpos— una potencia mayor, que en última instancia nos permite afirmar las artes de la atención como artes del cuidado.

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Conflicto de intereses Conflict of interest Conflito de interesses

Los autores declaran que no existen conflictos de interés potenciales relacionados con la investigación, la autoría y/o la publicación de este artículo.

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Sebastian Wiedemann: Conceptualización, Metodología, Investigación, Escritura — borrador original, Escritura — revisión y edición, Supervisión, Administración del proyecto, Adquisición de financiación. Verónica Naranjo-Quintero: Conceptualización, Metodología, Investigación, Escritura — borrador original, Escritura — revisión y edición. John Echavarría Cañas: Conceptualización, Metodología, Investigación, Escritura — borrador original, Escritura — revisión y edición.

Declaración de disponibilidad de datos Data availability statement

Declaração de disponibilidade de dados

Los datos que sustentan los hallazgos de este artículo incluyen el cortometraje *Posesas* (2025, 16min18), disponible en <https://vimeo.com/1099224844> (contraseña: javiera). Los registros de sesiones, bitácoras y materiales de proceso no están disponibles públicamente por razones de privacidad y protección de las participantes menores de edad. Los datos están disponibles de los autores previa solicitud razonable.

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Se declara que se usó Claude.ai para la revisión final de estilo del texto.

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Para uma Poética do Corpo Feminino: Atenção e Mediação Técnica em “Baile Mecânico” (1956), de Salette Tavares

Towards a Poetics of the Female Body: Attention and Technical Mediation in Salette Tavares’s “Mechanical Ball” (1956)

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Resumo

O presente artigo apresenta um estudo de “Baile Mecânico”, texto escrito por Salette Tavares em 1956 e que permaneceu inédito até 2019. Trata-se de uma peça experimental pensada para filme e que versa sobre as relações de dominação entre o corpo feminino e o controlo clínico da maternidade. O enredo é narrado sob o ponto de vista de uma câmara que se debruça sobre o confronto físico e simbólico entre o corpo feminino vulnerável mas vivo, e o entorno militarizado de contexto hospitalar. A desconstrução paródica e poética que perpassa o registo de Salette Tavares, também pelas lentes da câmara que enfatiza um olhar duplice, centrado na experiência, mais do que no objeto, pode ser lida como forma de atenção e cuidado a este corpo, observado aqui sob a perspetiva de uma poética de sentidos que, tomando-o na sua natureza vital e transgressora, lhe devolve a dignidade humana.

Palavras-chave

performance | corpo feminino | ecologia da atenção | mediação técnica | enação cognitiva

Abstract

This article presents a study of “Baile Mecânico” (Mechanical Ball), a text by Salette Tavares written in 1956 and unpublished until 2019. It is an experimental piece conceived for film and deals with the relations of domination between the female body and the clinical control of motherhood. The plot is narrated from the point of view of a camera that focuses on the physical and symbolic confrontation between the vulnerable but living female body and the militarised environment in a

Keywords

hospital setting. The parodic and poetic deconstruction that runs through Salette Tavares's work, also through the camera lens that emphasizes a dual gaze, focused on experience rather than on the object, can be read as a form of attention and care for this body, observed here from the perspective of a poetics of the senses which, taking it into its vital and transgressive nature, restores its human dignity. performance | female body | ecology of attention | technical mediation | cognitive enaction

“A obra de arte como linguagem não é algoritmo nem sinal,
é significante. E expressão, linguagem em si, sentido incarnado.”
(Tavares 1955, 318)

**“Um dedo com um dedal é uma personagem teatral”:
a performance, em Salette Tavares**

“Baile mecânico”, de Salette Tavares (1922-1994), foi escrito em Lisboa, em abril de 1956, tendo permanecido inédito até ao final de 2019, altura em que a editora Tigre de Papel, pela mão do neto da autora, Bernardino Aranda, deu início à publicação de um conjunto de inéditos. Este guião experimental foi integrado no volume *O Kágado; seguido de Baile Mecânico; seguido de Anonimatógrafo* (2019d), composto pelos três textos que dão título ao livro. Liga-os o facto de se tratar de três projetos de performance para, respetivamente, teatro, filme e ópera. O enfoque dos textos é a expressão cénica do corpo sob diferentes declinações materiais, o palco, a câmara/ecrã, a música, aglutinando-os a temática feminina².

Este estudo enquadra-se numa leitura da obra de Salette Tavares à luz de uma estética vivencial plena do corpo, também o feminino, que atravessa toda a sua produção. Propõe-se uma leitura da poesia da autora como uma *poiesis* aberta que radica num postulado fluxista da vida como arte e da arte como vida, assumindo-se a obra de arte, neste caso o próprio corpo, como a linguagem que a artista advoga para si, única e original. Considere-se um seu comentário à estética de Vieira da Silva num artigo de 1970: “Um artista é um criador, o criador de uma originalidade que é a sua linguagem. O que uma obra de arte comunica ao seu público é exactamente essa originalidade poética,

1 (Tavares [1971] 2020, 117).

2 Veja-se o prefácio ao livro, de Manuel Portela, “Desmontar o Mundo como um Brinquedo” (2019), que propõe uma leitura comparativa entre as três composições, cruzando estes dois eixos.

aquilo que lhe dá categoria artística” (Tavares 1970, 31). Esta visão do lugar central do corpo como linguagem na percepção da arte constitui um postulado central da obra de Salette Tavares, motivo pelo qual a autora pode ser considerada uma das pioneiras do *happening* e da performance em Portugal (Torres 2014, 26-27; Dias 2016, 372-79). Os primeiros registos neste domínio remontam aos anos 1940, sendo relevante notar, além disso, apontamentos seus da infância alusivos a uma espacialidade encenada do corpo como aspeto determinante da sua ontologia criativa. Escreve:

Esta escola, pré-primária, tinha umas aulas simples, quási provisórias, (...). O meu irmão usava lá uma serra fininha e recortou madeira e fez um teatro com cortina e bonecos. Nós púnhamos os bonecos a mexer e falávamos por eles. / As meninas da terceira classe, as grandes, fizeram uma peça e uma delas era tão alta que chegava ao tecto. Eu não percebi que tinha andas mas vi que a fazer teatro podiam acontecer coisas mirabolantes. Fiz lindos vestidos em papel pardo com os alinhavos que já sabia fazer e inventámos teatro lá em casa quando os primos iam / A escola pré-primária foi sem dúvida o maior privilégio da minha vida. (Tavares 1979, 1)

Mais tarde, em *Lex Icon* ([1971] 2020), o seu último livro, Tavares corrobora esta importância, recordando: “Ó quem me dera outra vez / o meu teatro miniatura / com a agulha entre os dedos / com o dedal da ternura / e a linha a passar o tempo” (Tavares [1971] 2020, 121). A referência à performance é substancial também noutros textos de carácter biográfico, como no currículo de 1984, ele próprio redigido em clave performativa e publicado em *Poemografias* (Aguiar e Pestana 1985): nas menções a diversas atividades que levou a cabo neste campo, entre estas constam as récitas de poesia que realiza, desde os anos 1940, na Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, onde estudará, mais tarde; os “Primeiros esboços de happenings”, em 1944, no contexto de um grupo estudantil de reuniões no Museu João de Deus, que coorganiza com Maria Violante Vieira; a participação no *happening* “Concerto e Audição Pictórica”, em 1962, com poetas e músicos experimentais; a aula-performance “Sou Toura-Petra” (Dias 2023; Cardoso 2024, 344-55)³. A autora assume, ainda, neste texto, e noutros, a influência de tendências e estéticas próximas da performance, como o *ballet* de Merce Cunningham, a música de John Cage, o teatro polaco de Tadeusz Kantor e Jerz Grotowsky (Tavares 1985a, 262-68), o teatro Nô japonês (Tavares 1955, 317) ou a Bauhaus de Walter Gropius (Tavares 2020b, 141). Note-se, ainda, que Salette Tavares foi interlocutora direta de Maurice Merleau-Ponty e Gabriel Macel, com quem conviveu — “1949, Paris. Frequência das 6as. Feiras em casa de Gabriel Marcel” (Tavares 1985a, 263) —, tendo produzido intensa reflexão sobre a matéria, nomeadamente *Aproximação do Pensamento Concreto*

³ De entre as performances mais marcantes de Salette Tavares encontra-se a aula-performance “Sou Toura Petra”.

de Gabriel Marcel (1948) e demais textos, entre os quais alguns dos ensaios publicados na revista *Brotéria* (Tavares 1965b, 1965a, 1955). Uma parte da sua produção teórica sobre o assunto encontra-se inédita, nomeadamente em *A Dialéctica das Formas*⁴.

Assim, pese embora ainda esteja por sistematizar o pensamento de Tavares nesta matéria⁵, nomeadamente na relação clara que estabelece com as atuais teorias da enação perceptiva (Varela 1994; Stewart et al. 2014; Shapiro 2017; Maurense et al. 2019), certo é que estes escritos lançam as coordenadas de uma arte da percepção e do corpo que a autora plasmou de modo sustentado, não só numa produção teórica consistente, como na sua obra artística. Rui Torres, especialista na autora, situa a sua poética no quadro de um “entendimento semiótico acerca do texto e da visualidade” (Torres 2014, 25), desdobrando-se a mesma em dois modos de criação: um, centrado no significado, outro, no significante. É neste último que podem ser enquadradas, não só as performances e *happenings*, como a poesia visual e espacial de Salette Tavares.

Para uma Empatia do Corpo Feminino

No centro da poética desta poeta encontra-se, pois, o corpo, aspeto que reconhece, por exemplo, em carta a Pedro Sete datada de 1967:

Eu, senhora que estou de meus laboratórios, assisti à paisagem formada pelo crescimento espontâneo em minha poesia de um desenvolvimento estrelar em que cada ponta aponta uma abstracção. A exuberância da metáfora em que a substantivação e outras alterações gramaticais tendem para coisificá-las objectos. A utilização das consonâncias e dissonâncias. As significações sinalizadas pelo tratamento espacial da escrita. A vivência poética e humana automaticamente devolvida por um espelho cego (Tavares 2024, 17-18).

Recorde-se que espelho cego é o título do seu primeiro livro de poemas, publicado em 1957 (ano seguinte a “Baile Mecânico”). O registo barroco e surrealizante, protoexperimental⁶, coaduna-se, nesta obra, com a expressão de um sujeito feminino que assume o corpo como plena expressão subjetiva. Veja-se, por exemplo, o poema “Bebi”: “Meu corpo de monte / sereno e bravio / possante gigante / animal sombrio, / tão quente, / tão grande, / tão bicho macio, / respira de espanto / sereno e cinzento

⁴ A Revista *ARTETEORIA* publicou, em 2020, um excerto de provas tipográficas em curso (Tavares 2020a).

⁵ O que apenas será possível após a efetiva publicação do seu mais importante texto no cômputo da teoria da arte, *A Dialéctica das Formas*.

⁶ De acordo com Rui Torres, é a partir de 1963 que se efetiva a ligação de Salette Tavares à poesia experimental portuguesa, nomeadamente através da colaboração com os *Cadernos da Poesia Experimental* de 1964 e 1966 (Torres 2010, 8).

/ dançando o assombro / de folhas ao vento” (Tavares 2022a, 78). Ou “Aqui onde che-gaste”: “Meridiano do meu corpo / mundo escorrido limite / raiz encharcada d’água / a respirar-me no peito” (Tavares 2022a, 74). Esta opção discursiva enquadra a arte poética que Tavares sistematiza no poema homónimo que abre *Concerto em Mi Maior para Clarinete e Bateria* (1957-1959), livro seguinte:

Espelho mudo lugar reflete / o todo que me é dentro. / Espelho cego lugar repete / a voz que me é dentro. / Espelho mundo lugar intenso / nos braços já, te prendo. / Espelho nego lugar suspenso / em vidro só, relendo. (Tavares 2022a, 120)

A arte de Salette Tavares é uma arte da observação e atenção ao mundo, um espe-lho que a devolve consigo própria nas relações significantes que entretece entre si e o seu corpo. Daí, também a atenção ao universo feminino, que constitui um dos temas recor-rentes da sua poesia. A autora vaticina, em jeito de mantra, no poema “No corpo da mulher”: “No corpo da mulher / a trepadeira espera a madrugada”⁷ (Tavares 2022a, 755-57). Note-se que a sua posição, nesta matéria, não é ideologicamente estrita. A poe-ta reflete sobre o assunto na introdução que redigiu ao catálogo da exposição “Artistas Portuguesas”, que teve lugar entre janeiro e fevereiro de 1977, na SNBA, já enquanto presidente da AICA: “Tememos já a demagogia. Preferimos o acto concreto de saber discernir e lutar quando é preciso” (Tavares 1977b, 5). A autora propõe-se, então, pen-sar esta questão de um ponto de vista “largo e universal” (Tavares 1977b, 5), centrado na “afirmação de criatividade” feminina (Tavares 1977b, 6), patente, por exemplo, na mostra em causa, em obras de Paula Rego, que analisa, e na sua própria produção ar-tística. Destaque-se, neste cômputo, a sua última obra *Lex Icon* ([1971] 2020), de 1971, o livro *Menez* (1983) ou *O Livro do Corpo* (1974-1977), inédito até à antologia de 2022, *Obra Poética 1957-1994* (2022a), publicada pela Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda, e organi-zado pela especialista Catherine Dumas. De entre as diferentes leituras já propostas, sobressai, nestas obras, a temática do quotidiano doméstico filtrado por uma percepção feminina de observação empática, reflexiva, disruptiva, das suas circunstâncias espe-cíficas. A autora observa, a propósito de Ana Vieira: “Criação, como dizia Worringer, é uma projecção objectivada — empatia objectivada” (Tavares 1975, 26). Esta ideia já fora desenvolvida, também a propósito de Paula Rego⁸, defendendo, Tavares, uma estética das formas vivas que narram histórias e despertam a empatia no leitor/observador, não na decifração plena das narrativas que a obra de arte formaliza mas no reconhecimento das suas formas orgânicas e sensíveis⁹ e que se inscrevam no conceito de fidelidade

7 Este verso é repetido por quatro vezes, em transições-chave, ao longo do poema.

8 A relação entre as duas artistas foi recentemente alvo de uma exposição, estudo e publicação (Oliveira 2023).

9 A autora analisa a participação de Paula Rego na EXPO AICA 74, que teve lugar na SNBA, e no âmbito da qual propôs a secção “Estrutura semântica numa obra”, composta pela obra única de

criadora que propõe. A propósito de Ana Vieira, também, refere que é a “consciência reflexiva que estrutura a sua obra [de Vieira]”, acrescentando, “é sempre importante termos o testemunho vivo dos artistas” (Tavares 1974b, 12).

Isso mesmo pode ser igualmente entrevisto, também, no modo como a poeta revisita, nos seus poemas, experiências de presença radical do corpo vivo, que articulam, por um lado, uma atitude percetiva e de descoberta, de presença, e por outro, de atenção crítica, que interroga, se expressa e suscita, não sem o humor mordaz e deleitado, também, que caracteriza sobremaneira a estética da autora. Em *O Livro do Corpo*, por exemplo, encontra-se o poema “Parto”, redigido em diálogo com “Fim”, de Mário de Sá-Carneiro, e “Mar Português”, de Fernando Pessoa. Sublinhe-se o registo celebratório do texto, como em Sá Carneiro, que, na morte, convida à festa: “— Quando eu morrer batam em latas, / Rompam aos saltos e aos pinotes — / Façam estalar no ar chicotes, / Chamem palhaços e acrobatas” (Sá-Carneiro 2001, 132). Salette Tavares, por seu turno, ante as dores do parto, desafia: “— partam o caixote, estourem o armário / e / cresçam na Vitória dos contrários” (Tavares 2022a, 673). Simultaneamente, o texto de Tavares exalta o sacrifício e a capacidade de sublimar a condição de vulnerabilidade extrema que o parto presume (como em “Mar Português”, a propósito, não só, mas também, do sacrifício das mães¹⁰), afirmando: “Houve dores também? / Poucas, / nenhumas! / Porque ‘tudo vale a pena / quando a alma não é pequena.’ (...) Saibam perder a vida para ganhá-la. / Exemplo seu é belo / para sê-lo. / Parto / Como-vida!” (Tavares 2022a, 673). O tema do parto é ainda motivo de celebração numa das atividades da aula-performance “Sou Toura Petra” (1974), em que a professora, Tavares, e os seus alunos de Estética da Escola Ar.Co, onde lecionou em 1974, e que se sentam em torno de uma toalha de papel, no jardim da escola, para celebrar o renascimento, em sentido lato e figurativo, representando, um poço, ali perto, o útero feminino (Dias 2023, 127–28), de onde tudo nasce. Esta ideia de poço é retomada na instalação de 1979, intitulada “Dia Positivo”, originalmente exposto em 1979, na Galeria Quadrum, e de que, em 2014, foi apresentada uma réplica na exposição retrospectiva “Salette Tavares. Poesia Espacial”¹¹, no Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian. Esta é composta por uma mesa branca sobre a qual estão dispostos quatro painéis em acrílico, igualmente brancos, e cobertos com fotografias de família, nomeadamente dos filhos e da própria Salette Tavares. A disposição dos painéis em estrutura retangular conforma um espaço circunscrito, como uma moldura para um poço, ventre, casa, se visto de cima, onde se depositam as memórias, em diapositivos, imagens, fotografias, representações, dos dias positivos, isto é, dos dias do nascimento

Rego, “Provérbio popular” (1960), e sobre a qual escreve no catálogo da exposição (Tavares 1974a).

10 “Ó mar salgado, quanto do teu sal / São lágrimas de Portugal! / Por te cruzarmos, quantas mães choraram, / Quantos filhos em vão rezaram! / Quantas noivas ficaram por casar / Para que fosses nosso, ó mar! / Valeu a pena? Tudo vale a pena / Se a alma não é pequena. / Quem quer passar além do Bojador / Tem que passar além da dor.” (Pessoa 1986, 114).

11 Entre 17 de outubro de 2014 e 25 de janeiro de 2015.

dos seus filhos. Na superfície da mesa encontram-se, ainda, três binóculos quadrangulares, também em acrílico, que o espetador é convidado a espreitar e no fundo dos quais estão diapositivos dos dias de nascimento dos seus três filhos, Guilhermina, Salette e Francisco. As inscrições, a preto, nomeadamente “Dia Positivo”, “Diapositivo”, “Parto Como Vida” e “Parto Comovida”, constituem chaves de leitura da instalação que convidam a uma experiência festiva, prazenteira, até, da sua vivência como mãe, em que todos são convidados a sentar-se à mesa, para participar. Não pode ser deixada de notar, também, a relação de “Dia Positivo” com a toalha branca de “Sou Toura Petra” e do poema “A toalha”, de *Lex Icon*, que relembra que a alvura é luz, presença, comunidade de corpos que se juntam para celebrar, para depois partir: “Assim / à beira de uma toalha / à sua beira se acolhem / as linhas divididas / as distâncias que separam / as vidas” (Tavares [1971] 2020, 68). Como no parto, nos lençóis brancos da cama de casa ou do hospital, em que mãe e filho são separados, partindo, para a vida.

Assim, a arte de Salette Tavares cria uma disposição de projeção percetiva que, reenquadrando, descobre, recria, retematiza a condição do corpo feminino sob o ponto de vista de uma sabedoria que é vivida por si. Em certa medida, trata-se, também, de um resgate na linha do que Silvia Federici, mais tarde, haveria de defender quando afirma que a realidade corpórea feminina começa “com a afirmação da capacidade e da sabedoria do corpo tal qual o conhecemos, no sentido em que se formou ao longo de um grande período de tempo, em constante interacção com a formação da Terra” (Federici [2020] 2025, 17). Veremos, em seguida, como a personagem principal de “Baile Mecânico”, Vénus, é, ela própria, um ser de barro e virginal, matéria de encantamento que arrisca a “empatia objetivada” que Salette Tavares propõe como mecanismo percetivo para a sua reflexão artística.

O “Baile Mecânico” de Vénus

As ligações entre o eu empírico e a obra de Salette Tavares já foram notadas amplamente (Alves e Prior 2016; Alves 2017; Dumas 2016). A própria escreve: “O artista está presente na obra, com o seu mundo, a sua dramática existência em diálogo comigo que contemplo a obra de arte como tal. A forma apreendida é apreendida como presença” (Tavares 1955, 319). A exposição “Brincar”, organizada em 1979, na Galeria Quadrum, constitui um mostruário de diferentes aspetos desta relação entre obra e vida. Veja-se, em particular, as peças criadas para e com os seus filhos — Mininha, Salettinha e Chico, como lhes chama —, e que refere no texto de abertura do catálogo da exposição: “São diálogos de meus filhos comigo. Presentes que faziam em segredo e me davam. Há também objectos que eu fazia para eles com os lixos limpos das praias que apanhávamos juntos” (Tavares 1979, 6). Note-se que nesta exposição, e noutros textos, Tavares assume-se como artista que é mãe — as obras são assinadas, no catálogo, como “Mãe”, em

clara alusão à predominância oral da linguagem infantil¹² —, podendo estes trabalhos ser perspectivados como material de reflexão e projeção desta sua experiência feminina, mundo de afetos e vertigens a que a poeta dá corpo nestes objetos. “Prato” (Silva et al. 2014, 54), por exemplo, poema espacial em cerâmica datado dos anos 1950, é emblemático. Por um lado, remonta à década durante a qual a poeta teve os seus três filhos: 1950, Guilhermina, 1952, Salette e 1956, Francisco. Por outro, o prato, também descrito em *Lex Icon*, como “prisma cristal do instante” (Tavares [1971] 2020, 111), é o objeto, por excelência, que serve a alimentação, e mãe é sinédoque de nutrição, literal e figurativa. É a mãe que alimenta, nutre, protege, aconchega, guia. Uma dança das relações entre mãe e filhos é motivo de júbilo e caos, ao mesmo tempo, como se vê nesta louça de fundo preto demarcado a desenhos de traço branco fino. O tracejado bailarino, como nos desenhos infantis, de rodas, uma camionete, um comboio, pássaros, uma menina e um chapéu-de-chuva, indicia movimento, percurso, estação de vida, ladainha. Ao centro, situa-se o desenho de um conhecido jogo infantil para se saltar ao pé-coxinho e, dispersas, na superfície, palavras holofrásticas: mamã, bebê, Mininha (nome por que é conhecida a primeira filha de Tavares).

Data dessa década, também, a peça “Baile Mecânico”, que se propõe aqui, estudar no quadro desta relação. A própria autora estabelece este diálogo ao assinalar, lado a lado, no seu currículo, as duas efemérides: “Importante: O Baile Mecânico. Nasce o meu filho Francisco de Assis a 31 de Dezembro. 1956, fico só com os filhos os filhos os filhos” (Tavares 1985a, 263–64). O teor da composição e o seu tratamento estético, ao nível da forma — um guião para um filme experimental —, e do discurso, uma paródia poética, permite-nos ler “Baile Mecânico” como chamada de atenção para o corpo feminino nas circunstâncias específicas do parto e amamentação. Senão, vejamos.

Será necessário, desde logo, notar as relações entre “Baile Mecânico” e o filme experimental “Ballet Mécanique” (1924), de Fernand Léger e Dudley Murphy, com música de George Antheil¹³. Esta proximidade verifica-se no tema — entre outros, a mecanização cinematográfica do corpo feminino (Shingler, 2022; Guido 2010; McCarren 2003) — nos planos de montagem experimentais e no título. A designação de “baile”, ao invés de “ballet”, na obra de Tavares, remete desde logo, no entanto, para uma disrupção do género teatral em causa: a dança-teatro. O termo “ballet” encontra-se inevitavelmente

12 Além disso, é conhecida a sua posição contra a normatização ortográfica. Veja-se a intervenção gráfica “Que linda vae com seu erro de orthographia” (1982a), o poema visual “Alfabeto” (1985), que propõe uma reinscrição musical do princípio alfabético da escrita, a conferência-happening “Voz” (1980), o livro-manifesto *Irrar* (2019c), entre outros. No texto “Silêncio”, a autora afirma: “Recusome a respeitar essa ortografia gravosa (...). E já se diz mãe em vez de mãi, enquanto em vez de emquanto, enfim em vez de emfim, etc.” (Tavares 1982b, 103).

13 O filme, de 16 minutos e filmado em 35mm, contou, ainda, com a colaboração de Ezra Pound, Alvin Langdon Colburn e Man Ray, tendo-se estreado em 24 de setembro de 1924 na sessão inaugural da *Exposição Internacional de Novas Técnicas Teatrais*, organizada por Frederick Kiesler, em Viena.

ligado, não só à escultura de Francis Picabia publicada no número 7 da revista 391 (1917)¹⁴, como ao “Ballet Triádico” (1922) e demais experiências cénicas de Óscar Schlemmer e Kurt Schmidt¹⁵. Nos modelos de dança mecânica do Teatro da Bauhaus, o conceito filosófico central reside no estudo metodológico das possibilidades expressivas e metafísicas do corpo mecanizado na articulação com a música e o espaço arquitetónico — o estúdio tridimensional. No filme de Léger e Murphy, contemporâneo da Escola de Weimar, esta mecanização é transposta para cinema e sujeita a efeitos de fragmentação cubista, por processos de montagem filmicos. A peça de Salette Tavares, por seu turno, pese embora as múltiplas semelhanças, quer com a estética da Bauhaus, quer com a composição de 1924, é concebida como uma dança feminina visceral e despojada (em contraste, por exemplo, com a opulência dos disfarces na Bauhaus e em Léger) que irrompe o enquadramento maquínico — técnico, cultural, social e político — para o subverter. Também pelo tema que aborda, a maternidade. Por esse motivo, em “Baile Mecânico”, ao invés de poemas, uma performance, exposição ou instalação, a poeta opta pelo formato híbrido de peça, dança e filme. Tratando-se de um texto escrito, em formato de guião, com indicações cénicas e de filmagem, as personagens desenham uma coreografia de corpos femininos concebidos como um baile biomecânico, como em Vsevolod Meyerhold, em que corpo e máquina são pensados de modo orgânico, sendo a precisão físico-rítmica, determinante, sobretudo no contraponto que entretece com Vénus, a protagonista, como se verá. A peça é mecânica, também, conquanto é mediada pelo dispositivo filmico que captura o que se passa em cena. O movimento maquínico é contrabalançado pela dança, constituindo o corpo em movimento livre, um dos princípios agenciadores da peça. A dança é concebida como motor que permite ao organismo respirar, navegar. Esta é, também, uma das perspetivas apresentadas no poema “Máquina motor bailarina”, da secção de inéditos da antologia de 2022, datado de 20/5/1960, e que diz: “Máquina motor bailarina / sem silêncio sem o seco / cadeia roda turbina / de engenho te me navego / (...) No manicómio me avanço / no infinito do tempo / sem receitas de descanso / embraio sentido e vento” (Tavares 2022a, 804). A ideia de baile está presente, como princípio subversivo, no currículo da autora, já mencionado. Redigido em 1984, Tavares termina-o do seguinte modo: “1984, sinto-me lenta de mãos, veloz de cabeça. Deus queira que a minha escrita não acabe num ballet de caranguejos¹⁶ blá blá blá blá blá...” (Tavares 1985a, 268). A noção de escrita como teia circular, dança a muitos membros, percorre a obra de Tavares, constituindo uma das suas propostas fundadoras. Do diálogo criativo com Paula Rego, é conhecido

14 391 foi uma revista dadaísta editada por Francis Picabia entre 1917 e 1924 em diferentes cidades europeias. A escultura consiste numa engrenagem, qual peça de motor suspensa que toma a forma de uma silhueta feminina prestes a rodopiar.

15 O artista Kurt Schmidt encena, em 1923, para a Semana da Bauhaus em Dessau, um bailado intitulado precisamente *Mechanisches Ballett* (ballet mecânico).

16 Veja-se como “ballet” é aqui apresentado como regime de movimento repetido do corpo, por confronto com o “baile”, que, ainda que mecânico, como na peça em estudo, pressupõe a insubordinação de tal regimento.

o poema em pano “Dança das sortes” (1963), oferecido por Rego a Tavares, consigo em diálogo, e exposto na mostra “Brincar”. Este quadro mostra uma silhueta feminina cubista que dança em simbiose ergonómica com o ambiente doméstico que a rodeia — malas, panos, um xaile (?), um coelho ou boneco de peluche, um ovo estrelado cortado ao meio, um capuz de menina e uma mãe pequenina ou professora em pose liceal, ainda uma mão comprida, pintada a vermelho e uma língua de fora. E tudo se move e entrelaça. Trata-se, pois, de uma jovem senhora bailarina que, da casa, faz o seu palco, dos objetos, os adereços da sua dança. São inúmeros, outros, os trabalhos de Tavares que remetem para este movimento de corpos — veja-se o poema que dança “Maquinin” (1963-2010), móbile em aço inox com o poema homónimo originalmente publicado em *Quadrada* (1966), a “Bailia” (1979-2014), móbile em cobre cromado com a conhecida composição de Aires Nunes de Santiago, do século XIII, ou muitos outros poemas e textos, como o “Sapato” (Tavares [1971] 2020, 44-47), litania para uma dança litúrgica. No fundo, trata-se de conceber a escrita como uma teia que o próprio corpo sintetiza de modo a desenhar caminhos e traços de perceção sobre o mundo. Relembre-se, a ligação à música (Bajini 1994) e o modo como a configuração de alguns dos textos de Tavares, mais do que linguística, é notacional, como o poema “Parlapatisse” (Tavares 2022a, 693), transformado na pauta em acrílico “Parlapatisse (kinetofonia)” (1978), entre muitos outros.

A ideia de baile ganha particular enfoque se tivermos em conta que a personagem principal de “Baile Mecânico” é Vénus, figura “esteatopígica em carne e osso” (Tavares 2019d, 49) mas sem rosto, ou, pelo menos, nunca mostrado ou captado pela câmara (como, de resto, em todas as estatuetas homónimas). As relações com a Vénus de Willendorf são evidentes, estatueta em barro descoberta na Áustria no início do século XX, e que representa, por excelência, a fertilidade, mas também a sensualidade feminina. Uma fotografia desta estatueta¹⁷ é reproduzida num atlas criado para uma das suas aulas de estética na SNBA ou Ar.Co, nos anos 1960-1970, onde anota: “Culto da fecundidade explicando o mistério das plantas que nascem da terra, e da maternidade da mulher que dá os alimentos e os filhos” (Tavares 2019a, 1). Também a jarra branca “Sinhora do Ó” (1959-1963) reproduz o formato esteatopígico da figura de “Baile Mecânico”, abaulada em baixo, estreita em cima. Na secção “Dispersos” de *Obra Poética 1957-1994*, o poema “A Língua”, diz: “Senhora do Ó, tu sabes / que ao dar-te por título uma vogal / o português sabia as quatro dimensões / de uma letra tal. / Esticou-te os dedos, alargou-te a palma / para abraçares o ventre com muita calma.” (Tavares 2022a, 710). De facto, é com muita calma e lentidão que Vénus, da peça, contracena com o batalhão de enfermeiras em aço, estas, sim, velozes e com tempos de resposta de “milionésimos de

17 Em conjunto com as Vénus de Laussel e de Lespugue. A Vénus de Willendorf é aquela que parece estar mais próxima do culto da fertilidade, dado que a de Laussel, devido ao corno com treze incisões, costuma ser associada aos ritos e ciclos lunares, e a de Lespugue, à sexualidade, em virtude da marcada estilização dos órgãos femininos. Estas interpretações são, obviamente, discutíveis e permanecem hipotéticas (Cârciumaru e Colan 2024).

segundos” (Tavares 2019b, 49). São os movimentos mínimos de Vénus, mas decididos, que vão espoletar o desenrolar da peça e requerer a atenção concentrada da câmara.

O enredo pode ser resumido do seguinte modo: Vénus, que usa saia aos quadrados e um avental e arfa como um cavalo, desloca-se da natureza para a clínica, onde se encontra o seu recém-nascido. Esta confronta-se, no local, com um exército mecânico de bailarinas em tarlatana, as enfermeiras, que, nesta maternidade cujo lema é “LUTAMOS. MARCHAMOS. AVANÇAMOS. / PELA HIGIENE. / PELA ORDEM. / CONTRA OS PRECONCEITOS. PARA UM FUTURO FELIZ” (Tavares 2019b, 54), tudo fazem para impedir que Vénus se aproxime do bebé e o amamente — símbolo, por excelência, da maternidade “porca”, visceral. Vénus, no entanto, consegue irromper, sem esforço, e de modo cadenciado, pelo dispositivo de controlo criado em torno dos berços de bebés ordeiramente dispostos e higienizados, provocando o caos e a rutura no edifício de controlo. A protagonista vai acercando-se do espaço, tomando-o, interagindo com as enfermeiras e surpreendendo-as na sua automaticidade cómica: primeiro, com a rececionista à entrada, que entra em pânico com a sua mera presença — “A sua voz grita ao telefone: Perigo!” (Tavares 2019b, 51); depois, com a telefonista — olhando para as suas luvas de borracha, Vénus pergunta: “Peste?”, ao que a enfermeira responde: “Varicela”. Vénus volta a perguntar: “E o menino?”, indicando-lhe a robot em seguida: “Suba.” (Tavares 2019b, 53). A mulher sobe para se defrontar com a primeira chefe das enfermeiras, a quem Vénus diz, de rompante: “Olha quem ela é! Nem te conhecia, mulher. Estás bem disfarçada!” (Tavares 2019b, 55). A interlocutora não responde e informa que o bebé está isolado e que ordens são ordens. Impassível, Vénus avança e o clímax é provocado pelo momento em que pega no seu filho e o amamenta (os restantes bebés são alimentados, pelas enfermeiras, com biberons de leite esterilizado, ao ritmo de música jazz¹⁸):

Grande berro da criança que chora com energia. / A câmara fixa o colo de Vénus com um bebé nos braços. / Com uma das mãos como na boca surgem todas as enfermeiras aflitadas. Uma, outra, outra. Todas. No meio delas, que formam quase uma roda fechada, está Vénus. / Em primeiro plano o colo de Vénus, que tira o peito para fora e ao qual a criança se agarra voraz, calando-se. / O cerco das enfermeiras fecha-se e todas avançam. Uma palavra é ruminada quase imperceptível mas, na insistência da repetição, surge às vezes clara: — Porca, porca, porca. (Tavares 2019b, 56–57)

A peça culmina com uma dança entre as enfermeiras que, em reação ao sucedido, são apossadas de delírio coletivo que as faz arremessar-se contra as portas e janelas, dançando e vomitando as suas molas, enquanto Vénus, de sapatos de “gitana”, determina o fim da dança e da peça com “duas pancadas destacadas” (Tavares 2019b, 57).

¹⁸ Lê-se: “O agitar dos biberons deve recordar os gestos dos músicos de jazz” (Tavares 2019b, 53). Esta indicação cénica é introduzida através de uma nota de rodapé e deve ser lida no efeito sofisticadamente disruptivo que provoca na cena (Tavares 2019b, 53).

Uma porca, senão esteatopígica, pelo menos opulenta, e a amamentar as crias, é a imagem que abre o catálogo da exposição “Brincar”. Abaixo, pode ler-se “Diálogos Criativos”, subtítulo de uma das secções da mostra. De facto, amamentar é o diálogo primevo entre mãe e filho, que se conhecem, numa primeira instância, por intermédio desse elo orgânico. Pormenores da amamentação dos seus filhos são, também, incluídos no currículo de 1984. Bem como em alguns dos seus textos que referem a importância da boca, da língua como “princípio do começo”, como explica no poema já citado “Língua”: “O choro alívio enche a casa toda de suspiro! / a boca aberta / lança a língua cauda de cometa / certa para abraçar a teta” (Tavares 2022a, 712). Tavares escreve reiteradamente sobre a necessidade de reconexão com a natureza e os seus ciclos ancestrais¹⁹. A própria Vénus caminha, no início da peça, de uma “terra lavrada e húmida”, de “humidade lodosa”, para uma “terra endurecida”, depois “alcatrão de uma estrada”, em seguida um “passeio de cimento”, para terminar num “chão de plástico que reflecte a mulher (Vénus) quase toda” (Tavares 2019b, 50), o pavimento da clínica. É aqui que resgatará o filho para o restituir ao seu entorno natural, a mãe, funcionando a amamentação como religar do ciclo, o gesto detonador do curto-circuito desse “sistema clínico como regulação higienista e des-sexualizadora do corpo” (Portela 2019, 14), de que fala Manuel Portela a propósito da peça, e que Foucault sistematizou (Foucault [1978] 2008, [1976] 1994)²⁰. É a reconexão, afinal, entre os corpos, que restitui, à mulher o seu poder simbólico e agenciador contra a máquina militarizada que a procura, a todo o custo, amordaçar e controlar. É apenas a natureza a ser ela própria, lenta mas cadente, que irrompe, nesta peça, como mecanismo atencional focado que amotina a máquina, esse “centro electrónico doido e abstracto”, cujo “futuro morreu no presente não nascido” (Tavares [1965] 2024, 34), como escreve a poeta em *Cartas e Letras de Pedro Sete*.

Assim, pese embora a proposta de Salette Tavares coloque o centro do olhar na câmara titubeante que percorre a dança ritmada da natureza (Vénus) vs. dança mecânica da máquina (a clínica), recorde-se o aparato fenomenológico da sua proposta e a relação com a experiência de mãe. Como lembra em “Forma e Criação”: “O centro da percepção é o corpo” (Tavares 1965a, 602). Ou seja, a visão do corpo feminino que nos é devolvido, neste baile, é o de uma experiência encarnada e viva, exuberante, até, como as outras obras de Tavares sobre o tema acima referidas, o demonstram, e em sintonia com a ideia de palco como mundo e vida. Explica, no poema “Rito do ‘eu autor’”: “Meu palco agora é mundo / profundo de quadrado / habito nele o certo / liberto visto e bailo / o fausto tão discreto / estame escancarado / previsto não previsto / fecundação

¹⁹ Veja-se, em particular, a obra póstuma editada em 2022, *Sintra no Jardim da Esmeralda* (Tavares 2022b).

²⁰ Neste campo, veja-se a proposta de leitura de Inês Cardoso desta peça (Cardoso 2024, 274-87), que a lê e enquadra no debate específico da tecnociência, pós-humanismo e estudos de género, motivo pelo qual este âmbito não é aqui desenvolvido.

mistério” (Tavares 2022a, 226). Neste sentido, são planos atentos a um corpo feminino contemplado na sua forma e ritmicidade de objeto poético, potenciador. Também como corpo que cumpre o rito cíclico da natureza e que, de certo modo, sintetiza um erotismo visceral que lhe é estético. É a forma que dança que sobressai nesta peça: a Vénus que custa a movimentar-se, pelo peso do seu corpo, e que arfa, mas que dança livremente para cumprir o seu afeto e ritmos em simbiose com a natureza de que é parte. O desenho desta peça-poema parece responder ao paradigma de uma arquitetura da extravagância que Tavares lê na obra de Pancho Guedes e à luz da qual escreve o seguinte: “A vida da forma deixa que as suas raízes sigam caminhos aleatórios insuspeitos — atravessam oceanos e vão plantar-se longe, profundamente” (Tavares 1977a, 23). Vénus é a mãe que caminha devagar, chega longe, e amamenta. Vénus é a mãe feliz, que ri. É o corpo que sustenta o ritmo e que provoca a desordem do sistema por ser o que é. Mas Vénus também é a escrita que dança, a escrita do corpo que propõe um baile das formas vivificante. É o próprio corpo de Vénus, ainda que sempre perspectivada das ancas para baixo, que conduz a escrita da peça. É esse o ponto de intersecção da interação com o bebé e as enfermeiras, do olhar da objetiva e do espetador, dos planos fílmicos e narrativos. Como escreve, citando Walter Gropius e a estética da Bauhaus (e que pode ser entrevista, também, em “Baile Mecânico”):

A mão compreende (entende) o espaço material palpável da realidade que nos é exterior, constrói-o na realidade segundo as leis da matéria e da mecânica e pondera a substância material que o determina, quer na sua firmeza, quer nas suas relações mecânicas construtivas. / Domina-a com o saber do artífice, com a ajuda de instrumentos mecânicos e máquinas. (Gropius citado em Tavares 2020, 141).

A “mecânica construtiva” proposta pela peça surge por contraponto à mecânica autodestrutiva do edifício clínico, não sem a parodização que é cara a Salette Tavares. Retratada na figura das enfermeiras militarizadas, a paródia é desenhada sob um prisma “reverencial, lúdico e desdenhoso” (Hutcheon 1989, 38-39), e que implica, ao mesmo tempo, “cumplicidade e distanciação” (Hutcheon 1989, 48). Isso mesmo é visível em “Baile Mecânico”: por um lado, uma visão de intimidade do ambiente retratado, conhecido; por outro, a recriação do cenário hospitalar sob um ponto de vista paródico constitui uma estratégia de encenação narrativa que a revela na sua contradição plena, constituindo o efeito cómico de teor dramático, uma consequência, também, da sua transposição para palco e fita. É o movimento da câmara que vai arquitetar esta abordagem fílmica e que se inscreve numa visão distópica sobre a máquina que Tavares soube antecipar.

Câmara “em tarlatana”: mediação tecnológica em “Baile Mecânico”

O facto de Salette Tavares propor, em “Baile Mecânico”, uma atenção mediada pela câmara — num processo de externalização tecnológica —, articula os dois regimes de atenção propostos por Yves Citton (2017): por um lado, constitui um laboratório estético que se propõe interrogar modos e modelos de valorização do corpo feminino por intermédio de uma atenção interpretativa e reflexiva, como se viu acima; por outro, recorrendo a intervenção direta nos modos de *reframing* eletrónico, Tavares propõe a subversão das culturas de interpretação mediática (a peça é de 1956), espécie de engajamento meta-atencional que resgata a natureza viva do corpo feminino, ressignificando-o. Escreve, num poema de 1961: “Ó luz onde estás? Repete. / Reflete. Espelhando traz. / Ó luz que me és / quem cega me fez / cortando-me os olhos / com vidros de espelho?” (Tavares 2022a, 825). A referência ao espelho, ao vidro e à luz são constantes na obra de Salette Tavares, *leitmotiv* que não pode deixar de relacionar-se com a obra de Lewis Carroll, que a poeta cita, por exemplo, em *José de Guimarães* (1985b), recordando as suas “Magias ilusionistas (...) para surpreender a Alice que sou” (Tavares 1985b, 13). O país das maravilhas é recuperado, também, no poema “[As maravilhas ficaram]” (Tavares 2022a, 340), que deu origem à instalação poética “Porta das Maravilhas” (1979) (Silva et al. 2014, 118–19), apresentada em “Brincar” (1979), e que é constituída por uma porta transparente em acrílico com o texto do poema serigrafado, e que versa sobre as diferentes leituras morfélicas da palavra “maravilha”: mar, ave e ilha. Ao leitor do poema é dada a possibilidade de atravessar a porta para o outro lado, que permite reler o poema no seu contrário, convidando-se à perspetiva. Já a transparência cria o efeito de ilusão, rasurando-se-lhe a opacidade. As maravilhas podem ser a quimera irreal, o sonho que se almeja, a moldura-matriz, ou a capacidade, em si, de tudo transformar em filme, história que se conta para entender. Como a autora lembra no poema “Janela”, de *Lex Icon*: “A janela é um quadro translúcido que muda / a casa (...) / Dia-positivo em movimento / animatógrafo lento olho o pulsar o dia / a janela é um quadrado a trazer do outro lado / o agora real agora.” (Tavares [1971] 2020, 128). Assim, por um lado, pode concluir-se que a poética de Tavares, num sentido lato, chama a atenção para a necessidade de projeção empática, que realiza através de um filtro de arte encarnada, como se viu até aqui; por outro, é conhecida a sua reflexão sobre a teoria da informação, nomeadamente a partir de Abraham Moles (Tavares 1967), tendo a poeta produzido conhecimento *avant la lettre* sobre a transição cibernética. A obra *Letras de Pedro Sete*, é, aliás, um dos livros de poemas onde a autora explana a sua visão distópico-lúdica sobre o assunto. É emblemática a passagem seguinte:

matemática cerzida / a partir do zero. / Nem sentimento nem gesto / para o que passa, /
o mais que nada / és tu e eu o moderno / inventando o nunca visto / sabendo economia
automação / como sabia Cristo / e fazendo o malabarismo do poeta / ciberneta / no deserto povoado de automóveis. / No cemitério é já velho / o que antes não era ainda velho, /

de snob em nobre esquecimento / eis a única prosa / que imita da vassoura o movimento.
(Tavares [1965] 2024, 80)

Por isso, relembra, ainda a propósito de Moles, que cabe à obra de arte ser poética, ou seja, produzir sentidos inesperados, ao invés de apenas codificação semântica — como a imitação da vassoura em movimento, do poema. Ou seja, cabe à obra de arte, produzir a abertura da forma de modo a gerar valor estético improvável. No conhecido poema “Os Efes”, recorda que “a obra de arte não é um pastel de massa tenra em que se possa separar o exterior aparente da carne que constitui um recheio” (Tavares 1973, 122). E por isso, há que fazer da forma, defende, máquina em si própria, programa de projeção poética, mecanismo que labora no signo e sua variabilidade infinita, e não apenas na soma da informação que indicia. Trata-se de “decantar sábia e cuidadosamente todos os pontos luminosos” (Tavares 1973, 123), arquitetar a luz, da câmara escura, como o poço de Alice, às escuras, que atravessado, revela²¹. Não podemos deixar de notar as semelhanças entre o “poço” de Tavares e a caixa negra de Vilém Flusser²². A máquina de filmar de Salette Tavares é uma caixa de lentes prismáticas, que permitem, por um lado, registar, observar de perto, ampliar ou desfocar, e, por outro, captar a dança de um corpo que abre interstícios, se transforma e faz transformar, pela dança natural que entretete entre si e os elementos, pelo olhar suscitado pela objetiva e respetiva reconfiguração compósita de sentidos. É que o espelho também desensina o olhar e a câmara pode aqui ser entendida como o limite que se atravessa, a saída de cena que permite entrar nos seus bastidores e tudo observar sob outro ângulo. O espelho devolve a mesma imagem mas reposicionada, por isso, é também o vidro da objetiva que filma e conta a história reescrita, por quem narra, mostra, e por quem olha e sente. Como na história de Vénus e do seu filho, na sua clínica prisional, mas de onde ambos se libertam.

A tarlatana, sendo o tecido de que é feita a farda das enfermeiras, é igualmente um adereço marcante de “Baile Mecânico”, porque também é o biombo que desfoca, faz deslizar o olhar para as luzes da ribalta, para o que brilha, cintila, ao mesmo tempo, assinalando o detalhe. A propósito da instalação “A Gaiola”, de Ana Vieira, Salette Tavares observa:

As imagens na cortina são as mesmas sombras de definição essencial do objecto (como o primeiro plano da gaiola). Só que o primeiro plano é esticado e estático, enquanto o último se move pelo franzir da cortina. Dando movimento, por outro lado, suspende esse

²¹ Esta ideia de poço como máquina encontra-se expressa no poema “+1”: “No tempo das máquinas enfeite de chapéu / e trágico / nem eu era Pedro nem Pedro era eu. / Seguiu atento os livros que saíam / das caves torturas máquinas escuras / e enchia a parede com traços retratos / de ideias futuras.” (Tavares [1965] 2024, 67).

²² O autor escreve, por exemplo: “(...) as imagens técnicas são pós-históricas. Ontologicamente, as imagens tradicionais imaginam o mundo; as imagens técnicas imaginam textos que concebem imagens que imaginam o mundo. Essa condição das imagens técnicas é decisiva para o seu deciframento.” (Flusser 1983, 13).

“movimento instante” para captar no espaço dimensão tempo. (Tavares 1974b, 14)

O efeito de *reframing*, em “Baile Mecânico”, é, também, conseguido por intermédio de outras estratégias de mediação: o próprio movimento em cena, do corpo de Vénus, sempre filmado a partir de baixo, focando-se os pés, descritos como ágeis e sensuais, e que caminham “com demora e satisfação”, enterrando-se, ao início, numa terra viscosa que sobressai e se torna “palpável à vista” (Tavares 2019b, 50). De modo compassado, ao longo dos sete atos nos quais se divide a peça, estas pernas vão conquistando ritmo e ocupando o espaço militarizado da clínica através da dança e reagindo, fora de tempo, ao ritmo mecânico das enfermeiras: “Os pés de Vénus docemente no chão marcam o compasso. As mãos das enfermeiras com luvas de borracha em grandes gestos.” (Tavares 2019b, 52) —, pode ler-se na cena cinco, antes do encontro entre Vénus e a telefonista. No fim, calçando os sapatos flamencos, e já depois de amamentar o seu filho, é Vénus que lidera e orienta a dança dos passos no seu conjunto, de todas as enfermeiras, entretanto entregues ao ritmo distorcionário da máquina que avaria. Avaria esta que vai sendo anunciada: paralelamente ao ritmo orgânico de Vénus, o ritmo das enfermeiras é apresentado, ao longo da peça, sob efeito de uma disforia dadá que contribui para a parodização e desconstrução da lógica maquinica a que estão sujeitas. É assim que a autora descreve o seu ritmo, na sexta cena: “Um, dois, um dois, um dois, bacalhau com arroz, um, dois, bacalhau com arroz, um dois, bacalhau com arroz. Corta.” (Tavares 2019b, 52). Outra das estratégias exploradas é o *smash cut*²³ entre cenas, suturando-se a sua transição sem dissolvência ou *fade out*. O encaixamento de entre todos os planos dá-se, pois, por *collage* costurada, proporcionando uma visão diagramática que coloca em evidência franjas narrativas da história. São os detalhes que narram e indicam o *plot*, construindo-se uma *mise-en-scène* aberta e observacional que funciona como sutura dorsal de toda a montagem. Lê-se: “A câmara recreia-se” (Tavares 2019b, 51), “A câmara sobe a escada lisa quase colada às ancas de Vénus. Magnífica”, “A câmara perscruta!” (Tavares 2019b, 53). O próprio número de cenas, sete, é concebido como totalidade de ciclo, número de etapas que é preciso completar na busca de sentido, introspeção, sabedoria.

Pode concluir-se afirmando que Salette Tavares concebe a câmara como uma fábrica²⁴. No poema “Os olhos”, afirma: “Olhos não são máquina fotográfica / são fábrica, fabricante e operário / e a lente que regula salta à corda / pula menina do escuro ao claro / e a memória não regista apenas / mas labora” (Tavares 2022a, 865). Em “Baile Mecânico”, a montagem de perspetivas congrega-se numa arte do labirinto que, desvelando, revela, para retomar o arquétipo do fio de Ariane, também tão próximo da autora. Escreve: “Mobilei meu labirinto com fio de seda. Não lhe conheço os percursos,

²³ Corte abrupto da cena.

²⁴ “Fabricar é o mais religioso serviço do homem” (Tavares [1971] 2020, 35).

reencontro-os porque a seda às vezes se faz cortina e da transparência me deixa ficar mais presa do oculto” (Tavares 1983, 8). Ou seja, a autora sabe que toda a percepção é situada e se mostra desse ponto de vista, logo, também oculta. No caso de “Baile Mecânico”, ecoam as suas experiências como mãe, mas numa perspectiva que aprofunda os ângulos e as camadas de sentido, sintetizando-as numa visão integrada das relações entre corpo feminino, natureza, civilização. Assim esta obra de Tavares não deixa de inscrever-se no cômputo de uma visão da técnica como “tecnologia cognitiva”, ou seja, como define Luciana Kraemer, “que vê o conhecimento como comprometido com um modo de ser e produzir diferenças com e para este mundo a partir de um contínuo processo de transformação de si incorporado e não representado” (Kraemer 2019, 117). Em concomitância, o modo como Tavares pensa e produz a camada técnica, fílmica, deixa perceber esta peça como experiência estética e sensível (Gumbrecht 2010), também para quem vê, ouve ou lê a peça.

As obras de Salette Tavares antecipam problemáticas civilizacionais, para as quais a poeta foi propondo leituras, intervindo nos modos de conhecer, saber e descobrir a vida. Na peça “Baile Mecânico”, para além de abordar questões tão na ordem do dia, hoje, em pleno século XXI, como a violência obstétrica e a militarização tecnocrática da vida, resgata uma visão devocional do corpo da mulher, celebrando-o. Fá-lo propondo uma reflexão profunda sobre corpo e técnica, e antecipando-a como um caixa de espelhos fractais que também é de dentro para fora e, como tal, pode ser palco para uma performance que, ao celebrar o corpo, devolve-lhe a presença. Concluo com Pancho Guedes que, citado pela voz de Salette Tavares, recorda:

Os nossos edifícios deverão ser organismos artificiais, bonecas mecânicas e monstros, rosnando e rosnando às baforadas, soprando e assobiando, contendo quartos com os murmúrios escondidos das conchas do mar, espaços negros, passagens lascivas, salas de multiplicações infinitesimais, voltadas de dentro para fora. Devemos ouvir as vozes que falam para todos nós do outro lado dos sonhos, devemos vigiar as visões e os cânticos dentro de nós mesmos até que o arquipélago das necessidades, ideias sonhos, desejos e obsessões, se levante para revelar o continente submerso da função total. Os edifícios então pertencerão ainda mais às pessoas, tornar-se-ão mais reais e animados e a beleza mais ardente e conclusiva. (Guedes citado em Tavares 1977, 17).

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Snap, Hiss, Crackle, Pop: Counter-factual Conservation as Attentional Practice

Estalo, Chiado, Crepitação, Pop: Conservação Contrafactual como Prática Atencional

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Abstract

This essay emerged through a counter-factual approach to institutional documentation, repurposing conservation-based practices (specifically the Museum's Activity Log, officially termed the "Activity Snapshot Module") from a time-tracking tool into a creative archival practice. This unofficial experiment, straddling the pandemic and its lockdowns, became a way of attending to what goes unmarked: the textures and rhythms beneath institutional accountability. It manifests sonically and materially: field recordings of the canteen's afternoon clamour—voices, clattering dishes, the sounds of a museum in full operation—mingling later with the eerie quiet of pandemic lockdown; the mechanical hum of building systems in emptied galleries, security radios crackling through vacant corridors; surfacing digital images; objects and the conditions of care; voice notes whispered in the darkroom's red glow. The soundscape shifted from institutional din to ghostly stillness, revealing what the everyday cacophony had masked. Reclaiming this administrative tool, I sought to create a space for temporal drift, to breathe, where the liveliness of conservation work might surface beyond quantified metrics. This reclaimed space extends beyond the written page, finding a dynamic, activated form in [Museum Soundings](#), an online archive (museum-within-museums) that invites readers to experience: 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 archive houses the acoustic emissions recordings discussed here, sound walks from my wanderings through institutional spaces, and the Activity Log itself. This growing polyphonic space invites readers to move between textual analysis and embodied listening, between the essay's theoretical framework and the lived textures it describes, making the 'lived' experience of duration central to the work's unfolding.

counter-factual conservation | institutional attention | acoustic emissions | archival practice | Victoria and Albert Museum

Keywords

Resumo

Este ensaio emerge de uma abordagem contrafactual à documentação institucional, reaproveitando práticas baseadas na conservação—mais concretamente no Registo de Atividades do Museu, oficialmente designado “Módulo de Captura de Atividade”—transformando uma ferramenta de controlo do tempo numa prática arquivística criativa. Esta experiência não oficial, desenvolvida durante a pandemia e os seus confinamentos, tornou-se uma forma de atender ao que passa despercebido: as texturas e ritmos subjacentes às lógicas de responsabilização institucional. O trabalho manifesta-se de forma sonora e material: gravações de campo do clamor vespertino da cantina—vozes, o tilintar da loiça, os sons de um museu em pleno funcionamento—misturando-se depois com o silêncio inquietante do confinamento pandémico; o zumbido mecânico dos sistemas do edifício em galerias vazias, rádios de segurança crepitando por corredores desertos; imagens digitais emergentes; os objetos e as condições do seu cuidado; notas de voz sussurradas no brilho vermelho da câmara escura. A paisagem sonora mudou de burburinho institucional para uma quietude fantasmagórica, revelando o que a cacofonia quotidiana havia mascarado. Ao recuperar esta ferramenta administrativa, procurei criar um espaço para deriva temporal, para respirar, onde a vivacidade do trabalho de conservação pudesse emergir para além de métricas quantificadas. Este espaço recuperado estende-se para além da página escrita, encontrando uma forma dinâmica e ativada em [Museum Soundings](#) — um arquivo online (museu-dentro-de-museus) que convida os leitores a experienciar: Como é sentir um museu a pensar? Como é estar perto de um objeto e em dúvida? O arquivo aloja as gravações de emissões acústicas aqui discutidas, caminhadas sonoras das minhas deambulações por espaços institucionais, e o próprio Registo de Atividades. Este espaço polifónico convida os leitores a moverem-se entre análise textual e escuta incorporada, entre o enquadramento teórico do ensaio e as texturas vividas que descreve, tornando a experiência ‘vívida’ da duração central ao desenrolar da obra.

Palavras-chave

conservação contrafactual | atenção institucional | emissões acústicas | prática arquivística | Victoria and Albert Museum

The museum scientist Boris Pretzel describes the acoustic emissions of eighteenth-century furniture as revealing ‘characters and characteristics’ (Pretzel 2014), the clicks and pops that mark new surfaces arriving in the wood. I have borrowed his phrase. What I have come to think of as counter-factual conservation produces its own characters and characteristics, among them the unreliable conservator, and the museum scientist who emerge not through deliberate positioning but through attention to what institutional protocols filter out as noise. These are experimental figures, an ecology of practices made manifest in the interstices of the museum and its everyday; wandering beyond established protocols, beyond the object itself, to the interstitial spaces, the gaps, margins and thresholds where institutional certainty breaks down and something else surfaces. Museum Soundings, a growing online archive, a

museum-within-museums, emerges from these micro-events, these small ruptures in institutional routine. Not the other way around.

These dispositional characters emerge from years of intimate engagement with the museum, its materials and rhythms, what I have come to experience as the ‘deeply felt everyday’ of conservation work. The wandering, listening, attending to micro-events grew from a close, hands-on attunement to material cadences, to how objects transform over time, to the institutional rhythms pulsing beneath official protocols. Intimacy with these cadences makes it possible to notice when conditions shift, when something else surfaces in the interstices.

Canteen With Pretzel (Attentional Cadences)

If I want to mix a glass of sugar and water, I must, willy-nilly, wait until the sugar melts. This little fact is big with meaning. For here the time I have to wait is not that mathematical time which would apply equally well to the entire history of the material world, even if that history were spread out instantaneously in space. It coincides with my impatience, that is to say, with a certain portion of my own duration [...] It is no longer something thought, it is something lived! (Bergson 1998)

The museum’s staff canteen is bustling. Seated, absentmindedly turning a sugar crystal, I am waiting for Boris Pretzel, a museum scientist I have worked with for many years. He is late, and my patience is wearing thin. The afternoon clamour of colleagues, the clattering of dishes, are a noisy cacophony, a background noise echoing what we’re about to discuss. The sugar crystal, a recent playful experiment, catches the light, scattering it across the table, catching the waiting cup of tea, each facet a different frame of attention, a tuning of the surroundings.

When Pretzel arrives, our meeting is brief, informal, friendly, starting with a light-hearted moan about the Activity Log, that unloved add-on to the collections database that has us account for our hours against every project and task: an unnecessary tool, a pain. He hands me a memory stick of sound files from rhEvents, the sub-name of a material-analysis project he coordinated (Pretzel 2014): a study of how fluctuations in relative humidity register as acoustic events in an eighteenth-century French lacquered commode on open display.

Using wide-band microphone sensors and digital speckle-pattern interferometry, he and his colleagues had recorded the micro-cracks, small releases of energy as new surfaces arrive in the wood, in order to broaden the climate parameters within which such objects can safely be shown.

I mention my interest in the discrimination at the method's heart: its patient filtering of signal from background noise, its willingness to attend to events too small and indeterminate for the human ear. Where Pretzel's aim was to specify and mitigate risk, mine turns elsewhere.

Still toying with the sugar crystal, I lightheartedly speculate about how quickly it would dissolve in his still steaming cup of tea, echoing Bergson's observation about waiting for sugar to melt, an analogy for the conditions of material change and for how conservation practice might open into something else. My research inherits his instruments and his data, departing from him in what it asks the sounds to do. I'm keen, I explain, to keep the recordings unresolved; open: to experience the emissions not as damage to be managed but as a museum's material life becoming, briefly, audible.

Listening to Eighteenth-Century Furniture

Listening to an [18-second compression](#) of a year's worth of data, I'm captivated by these acoustic recordings, intrigued by the arrival of these 'characters'. A year of the commode's transformation spatialised into eighteen seconds, Bergson's melting sugar sped past audition. What the compression cannot hold is the duration it stands in for: the lived, indivisible time of the item's material condition and its containment, to which the recording can only point, where I explain duration becomes experienced.

The sounds, a by-product of the rhEvents analysis, emanate from an item of eighteenth-century French lacquered furniture (Pretzel 2014). This particular object, like many from its era, carries within its very material the colonial histories of its making: distant trade routes, exploitative labour, the embeddedness of empire. The micro-cracks and acoustic emissions, in this light, can be heard not just as material degradation but as conditions themselves becoming audible, a subtle yet persistent echo of its complicated histories. Over tea, Pretzel explains that the arrhythmic clicks and pops signify micro-events, the arrival of new surfaces in the furniture, cracks emerging with little fanfare from the background noise of a museum. These cadences create their own tuning of attention, where technical protocol meets material transformation, and listening becomes a way of attending to change.

In 2014, Pretzel and colleagues gathered evidence of the adverse effects of environmental fluctuation on antique furniture. Using acoustic emissions technology (AE) and digital speckle-pattern interferometry (laser), they sought to measure the interactions between artefacts and their surrounding climate. The research aimed to guide 'climate specifications for galleries with sensitive artefacts on display', emphasising an energy-efficient, risk-mitigated approach to their display (Pretzel 2014). Yet the same instruments can be tuned otherwise.

Human ears can only discern these elusive infrasonic micro-events through digital re-encoding. Ultra-sensitive audio equipment picks up the faint acoustic traces. These

signals mark releases of energy, the arrival of new surfaces, boundaries crossed, ‘micro-cracks’ suggestive of a change to the surface, characteristic of fluctuations in the climate that increase the risk of damage in objects (Pretzel 2014). *Museum Soundings*, by making these re-encoded sounds accessible, acts as a different kind of filter, one that amplifies these subtle releases of energy, letting us “fall into” a sonic world usually inaccessible and revealing the hidden cadences of material life.¹

This filtering, distinguishing signal from noise, is itself an attentional practice learned through intimate material engagement. What the system excludes as ‘background noise’ or ‘uncharacteristic’ reveals as much about institutional priorities as what it captures. Years of conservation work attune you to material stress, to the barely perceptible cadences that signal change. The museum in its everyday operations produces its own relentless background noise: the productivity metrics, the incessant visitor throughput, the coupling of profession and progress that drowns out the deeply felt everyday. What acoustic emissions research reveals in furniture, underlying stress made audible through filtering, the pandemic pause would later reveal in the institution itself: conditions that everyday cacophony had masked but intimate knowledge could recognise.

Here I take my lead from Brandon LaBelle, for whom background noise is never mere remainder. In *Background Noise* (LaBelle 2006) the background is not the negligible ground against which a signal stands out but the medium of relation itself, the shared field through which bodies, spaces and institutions are composed. To filter noise, then, is never simply to discard the inessential. It is to make a claim about what counts. Consider the museum’s micro-events: the snap of a new surface arriving in the wood, the crackle of a security radio, the pop of a flashbulb in an emptied studio. These are background noise in exactly this sense, not failures of signal but sonic territories the institution overlooks. To attend to them is already a small act of what LaBelle calls re-orientation, the way listening navigates the conditions of a place and the struggles over recognition and belonging it holds (LaBelle 2021).²

1 The system employs two wide-band single-ended microphone sensors [...] mounted at different locations on the commode (locations are chosen near existing cracks, operated efficiently to ensure that sounds from micro-cracking cannot be detected simultaneously by both microphones). The AE events are discriminated from the high level of background noise by comparing the signals at the two points and filtering out data with uncharacteristic frequency response or duration (Pretzel 2014).

2 My engagement with LaBelle’s work is not only textual. I took part in the Listening Academy at Iklectik, London (September 2022), part of the wider Listening Biennial network (Errant Bodies), and in Brandon LaBelle’s Poetics of Listening seminar (24 and 31 March, 7 and 14 April 2025), where these ideas were rehearsed less as theory than as exercise, closely allied to the practices of attunement described below.

Wandering the Museum

During my years at London's Victoria and Albert Museum, there was pleasure to be had in wandering. I occasionally recorded these walks. These wanderings resist goal-oriented life, following improvisational paths through the public galleries and the back-of-house spaces alike, cutting across and through the bordered museum. This was the museum at its most intimate: the conversations while waiting, the muscle memory of handling objects. The doubts and questions. These are the affective, shared dimensions, the deeply felt tempos of practice, that institutional systems fail to capture.

Looking back from the other side of the pandemic, I'm struck by the intensity of the sonic environment I have been describing. The sounds of a museum, once simply background noise, now carry a different weight, in response to my own fevered experiences of the Covid pandemic. These were not just the overt sounds but the subtle acoustic emissions, the micro-events: the distant clatter from the canteen, the faint echoes of conversations, the barely perceptible cracks opening in the eighteenth-century furniture, the ambient textures captured in the field recordings I'd made during my wanderings through the museum's less-trodden paths. All of it pointed to something shifting beneath the surface. Acoustic emissions reveal underlying stress in materials, the environmental fluctuations that cause furniture to crack. The pandemic's pause revealed the same in the institution: the unsustainable rhythms, the colonial violences, the extractive attention economies that 'business as usual' had normalised. The museum hoards time; a heterotopia of 'indefinitely accumulating time' (Foucault 1986, 26) depends on the accumulation never stopping. The pause stopped it. The museum was, I suspect, in a state of 'fever' long before the pandemic, its relentless activity masking a deeper unease.

Institutional Pause

They never imagined it happening: the technologies of production, put to work for over 170 years, paused...

The Museum closes to visitors. Indefinitely. Peace. Quiet. Save for the background hiss of air conditioning units, building management systems, data servers; occasional essential maintenance staff passing through the twilight of empty galleries, studios, corridors, and offices, the quiet pierced by intermittent crackle, fragments of conversation from the security teams' two-way radios; the regular low rumble of underground trains' mostly empty carriages, passing beneath the Museum's quietened Cast Court galleries. Not business as usual. Rather, a museum stilled, idling. In absentia, a parasymphathetic hiatus.

The institutional noise filtered out: the visitor footfall, the meetings, the performance metrics. What remained were the sounds that had always been there: the building's mechanical systems, the radios' intermittent crackle, the underground trains. Like the acoustic emissions equipment distinguishing micro-cracks from background din, the pause allowed different signals to surface. What the institution typically produced as its dominant frequency (productivity, throughput, the relentless forward motion) fell away revealing the subtler cadences beneath: the material conditions, the rhythms of care work, the attention that 'business as usual' systematically drowns out.

This unprecedented pause creates conditions for what Isabelle Stengers would call an ecology of practices, practices set beside one another so that none can claim the authority to disqualify the rest (Stengers 2023). With the conservation department emptied and the executive elsewhere, counter-factual conservation emerges not as a proposition to argue but as something to rehearse. The pandemic produced a rupture in the museum's fabric, its temporal and spatial logics disrupted. This opening created conditions for dishabitation, for pause. During this pause, the museum became alive to possibility, not the fevered productivity that preceded it, but a space of play, imagination, and care.

I imagine a museum at work (not in the strict sense). The technologies of production, the means of capture, retention and dissemination, re-attuning after years of continuous habitual use. The apparatus forging new alliances, playfully re-staging use and value. In the emptied museum, wandering returns, no longer the remembered pleasure of the working galleries but its imagined re-enactment, improvised meanders, crossing and recrossing institutional borders. The same doors I'd held open for processions of objects now opening to something else: time spent otherwise, attention growing wild. Or perhaps this is simply fevered imagination, lockdown's gift. The break, the opening, has always been here. It is not a new thing, real or imagined. The modern project alive with what it might yet become. The pandemic didn't create the crisis. It revealed what was already present, allowed what was suppressed to bloom.

In the fringing effects of the virus, the museum's *Henry Cole Wing* reverberates; laughter, voices, and footsteps echoing through vacant corridors—sound wandering through an institution in suspension; the opening refrain from Marvin Gaye's 'What's Going On' from a studio radio, a joyous looping of a gathering already underway; the rise and fall of street sounds, traffic, voices, drifting with the breeze from a window, open to Exhibition Road; mingling with the *scanning camera's intense pitch* and the intermittent staccato popping of flashlights from the open darkroom studio door; the faint sounds of water, the subterranean passage of a tributary of the river Westbourne, heading to meet the Thames. This concatenation of sound³ fills the Grand Staircase, the incorporeal instantiation of Henry Cole, the architect of the modern museum project,

³ On this concatenation of soundings, and the fugitive sociality it names, see Moten (2018, 162).

overflowing with the publics he sought to welcome. The technologies of capture, already at work in the museum, making themselves felt. The absence of the executive, the keepers of the modern museum project elsewhere, prompting a cacophonous infra-mural sociality.

Or is this just memory? Reconstruction? Here the unreliable conservator surfaces, working in the uncertain terrain between what happened and what might have been. Haunting the imaginary, the sounds mixing, real and dreamt, in the fringing effects of the virus. The fevered museum conjuring what might have been, what the pause might have allowed. Not preservation but transformation. Not the museum's habitual processions but attention turned fugitive, institutional possibilities growing wild. A question haunts this re-wilding of conservation: what forms of institutional life might have emerged if we had truly inhabited the pause, rather than rushing to 'recover'?

In this stillness, where traditional narratives and institutional constraints fell away, conservation practice found itself untethered from the 'scrupulous and short-sighted precision' that had long defined it (Stengers 2023, 24). The forced separation from museum and objects, a rupture paradoxically opened new pathways for imagining institutional care. For a conservator, being locked away from the objects creates a fundamental rupture of what I call the 'deeply felt everyday'. I would not claim the conservator is ever truly separate from the object, so co-constitutive is that intimacy. The rupture, rather, made the intimacy suddenly legible. This pause revealed how conservation might move beyond its origins in the modern project towards something more attuned to ongoing material and social relations.

This enforced separation directly challenged what Stengers identifies as a key symptom of the modern project: 'the coupling of profession and progress' (Stengers 2023, 26). This coupling, which shapes conservation practice, entails specialisation, disciplinary protocols, and often leads to a scrupulous and short-sighted precision, technically effective but foreclosing other forms of attention. What Stengers sets against this coupling is precisely an ecology of practices: not the abandonment of expertise but its resituating among other ways of knowing, so that conservation's precision is held in relation rather than granted sovereignty. Counter-factual conservation inhabits that relation, to practise what Stengers elsewhere calls a care of the possible: an attention that keeps open what the institution would otherwise foreclose (Stengers 2011).

The Activity Snapshot Module was, in the institution's terms, a fix for temporal drift: the slippage between the hours a conservator spends and the hours the record can account for. Bolted onto the Collections Management System, a manifestation of the same coupling, it asked us to book our time against every project and task so that labour left no gap. It is at once an object, a field in a database, and a process, a small daily discipline shaping how the everyday is spent. During lockdown I kept it running but turned it: logging encounters and their absence, time wandering unaccounted. The tool meant to abolish temporal drift became a space for it, and in that inversion the Activity Log became Museum Soundings, the institutional time-tracking tool reimagined as archive,

a work-in-progress where wandering, listening and attending to what exceeds capture became the practice itself.

Memory became fevered, speculative, without the anchoring presence of materials. Imagination, untethered from its usual institutional grounding, worked differently in the domestic space of lockdown, another kind of space, improvised and provisional, where new possibilities could be forged. In this hiatus, removed from the rituals and precisions of daily institutional life, the pause opened pathways for imagining care otherwise, not abandoning my expertise and technical knowledge but asking what forms of attention might emerge when enforced separation ruptures habitual practice. The pandemic thus made care itself the work: political, relational, and largely unaccounted for by institutional systems.

Reopening

The Museum reopens, the restructuring, the redundancies, the return to the coupling of profession and progress. Museums faced multiple intersecting crises: late capitalism's strains, the ongoing genocide in Palestine that exposes colonial violence not as historical but as present and lethal, the climate emergency. They retreated into familiar operations rather than risking change. When institutions needed care, they exhibited carelessness. An opportunity for transformation overlooked, refused.

In the wake of redundancy, something uncanny occurred. The Museum, that solid institutional architecture of stone and protocol, began to feel like a hallucination, whilst Museum Soundings, this counter-factual archive born from pandemic fever, became the more substantive reality — a museum alive in its interstices. This inversion is the museum's dysphoria laid bare: the fevered state where what institutions claim as "real" (productivity, hierarchy, institutional continuity) reveals itself as delirium, whilst what they dismiss as noise (wandering, listening, attending to togetherness) emerges as the practice. The dispossession of redundancy paradoxically created the conditions for a different kind of work, not the museum's work, but work, nonetheless.

Yet the crises persist, shapeshifting. What we misleadingly call 'post-pandemic' is not a return to stability but ongoing dishabitation, a state of fundamental discomfort with imposed conditions, a refusal to accept what institutions normalise as inevitable. The pause had opened questions about institutional care beyond scrupulous precision, about 'making sense in common' across different practices of attention (Stengers 2023), about the museum as a place of transmission and inheritance rather than redundancy. What the pause revealed was how institutional transformation requires exactly the forms of life the institution dismisses; time to breathe, to open sense-making to what it has excluded, to make sense differently, together. These questions weren't answered but foreclosed. They remain. Yet they insist.

Counter-factual conservation inhabits the gaps, nomadic, provisional, playful. The unreliable conservator remains at large. The sounds, real or imagined, continue. Work continues, or tries to. Not because the crisis ended, but because it didn't. Because it's ongoing. The museum as virus, in the process of overwriting itself, a seemingly endless process of un-making and re-making in the ruins of our ongoing unravelling. Time playing out, otherwise. The liveliness persists in the interstitial spaces. The snap, hiss, crackle, and pop, the dishabitation, always here. The question isn't whether to transform. The question is how to live the ongoing crises with care, and with others.

Practices of Attunement

What, then, is counter-factual conservation? Not a method laid over the old, nor another layer added to the record, but the institution's own instruments turned against their function. The practice brings the field recordings of the working and the emptied museum into dialogue with the acoustic-emission recordings and the textual traces of the Activity Log, and from this convergence assembles a documentation of what was never officially recorded: not the official capture but something else, what might have been. The unreliable conservator inhabits this terroir, a documentation that refuses institutional certainty and stays open to what exceeds capture, to the social and material textures that no database can hold.

The Activity Log, built to track time as a metric, becomes a repository for what could not be done. The acoustic emissions, gathered to mitigate risk, are heard as a museum's material life rather than as damage. It is an anarchive in the strict sense, resisting the archive's ordering, keeping its characters unresolved rather than classified.

Rooted in art practice, my approach to conservation adopts slowed attention, listening, speculation and doubt, sensitivity to objects and their environments, curiosity, collective and convivial endeavour, the arts of documentation, and embodied relations to layered material histories.⁴ Adapting what I have learned there, counter-factual conservation does more than arrest change. It opens the technical protocols to imagination and speculation without abandoning their rigour, moving from an object-based

⁴ These practices were tested and developed through a research group formed during the pandemic. Emerging from an (Un-)Learning programme, the group became an online space for gathering, a respite from dishabitation, creating distributed intimacy across continents. Drawing on Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's concept of "study" (Harney and Moten 2013), we explored 'instituting' as process rather than institution, testing what holds things together when things fall apart, including through making sugar crystals as a prompt to explore togetherness and duration. Instructions for making these crystals are available in Museum Soundings, inviting others into this practice. This collective work directly informed the counter-factual methodology developed here and produced collaborative outputs including a sound work for a topologies project and participation in an economies residency, where we explored decolonisation of economic frameworks and communal sharing practices.

conservation toward an environmental sensibility attentive to conditions, atmospheres, relations, the duration of the everyday.

If this is a practice, what does it set in motion? Less a reform than a contamination. It does not petition the institution to change. It seeds an outside within it, lodged in the institution's own tools. The protocols are subtly and, I suspect, irreversibly altered: an attention, once practised, is not easily unlearned. It spreads less by policy than by being practised, the way the pandemic's stillness let what was suppressed bloom. Museum Soundings is that seed made shareable, an invitation others might take up and germinate elsewhere.

The practice asks: what if we documented this instead of that? What if the play in the machine were not aberration but call and response? What these reworked emissions and Activity Log entries required, and still require, is a different quality of attention: not the rush to classify and resolve, but something closer to simply listening, letting them remain uncertain. This suspension of classification, this not-knowing, begins to feel less like failure and more like play, a resistance I would rather affirm than explain away. Following this reworking, these "uncharacteristic characters" were welcome additions to the Activity Log.

Duration

The pleasure of those wanderings feeds my conservation-based research. Take the acoustic emissions again. The filtering that separates micro-cracks from background noise demands precision, yet that precision does not fix what the sounds mean. It only makes them audible. The conservator listening to these re-encoded emissions is not measuring damage. They are hearing material change as it happens, an ongoing process rather than a problem to solve. The same precision that mitigates risk can instead become a way of listening: not the arrest of change but attention to its cadences.

This is duration in Bergson's sense: not clock-time measured out but time felt from within, the melting sugar, the wearing thin of patience. The unreliable conservator, following this lead, engages with duration as lived institutional practice, attending to the rhythms of material transformation, the tempos of care work, the cadences beneath quantified metrics. This changes how I engage the museum: not to preserve it but to notice how a technical protocol can itself become a way of attending. The museum struggles to respond to contemporary challenges: colonial legacies, a careless pandemic "recovery" as they referred to it, ecological crisis. This asks for a different kind of care, an attention trained on what usually falls outside the frame.

In the pandemic hiatus I return to the clamour of the afternoon canteen, the sugar crystal dissolving in the scientist's cooling tea. A museum in full swing. In the spaces of the technical protocols, something else can be heard. As the process philosopher Alfred

North Whitehead suggests, ‘life lurks in the interstices’ (Whitehead 1978)⁵. The unreliable conservator serves as guide to these interstitial realms, inhabiting the folds between technical protocol and material attention, between what institutions capture and what exceeds them. Here, in these traces of a museum to come, the work is not grand systematic change but the patient, intimate work of attending to what institutional systems cannot hold: the cadences, the deeply felt everyday, the care that persists in the interstices.

5 The full line reads: ‘life lurks in the interstices of each living cell, and in the interstices of the brain’ (Whitehead 1978, 105-106).

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Biographical note Nota biográfica

Simon Fleury's work is deeply rooted in his expertise as a conservator at London's Victoria and Albert Museum (1996–2021) and his extensive background in photography and film.

His academic path includes postgraduate studies at the Royal College of Art and a recent PhD from the Birmingham School of Art and Design.

As a co-founder of the Conservation Lab and the practices of attunement research group, Simon contributes significantly to the intersection of conservation-based creative and theoretical practice. His work is part of the collections of Tate and the British Council.

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ENSAIO VISUAL

VISUAL ESSAY

A fall into the self

Cair em si

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Abstract

This paper aims to bring together artistic, linguistic and experiential dimensions of falling, culminating in the idea that some falls do not take us away from ourselves but rather lead us back into ourselves. Although fall and ascension are treated as related movements, the actual centre of gravity of this paper is falling. This is a universal subject and yet surprisingly under-theorised. We will move between painting, literature, religion, philosophy, everyday language, popular music and dance, but without reducing them to a single disciplinary framework. These diverse materials all point toward a paradoxical movement whereby one reaches oneself through descent. The self is not achieved solely through mastery, transcendence or elevation, but rather, above all, through a process of grounding, vulnerability and return. Thus we develop a meditation on gravity, descent, embodiment and self-knowledge that culminates in the rich Portuguese expression “cair em si” (“to come to one’s senses”, literally “to fall into oneself”).
fall | everyday language | love | dance | grounding

Keywords

Resumo

Este artigo pretende reunir as dimensões artísticas, linguísticas e experienciais da queda, culminando na ideia de que algumas quedas não nos afastam de nós próprios, mas antes nos reconduzem a nós próprios. Embora a queda e a ascensão sejam tratadas como movimentos relacionados, o verdadeiro foco deste artigo é a queda. Este é um tema universal e, surpreendentemente, pouco teorizado. Transitaremos entre a pintura, a literatura, a religião, a filosofia, a linguagem quotidiana, a música popular e a dança, sem, no entanto, as reduzirmos a um único quadro disciplinar. Estes diversos materiais apontam para um movimento paradoxal pelo qual se chega a si mesmo através da descida. O eu não é alcançado apenas através do domínio, da transcendência ou da elevação, mas antes, sobretudo, por um processo de ancoragem, vulnerabilidade e retorno. Assim, desenvolvemos uma meditação sobre a gravidade, a descida, a corporalidade e o autoconhecimento que culmina na rica expressão portuguesa “cair em si”.
queda | linguagem comum | amor | dança | enraizamento

Palavras-chave

The call for the current issue of RCL included this idea: ‘Cadere’, a word that has the same origin as ‘cadence’ and embodies the idea of falling. We can fall into, or out of, a particular type of attention, curiosity, or passion.” I embraced this suggestion since few concepts appear so frequently across religious narratives, artistic representations, bodily practices, linguistic expressions and affective experiences, and yet the notion of falling has rarely been treated as a conceptual category in its own right. Thus I will start with matters related to *fall*, not in a moral sense, nor in a strictly spiritual way, but rather as a physical or psychophysical phenomenon which, by its gravity, affects common sense, common language and all of the arts. This will hopefully become clear throughout the text, which might later approach the complexity and ambiguity involved.

1. One of the mysteries of the Christian faith is that God himself, or rather God’s son, can also fall (as depicted in many paintings of Christ falling while carrying the cross) and eventually die. A falling Jesus, a dying son of God! Lucifer, the perfect angel, fought against this idea of a vulnerable divinity, which was precisely what caused his spectacular and irreversible fall, depicted here by Brueghel.



Image 1

Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, 1562



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Image 2
Rosso Fiorentino,
Descent from the Cross, 1521



—
Image 3
Bernardino Butinone,
The descent from the cross, c.1485

Our attention to falling cannot be separated from our need for ascension. In the visual arts, there is a long tradition of depicting the descent from the cross: paintings that invariably show how much effort and muscle it takes to ascend (usually on ladders) and how this ascent is only justified by the need to bring the crucified body down.

When winged figures appear in the picture, it is because they are angels trying to support the dead body of Christ. The look on their faces, as seen in El Greco or Sargent, shows how impossible it is to counteract the fall, even when it is God himself who is falling.



Image 4

John Singer Sargent (1856-1925),
The Descent from the Cross,
after El Greco, nd

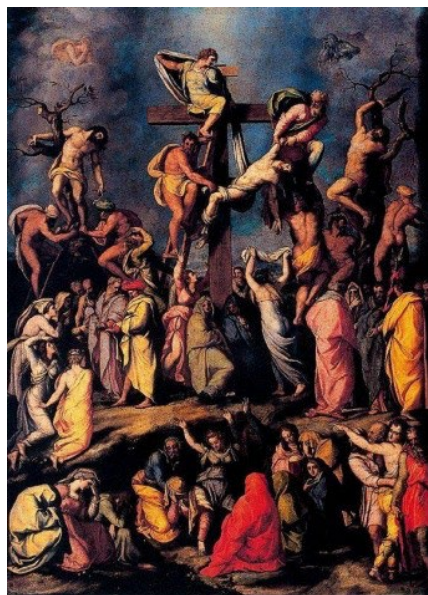


Image 5

Alessandro Allori, *The Descent from the Cross*, 1560

An exceptional 1560 painting by Alessandro Allori multiplies the tensions between going up and coming down in what is depicted as a solely human condition — this time, two angels just watch from above.

No wonder the arts work on the simultaneity of these descending and ascending movements. If we think of nature, we come to understand that they are not counter-movements, but rather the very condition of living beings. When speaking of *grounding*, both martial arts and psychology have often offered the image of a tree, which can spread high into the air as long as its roots grow deep down into the earth.

The great Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro kept writing in 1931 about his *paracaídas*, his parachutes, and he invented the need for a *parasubidas*, or a *para-riser*. In his words:

“Ah, mi paracaídas, la única rosa perfumada de la atmósfera, la rosa de la Muerte (...) Mago, he ahí tu paracaídas que una palabra tuya puede convertir en un parasubidas maravilloso como el relámpago que quisiera cegar al creador.”¹

This rare idea reappears some thirty years later in a text by the North American poet Barbara Guest called “Parachutes, my love, could carry us higher”:

“Parachutes, my love, could carry us higher.
I just said I didn’t know
And now you are holding me
In your arms,
How kind.”

Here again, descent and ascent are related and love, as we will discuss later, is the *locus* (both *amoenus* and *horribilis*) or the laboratory where we most experience this connection.

2. The dangers of flying too high are classically addressed in the myth of Icarus: his father, Daedalus, gives Icarus a pair of wings made of feathers, pieces of clothing and leather, all carefully bound together with beeswax, since flying is a movement already haunted by the possibility of falling.



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Image 6
Anthony van Dyck, *Daedalus and Icarus*, 1625

1 “Ah, my parachute, the only fragrant rose in the atmosphere, the rose of Death (...) Magician, behold your parachute that a word from you can transform into a marvellous para-riser like the lightning that would blind the creator.” Huidobro, 1993, p. 15. My translation.

Daedalus instructs Icarus not to fly too low for the sea's moisture can affect the wings, nor too high for the sun's heat can melt the wax. But the boy is unable to resist the temptation to fly very high and so the wax melts, he falls and he drowns.



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Image 7
17th-century relief, *The Fall of Icarus*, Musée
Antoine Vivenel.

3. As we think about how falling and ascending are related, we start noticing how the physical dimension is connected to other aspects of falling. In order to show and understand this connection, the best path is to turn to the language we use in everyday life. It is full of expressions that constitute *mathesis*, a profound wisdom of the body and of relations long before philosophical and scientific studies, a prosaic attention to the somatic to which we have not given due consideration. And at the same time it is the knowledge of how the somatic is both the root and the screen of the whole being (something particularly relevant at a time when a culture of ‘incorporeality’ or ‘immaterialization’ is being imposed). Alas, for decades, the social sciences were based on the assumption that they had to break away from common sense and dismantle it. In epistemological terms, we will follow the opposite path as elaborated in the “Oxford Philosophy” by authors such as Austin, Ryle and Strawson and especially in the *Philosophical Investigations* of Wittgenstein’s second phase, that is, in a search to respond to everyday language instead of rejecting it. Thus, we will also search for wisdom in common Portuguese expressions about falling as well as in the lyrics of popular songs that teach us how and why we fall in love.

Many Portuguese expressions that use the word “cair” or “fall” extend the physical fall to other connotations. When there is not an idiomatic equivalent in English, we will first give in parentheses a literal translation.

Most of the expressions qualify the fall as a *disgrace*, something bad or negative:

cair em desgraça — to fall into disgrace
 cair em desespero — to fall into despair
 cair doente — to fall ill
 cair de fome — to drop from hunger
 a cair de sono — to be falling asleep
 cair na lama — to fall into the mud
 cair aos pés — to fall down at someone’s feet

We may wonder whether the fall is due to the person’s excessive pride and defiance against higher powers, *hubris*, as seen in Icarus; or due to *hamartia* (a flaw that brings about the downfall of the hero in a tragedy), as in these two examples:

Cair em pecado — to fall into sin
 Cair em tentação — to fall into temptation (and “let us not fall into temptation”...)

But we find many more expressions where the fall is due to some kind of *entrapment*:

Cair na ratoeira, cair na esparrela — to fall into a trap
 Cair como um patinho (to fall like a little duck) — to naively fall for something/
 be tricked in a naive way
 Cair no anzol (to fall on the hook) — to take the bait
 Não caias nessa! — Don’t fall for that!

Yet, we sometimes refer to a fall as a random event:

Caiu-lhe em sorte — It fell to him/her by chance
 A Páscoa caiu em Abril — Easter fell in April this year

Maybe it is not *hubris* nor *hamartia* nor a trap, but the general *swerve* of the universe as conceived by Lucretius, the idea of which has been developed by Marx, Louis Althusser and Thomas Nail (2022) — a movement with no cause, or, as Deleuze (1979) puts it, a continuous variation, a perpetual oscillation: “the variation must itself never cease to vary.”²

² “Il faut que la variation ne cesse pas elle-même de varier”. Deleuze, 1979, p. 126. My translation.

Yet one can find a few expressions where the fall has a *positive* aura. (They are rare, but they do exist.):

A blusa cai bem com a saia (The blouse falls well with the skirt) — The blouse goes well with the skirt

Ela tem queda para a dança, ou para a matemática (She has a fall for dance or maths) — She has a gift for dance, or maths

Cair em graça (to fall in grace) — to win someone's favour

Cair no goto (to fall into the glottis) — to please

Cair no santo (to fall under the saint) — to fall under the power of the spirit

As for the *rhythms* (the cadences of *cadere*), sometimes they are abrupt, as in:

Cair à água — to fall into the water

Cair como uma bomba — to fall like a bombshell

Cair do céu aos trambolhões (to fall from the sky with a noisy crash) — to appear from nowhere unexpectedly

But sometimes it is a gradual fall, as in “as conversas caíam” — the conversations faded away. Numerous examples of a gradual fall come from nature:

Cair da tarde, das folhas, das flores, dos frutos — nightfall, falling leaves, flowers, fruits

Queda de cabelo, queda da crosta de uma ferida — hair falling out; the scab falling off a wound

Cair de maduro — to fall when ripe

Cair de podre — to fall when rotten; to fall to pieces

Decay is also gradual and can apply both to humans and non-humans.

In politics, the decay can be gradual, as in the Fall of the Roman Empire, or of Constantinople; but some falls can surprise us by the speed at which they happen, as we are currently observing in the United States. In Portugal, the demise of over 40 years of fascism was accelerated by a very physical and sudden fall — when the dictator Salazar fell off his chair and fell into a coma. True enough, we always feel we are living in a *durftige Zeit*, that is, in demanding times, as Holderlin wrote in one of his famous poems, or as Marlene Dietrich sang: “Such trying times, such trying times, Why do we live in such exasperating times?” Be it recurrent or not, the present feeling of political and ecological collapse, disorientation and precarity makes it all the more relevant to think about falling, not merely as a metaphor of failure, but as a condition for adaptation, transformation and renewed forms of attention.

3. In many languages, the movement of love is described as a fall. In English, “Fall in love”, in French, “Tomber amoureux”, in Portuguese, “Caidinho por alguém”. It is not just a metaphor often associated with love: it is the very concept of love, structured in the language and inscribed as a fall in the definition of love.

Another area of popular culture, songs, might provide some clues to further develop the materials we have presented in this essay.

Elvis Presley³ sings of love as if it were a law of nature, of gravity, like an apple falling: “Like a river flows / Surely to the sea / Darling, so it goes / Some things are meant to be”.

Maybe, if it were not a sudden fall, we would not go looking for it: “Wise men say / Only fools rush in / But I can’t help falling in love with you”.

Marlene Dietrich⁴ sung about the same feeling of irresistible movement: “Falling in love again, never wanted to / What am I to do / I can’t help it”.

The key seems to be that falling in love also makes you *bond* with someone: “Take my hand / Take my whole life, too / For I can’t help falling in love with you”⁵.

Falling in love implies the recognition and acceptance of one’s own vulnerability through which I discover the other and myself, painful as the process might be: “Fall for me, I wanna know you feel how I feel for you, love”⁶.

The risks are enormous: “I’ll never give my all again

‘Cause I’m sick of falling down

When I open up and give my trust

They find a way to break it down

Tear me up inside, and you break me down.”⁷

Yet songs teach us that even if you “never wanted to”, you will eventually fall in love again. The most surprising thing is that songs often explicitly declare that we all survive the turmoil. As Edgar says at the beginning of the fourth act of *King Lear*, “The worst is not / So long as we can say / This is the worst.” If everybody is singing about this falling in love, it probably means they have survived this general condition, and “that’s that”:

3 Song *Can’t Help Falling in Love*, 1961.

4 In Josef von Sternberg’s 1930 film *The Blue Angel*, first, then in concerts all her life.

5 Elvis Presley, song *Can’t Help Falling in Love*, 1961.

6 Trevor Daniel, song *Falling*, 2020.

7 Ibidem. That is why a wise Japanese proverb recommends: “Eat before falling in love”...

“You’re the drug that I’m addicted to, and I want you so bad
 Guess I’m stuck with you, and that’s that (...)
 When it all falls down, when it all falls down
 I’ll be fine
 I’ll be fine
 You’re the drug that I’m addicted to
 And I want you so bad, but I’ll be fine”.⁸

There is something to be gained from this shipwreck and so you had better continue.

“Take this sinking boat and point it home
 We’ve still got time
 Raise your hopeful voice, you had a choice
 You’ve made it now
 Falling slowly, sing your melody
 I’ll sing it loud”.⁹

4. Dance is perhaps the art form that has paid most attention to falling, at least since the ascending movements of ballet gave way to William Forsythe’s *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated*, and then a growing “Dialogue with gravity”, on which Ushio Amagatsu based his dance. The famous film on contact improvisation, narrated by Steve Paxton, is called *Fall after Newton*. Dancer Jo Ann Endicott (1999, 36) recalls how confusing it was when, after years of ballet classes where she was trained to go up, Pina Bausch asked her to go down.

Dance is probably the only discipline (apart from martial arts) where students receive lessons on how to fall so that they learn not to injure themselves while falling. Dance teaches falling not merely as accident or failure but as technique, knowledge and embodied intelligence — something particularly relevant in our trying times. And dancers learn how to think of going up while they are going down, as singers have to do when descending to lower notes.¹⁰

Following on from that, it could be interesting to conceive a choreographic piece around some of the expressions we find in everyday language, such as:

andar aos caídos (walking as if falling) — to live like the fallen /
 like a down and out
 andar muito caído (walking in a very fallen way) — to stumble over your own feet
 cair aos pedaços — to fall to pieces

⁸ Alan Walker, song *All Falls Down*, 2017.

⁹ Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová, song *Falling Slowly*, 2006.

¹⁰ Portuguese poet Luiza Neto Jorge (1966) has a famous poem around the idea that “O poema ensina a cair”, ie, “The poem teaches how to fall”.

não ter onde cair morto (to have nowhere to fall down dead) — to have no place
to lie down and die

caiu-lhe a alma aos pés (the soul fell down to his feet) — his/her heart sank
cair nas mãos de alguém — to fall into the hands of someone

In 2014-15, Portuguese choreographer Victor Hugo Pontes created the piece *FALL*. As he explains:

When a body falls, it is visible, undeniable. We can discuss the forces that propel it to fall, but we cannot doubt the downward movement. The other fall can be transparent, require moral judgment, get lost in a failure of interpretation. In *FALL*, it will be more immediate to observe the physical fall than the other fall — one is concrete and earthly, the other is metaphorical and insubstantial — although no boundary line has been drawn. First, because we all ‘fall in love’ just as we ‘fall to the floor’, or ‘fall to the ground’ at the end of life in the same way that the leaves of the trees ‘fall to the ground’ in Autumn, which in [American] English is called ‘Fall’. What is spoken of in this show is the act, deliberate or not, of falling. It starts from a movement, not a concept. We all fall, whether because we stumble, because we were pushed, because we lost our strength or consciousness, because we fell in love, because we succumbed to temptation, because we did evil, because we died. *FALL* lives here, in this diffuse intersection between what makes us fall and condemns us, and what makes us fall, but redeems us.

— Victor Hugo Pontes, <https://www.nomeproprio.pt/projetos/fall/>



Image 8

FALL, by Victor Hugo Pontes, photo by José Caldeira

5. These terms, “condemn” and “redeem”, are still too morally charged. Maybe we first have to put aside altogether the theological connotations of fall, so ingrained in Western culture (and remember that Christ is not diminished by the fact of his falling and dying), and then start to realise that falling is a part of life. We all know people who have been through a terrible maelstrom and, instead of passing away, have come back older but wiser. In literature, from the Bible to Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) or Edgar Allan Poe’s *A Descent into the Maelström* (1841), there are numerous stories of shipwreck, survival and revelation through the nightmare of falling.

It is not just a question of being stoic and laughing as you fall¹¹, nor of considering how it is worth approaching the heights and the sun briefly even if it makes you dive for ever¹². Icarus’ father, Daedalus, was the architect of the labyrinth in Crete and they lived there until they were accused of revealing its secret to Theseus: they were imprisoned and that was when they started to build wings. If we embrace the fact that the human condition is to be imprisoned in a labyrinth, we might start looking upwards and using ladders and bounding together feathers with leather. Japanese artist Yukio Mishima, “eager to know where” lay his allegiance (earth or heaven), wrote in the poem *Icarus*:

Do I, then, belong to the heavens?
 Why, if not so, should the heavens
 Fix me thus with their ceaseless blue stare?
 Luring me on, and my mind, higher
 Ever higher, up into the sky,
 Drawing me ceaselessly up
 To heights too far, far above the human?
 (...)
 That nature might bring home to me
 That to fall, not to fly, is in the order of things.

Even as you look down you see upwards — like the stars reflected in the ocean or in a well. As Fernando Pessoa/ Bernardo Soares writes in *Livro do Desassossego* (1982, 131):

11 “Here is what they don’t tell you: Icarus laughed as he fell. Threw his head back and yelled into the winds, arms spread wide, teeth bared to the world. (There is a bitter triumph in crashing when you should be soaring.)” Untitled poem by Fiona (often known by her pen name *weareallboats*.)

12 “Never regret thy fall, O Icarus of the fearless flight, For the greatest tragedy of them all, Is never to feel the burning light.”

These lines are usually attributed to Oscar Wilde, even though they cannot be found in his complete works.

“Minha atenção bóia entre dois mundos e vê cegamente a profundidade de um mar e a profundidade de um céu; e estas profundezas interpenetram-se, misturam-se, e eu não sei onde estou nem o que sonho. (...)”

Que grande posse mental vai desde o poço das emoções profundas até às altas estrelas que se refletem nele, e, assim, em certo modo, ali estão.”¹³

Again, like trees, the two movements are connected: grounding is a condition of growing and ascending. But we can go further and conceive of flying to the Earth. After being introduced in Maranhão (Brazil) to the “four-eyed fish” (very attentive and aware indeed), the Portuguese Jesuit and writer Padre António Vieira wrote in a 1654 sermon: “Porque há asas para subir e asas para descer. As asas para subir são muito perigosas, as asas para descer muito seguras”.¹⁴ In some Buddhist traditions, our suffering stems from desperately trying to hold onto fixed points, and true freedom comes when you accept the condition of falling. When you let go of rigid definitions, identities and limits, when you realise there is nothing to cling to, there is nothing to crash into either. Then you might stop fighting the experience of falling and embrace the wonders of flying downwards (using your “wings for descending”).

The bad news is that we are falling through the air,
there is nothing to hold on to,
not even a parachute.

The good news is that there is no ground.

— Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche¹⁵

Maybe the last decisive thing is *where* you fall. We can imagine a drop of water falling into the ocean and feeling, with acceptance or anguish, that its identity will be forever dissolved. You might fall into oblivion or into a vice or into a trap or into someone else’s landscape. But you can also fall into your own being and roots. The combination of the two movements, grounding and ascending, corresponding to self and superior self, is what allows you to “Cair em si”, literally “to fall into yourself” or “to fall inside

¹³ “My attention floats between two worlds and blindly sees the depth of a sea and the depth of a sky; and these depths interpenetrate, mix, and I do not know where I am or what I dream. (...) What great mental possession goes from the well of deep emotions to the high stars that are reflected in it, and thus, in a certain way, are there.”

¹⁴ “There are wings to ascend and wings to descend. The wings for ascending are very dangerous, the wings for descending are very safe.” https://bibliotecacatolica.com.br/blog/devocao/padre-antonio-vieira-sermao-de-santo-antonio/?srsltid=AfmBOoriPFC_3ni31vcO8Q5LFE2PE7sMixHCunDze_wH98qYEioy7vW1.

¹⁵ These sentences are not included in the Collected Works of the Tibetan Buddhist master Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939-1987). They were probably said during a dharma talk and have been transmitted in the oral tradition.

yourself”, an amazing Portuguese expression which has multiple meanings: to understand yourself, realise your mistake, come to your senses; to be aware, stop being abstracted or distracted, stop having dreams, daydreams, illusions; to remember what you have forgotten; to regain calm. *Cair em si* is no trap nor random event nor swerve: it is usually a long process, deliberated or brought about by time and circumstances (although it can also occur suddenly, like St Paul’s enlightenment when he fell off his horse). Perhaps falling into the Other contributes to the greatest of all goals, to fall into yourself, to be grounded — which is the opposite of living outside of yourself, “fora de si”.

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ENTREVISTA

INTERVIEW

Attention moves us. An interview with Meg Stuart

A atenção move-nos. Uma entrevista com Meg Stuart

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Abstract

In this interview, choreographer Meg Stuart explores issues related to improvisation as both process and public performance. Stuart shares the motivations behind public improvisation projects such as *Crash Landing* (1996-1999). Improvisational practices, rhythms, and shifts in attention also appear in her work with video as a medium.

Keywords

public improvisations | performance | choreography | attention

Resumo

Nesta entrevista, a coreógrafa Meg Stuart entra em diálogo com algumas questões relacionadas com a improvisação como processo e a improvisação como apresentação pública. Stuart partilha algumas das motivações por detrás de propostas de apresentações de improvisação públicas que se popularizaram, como *Crash Landing* (1996-1999). As práticas de improvisação, as cadências e os movimentos da atenção são evidenciados também nas suas experiências de trabalho com as ferramentas do vídeo.

Palavras-chave

improvisações públicas | performance | coreografia | atenção

Introduction

The choreographer Meg Stuart is part of a generation of artists who left their mark on the European performing arts scene since the 1990s. Her influence continues to this day through her work in the fields of dance, performance and video. A frequent presence on the programmes of European festivals, this artist's work also encompasses the dissemination and teaching of the performing arts as a teacher or choreographer-mentor, for example, at PACAP — Forum Dança in Lisbon 2025.

One of this US artist's specialities is organising events centred on improvisation and the performing arts/dance, notably as co-organiser of *Crash Landing* (1996-1999) with Christine De Smedt and David Hernandez, *Auf den Tisch!* (2004-2011) and, more recently, *Serious Fun* (2016-2018) with Mark Tompkins, Ana Rocha, Mariana Tengner Barros, Elizabete Francisca, amongst many other collaborators, and *One Shot* with Mark Tompkins (2016-2023). The writing and compilation of texts by contributors in the book *One Shot, dialogues on Real Time Composition* (Tompkins, Stuart 2022), serve as the backdrop to this interview.

Having spent years following the work of choreographers who reflect on issues of improvisation and choices of attention — such as Lisa Nelson, João Fiadeiro and Mark Tompkins — Sílvia Pinto Coelho interviews the choreographer Meg Stuart as part of the thematic issue of the Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens entitled 'Cadences: attentional moves in the arts and everyday life'.

Introdução

A coreógrafa Meg Stuart faz parte de uma geração de artistas que marcaram o panorama das artes performativas europeias desde os anos 1990. A relevância que alcançou estende-se até aos dias de hoje com propostas na área da dança, performance e vídeo. Frequentemente presente nas programações dos palcos europeus, o trabalho desta artista estende-se à transmissão e ao ensino de artes performativas como professora ou coreógrafa-mentora, por exemplo, no PACAP — Forum Dança, em Lisboa, 2025.

Uma das especialidades desta artista estadunidense passa pela organização de projectos de improvisação e artes performativas/dança, nomeadamente como coorganizadora de *Crash Landing* (1996-1999) com Christine De Smedt e David Hernandez, *Auf den Tisch!* (2004-2011) e, mais recentemente, *Serious Fun* (2018) com Mark Tompkins, Ana Rocha, Mariana Tengner Barros, Elizabete Francisca, entre muitos colaboradores, e *One Shot* com Mark Tompkins (2016-2023). A escrita e reunião de textos de colaboradores no livro *One Shot, dialogues on Real Time Composition* (Tompkins, Stuart, 2022) servem de pano de fundo para esta entrevista.

Após anos de acompanhamento do trabalho de coreógrafos que pensam sobre questões de improvisação e escolhas de atenção, como Lisa Nelson, João Fiadeiro, ou

Mark Tompkins, Sílvia Pinto Coelho entrevista a coreógrafa Meg Stuart a pretexto do número temático da Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens, “Cadências: movimentos da atenção nas artes e quotidiano”.

SPC: Since the 90s, you have been challenging the public’s attention through your artistic work in a wide variety of ways. Can you tell us about how you use your attention as an artist?

MS: What we perceive shifts our reality. It changes the quality of movement and our perspective on movement, and even why we are moving. Attention is a smooth way to shift the dynamics or the material while you’re moving, without feeling like you have to change everything. You can direct attention towards the context or the space when you’re moving, then shift your attention towards the rhythm, or the sensation, and so on. And these shifts reveal the many layers and complexities of how different frequencies and qualities coexist. All these layers are happening at the same time, in every movement, in every gesture.

I just realised that maybe there wasn’t enough emphasis on this when I started dancing. It was more like “you do too much,” or “you’re too dramatic,” or “you’re too...” But this idea that there are different temperatures and levels of attention also shows that there is depth in any single movement or action. I just find that fascinating.

In life, when you have a situation that comes to you, you can think about what’s going wrong, or you can think about what is actually positively taking place, or you can think about how you feel. Or you are distracted, and you try not to think about it. I just realised that all of that is movement, and I find it a really interesting experience of movement.

I wonder if we talk enough about training attention in dance practices. We might talk about release technique or building strength to move, about changing the duration, simplifying, or working on the dramaturgy. But it is very critical to be able to modulate the sphere of attention and the curation of attention. Because what you pay attention to expands or grows. I think this is also what resonates and has an impact on how people experience what you do: when you say “look at this” or “pay attention to this”.

I have this exercise I do with dancers where they sit face-to-face with someone else. First, they just practice looking at each other, and then there’s a shift where one of them allows himself to be seen and the other looks; then they shift, and the other one is looking, and the first one allows himself to be seen. That can also be done in a performance. You stand in front of an audience, and you allow yourself this vulnerability to be seen, instead of pushing yourself and saying, “I’m showing you something.” It’s valuable just to be able to talk about that as material, as movement: “I’m showing,” or actually “I’m allowing,” or “look at me.” Being vulnerable is a movement, you know? We can say “oh, that person isn’t fragile enough,” or “they’re not vulnerable enough,” or “they’re trying too hard,” but I think there’s just more nuance when you talk about attention in movement and in dance.

I'm quite obsessed with that, and it aligns a lot with Mark Tompkins' work. Mark often talks about the witness. You can understand what's going on in an improvised space by becoming a witness. You become still and watch. Even if you are inside, in the middle of things, you stop and take the time to see the whole scene.

He is so focused on vision: what you pay attention to, what you see, and how you see, or how you close your eyes and see internally. It's a shared interest we have, but maybe in another language, in other words, another point of view.



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Image 1
Portrait of Meg
Stuart. Copyright
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What is the difference between improvising for a project and sharing improvisation with an audience?

MS: When I'm improvising with a group for a project, it's not about keeping the moment alive or trying to make sense. It's a kind of deep research, where you start with a score, a question, or you have a word, or nothing, you just doodle, or you try. You are really walking through the forest, and you're just trying to understand the path. You're trying to go deeper and deeper into something.

And when you're improvising a performance, for an audience, you're very conscious: "I did this first, which makes this." You're quickly trying to compress the compositional process, you're in an instant composition, and it's more about chance: "this happened, and that means that this became possible." You're trying to make links and connections and create flows and sense.

Improvising in a creation process is more like digging, it's almost archaeological. It's about sifting, about doing something exhaustively, obsessively as an activity. It is very often about repetition. Whereas in performance it's about what magic can appear in that moment, at that time, with that full trust, with that synchronicity and with whatever energies are in the room at that particular moment. It's more singular, and it feels

more about chance in a way, and magic. Of course, it's also about listening, and how people come together, and they might have some scores and agreements before, but...

Sometimes, when you are just improvising in a studio during research, you're rather stripping things away. You're trying to burn out the first ideas or the ideas that come up first, so that you can allow something that you wouldn't have thought of to appear.

Would you say you share an ethics or even a style when you find a group?

MS: That's a good question because I'm about to work with a group on Monday. I think so. Maybe in some scores, ideas, or proposals, there's a wider scope for interpretation. Especially when it feels like a real and charged conversation is happening for the first time, or happening in real time, the ethics are about trying to understand the other. Even if they're improvising with a different language or a different way of moving, you still try to meet them. And you also try to provide dancers or other artists with tools to meet through different languages. Historically, there used to be an agreed-upon language. We danced through contact improv, or through certain states, or through theatre, or through a technique. And I think a lot of contemporary improvisation is about not understanding, or having completely different tools, and completely different interests, and still trying to share and have a connection in the room through those differences.

Would you say you are influenced by the Postmodern dance period in New York? How do you deal with that nowadays?

MS: I'm definitely influenced by that period, by the trust in the body to speak, and in its intelligence, and weight counterpoints, even if I might use other words now. I don't feel like I've abandoned it, I try to extend it. I think our generation has just extended those tasks. Feeling that we're still in dialogue, still in contact, even if we're not touching or we're in a different state. Even in different languages, we're still trying to follow those principles of meeting. There is a connection.

Like in Yvonne Rainer's saying, "The mind is a muscle", I feel you experience this challenge of going to places you don't know.

MS: I do. And sometimes those places are surprising because at first you think, "Oh, that just means freaking out." But the unknown can also be really subtle and quiet. I have always sought out disruption: first in movement, by disrupting flow, and then in performance, by disrupting expectations of what can be considered dance material. By being open to different languages and hybrid spaces. That can also happen by working with new collaborators. I try to keep it fresh, to stay experimental. I look for that in form as well. So yes, I do have a formal interest that I keep returning to.

You have a very particular way of bringing a kind of anarchic feeling, of keeping attention alive, and resisting what wants to be settled. Do you do that out of a visceral need, or is it something that puts you in contact with the public sphere? Or both?

MS: There is a kind of restlessness. I love trying new processes, but there are also certain topics I keep returning to. I'm like a pendulum. My work shifts between abstraction and fiction, the individual and the collective, encounter and energy. I'm fascinated by the energy that is released through emotional work, and the vibrations and energetic fields associated with transformation and healing.

My choreographic interests very often involve bringing up subconscious material, anything that is hidden under the surface. Whatever is dormant or latent, whatever needs to be unearthed and brought into view. I like breaking taboos or conventions, being kind of irreverent and playful, and working with humour. I also care deeply about atmosphere and spatial environments. Because the work is often situated in very different worlds, I often shift my approach.

For myself, in my movements, I try to be a system of support for my own body. Practising a kind of auto-contact, an auto-support. And then, I try the impossible, the task of wanting to merge, to become the other, to fly together, to enter the other body, to become one, to shape-shift, to be in many places at the same time, to travel with many realities. It's about doing things that the body can't do. The magical act, or the impossible act, or the dream act, or to levitate, or to explode. This kind of material. The joy of it also lies in discovering the dream self, the dream body. I think this is very much part of the work.

Can you give us some examples? Talking about public improvisations, one of your best-known projects is *Crash Landing*. Can you talk a little bit about these public improvisation projects and the encountering peers?

MS: In the 90s I was touring a great deal and I found myself in Europe, somewhat disconnected from my dance community in New York, where I had studied and begun making work. I was going from festival to festival, and back then I also had a lot of time, compared with now... I had a lot of time to make work, a lot of time to improvise, and a lot of pieces within pieces, because we had plenty of time to investigate. We could spend long periods researching material, letting one piece generate the other, which is a luxury. I also felt that there was a lot of time to produce. Back then, I wanted more than the brief encounters that happen at festivals. I didn't want to meet someone, say we admired each other's work, and then simply move on. I was looking for a deeper exchange. Being shy, I also felt more comfortable socially when I was in a project with others.

When I saw improvisations, I often felt like the scores followed the same pattern: oh, there's a solo, and then there's a duo, then there's a trio. I somehow wanted to have more control over the scores, or have more content discussed. And I also wanted to collaborate with musicians working with electronic instruments rather than acoustic ones,

and to include a visual artist in the improvisation. In *Crash Landing*, which I created with Christine De Smedt and David Hernandez - who were dancing in my work at the time - we wanted to explore collaboration as the container for improvisation. But then, everything kept expanding because why have only one stage designer, when you know they might also need somebody to improvise with. Same for the light designer. Every discipline opened a new possibility. So, all of a sudden it started to grow, and each night we had a new space, with a new design, and so on. The project kind of exploded. Out of our conversation, we decided to create an improvised environment on a large scale. We went to Théâtre de La Ville, performed in Leuven, Lisbon, Vienna and other places.

It was quite a thing to go to Théâtre de La Ville with an improv project, rather than a piece. It felt risky and wild, and people said “yes”. Jérôme Bel was a part of it, and so was Xavier [Le Roy], and Vera [Mantero]. It was also a way to meet these people and the musicians. It became this playful testing ground. I met Nadia Lauro as a very young artist in that project. In one of her first collective projects. Many people met each other for the first time through *Crash Landing*. Yeah, it was beautiful. It’s not like every night was extraordinary, but there were always unexpected things that happened, and that risk was a really bonding experience.

It is very interesting that you say, “risk is a bonding experience.” Do you think it is a possibility for joint attention to emerge?

MS: Yeah. There’s nothing to get right. There’s no way to get it wrong. It’s just that we can’t not jump. We also began to think differently about the theatre itself, looking at the theatre from the perspective of possibility, not limitation. “Let’s not just use the theatre as it is, but let’s use the balconies, let’s use the audience seating, the upstairs, the downstairs...” It was about looking at the theatre as a site. Looking at it as a place to play. “What can we do with what we have? What’s available to us? Can we hang from the ceiling? Can we walk on the seats, on the balconies?” It was about what’s possible, and what we could do together. That spirit made the work incredibly joyful.

Would you say that performing demands a special courage that challenges the individual to shed social fear? I’m thinking about how it could be part of our education and our courage education. Do you think it’s a useful tool?

MS: Probably, in a structured way, it is. Encountering improvisation was thrilling for me, especially while I was studying dance at NYU. The idea that you can just go on stage and not have any instructions. You can just start dancing and be with others. It’s insane.

When big crises happen, you can’t prepare for them. But when they do happen, you have to improvise just to survive, and I think it makes you resilient for sure, and collectively resilient. There’s a trust in it. There’s a trust in a higher power. As if some forces that are unseen are dancing with you or supporting you.

Can you recall special moments of discovery, encounters where everything seems to click and you think “oh, this is exactly it!”? I think there’s a certain pleasure when you find a “click” in a group improvisation. Can you describe moments when everything is flowing like magic?

MS: Improvisation always partners with magic, but I can’t recall an extended stand-out performance right now. I know that Mark has experienced this. He describes it in *One Shot*, this one special evening in Vienna, when we performed *Serious Fun* in 2018. It’s true that there have been so many beautiful moments of synchronicity over the years, but I don’t have this feeling of, “oh, this is the night where everything worked out.” Maybe I don’t remember it that way. I’m obsessed with things that didn’t click. The moments where you think: “Oh my god, how did we get through that?” Or “I can’t believe I did this to that musician” or “I can’t believe I walked onto the stage and did that.” These are the things that I replay, and not the click. And then, I just have to let it go. “Hey, there’ll be a next time.”

So, you don’t think there is a special addiction to taking risks?

MS: No, it feels natural. I’m more interested in questions like, “Why did it work that time? What were the conditions?” or “How did we prepare?” “What did we talk about?” “How much did we rehearse?” “How much of it was scored?” “How much was left open?” Those are the things I’m thinking about. Because the chance to just do pure improvisation in front of an audience is quite rare. It doesn’t happen very often, so there is a lot of time to consider the format.

What’s the pleasure of that? Why do you wish to improvise? Is it a need, a challenge?

MS: Especially when you’re teaching or transmitting a lot, improvisation becomes a way to process things in the moment. It’s a way of processing your interest, processing your subconscious. It is a way to open the gates and become a channel.

Several times now, I’ve performed a solo at Tictac Art Centre in Brussels. It’s just half an hour, it is quite casual, but I’m always surprised by what I decide to do, or what comes out, or how that happens. I only prepare on the day itself, and it’s quite interesting. Of course, it’s beautiful to see somebody work on a piece for a year, and it’s exactly as they want it to be. But there is something special about the moment when it’s simply, “Wow! We just started dancing!” If you feel the urgency, if there’s some sense of why, or a feeling that this needs to be shared... You can feel the difference in attention when you’re performing in front of improvisers, especially if you’ve been in the same room practising for a week. It is another dimension of the exchange, not just a performance.

I feel I can do this because I’m passionate about it. And because I have dedicated so many hours to it, and because I also guide people through it. I also need to put myself in

that fire with the others, or with myself. I need to enter that situation again and again, to test what I think I know. Otherwise it remains abstract.

There's something different about improvising in a studio or being in a jam, where you go to dance with people freely. There are different qualities and states of dancing, and you can circulate, and it's beautiful! That's how improv spaces were formed and started historically. But when there's an audience, it ensures every choice is exposed. There is another kind of time, another kind of development, another kind of space. And I also love this thing of "wow, I can't believe this is happening here." Sometimes you discover that you are stronger, braver, stranger, rougher, more tender than you thought. Things emerge that you just didn't know were there. Seemingly random events lead to unexpected solutions. Problems have to be solved one way or another. Of course, it also depends on the people you are improvising with and the energies in the room.

For instance, I did many lecture-performances in a kind of talking-dancing format with Mark [Tompkins]. There were stronger moments and weaker moments, but there was something very alive in the dynamic there. I really loved it because it was a performative continuation of an ongoing personal conversation about improvisation and life. That made a lot of sense to me, because it was a shared practice. In those situations, you act without fully knowing what you're doing, while others are watching. The presence of an audience gives a strange kind of validation—not as approval, but as witness. It's life-strengthening and empowering, not only for the performer doing it, but also for those witnessing it, from the inside and of course from the audience. To see people act without certainty, to watch them discover things in real time, to remain in the unknown together.

It's clear when dancers are not covering up the moment with technique or with flourishes, when they are really allowing for a suspension of time, creating an openness in which things can emerge.

There are two words I found in *One Shot*, the book, that surprised me: "immanence" and "transcendence". Do you use them as concepts, or is it just something that helps you as a tool in the lexicon?

MS: "Transcendence" for sure. We're trying to have a transcendent moment, something that goes beyond your form, beyond you. It's a connection to something larger: your spirit, your higher self. This can be your witness, something that dances through you, or in relation to others, or in response to them. "Immanence", I don't know. But transcendence for sure.

In the lexicon you wrote with Mark Tompkins, you say “Immanence” — things as they are. And things as you’d like them to be would be “transcendence”. I think this is very interesting.

I would like to go back to the first piece I watched by you, which is *Splayed Mind Out* (1997), with visual artist Gary Hill. In this piece, I observed several layers of attentional challenges for the audience. Can you talk about your work from there?

MS: *Splayed Mind Out* (1997) was part of the *Insert Skin*-series, which I began in 1996 when I invited visual artists to collaborate with me. Gary Hill was one of the artists I worked with. I was curious to bring his artistic language into dialogue with my own and see how they could meet in a shared space. Gary was also performing in the piece. We explored how the body could become a site where physical presence and mediated images overlap, and how choreography could respond to video as an active, thinking partner. I would describe this piece as being closer to performative visual art.

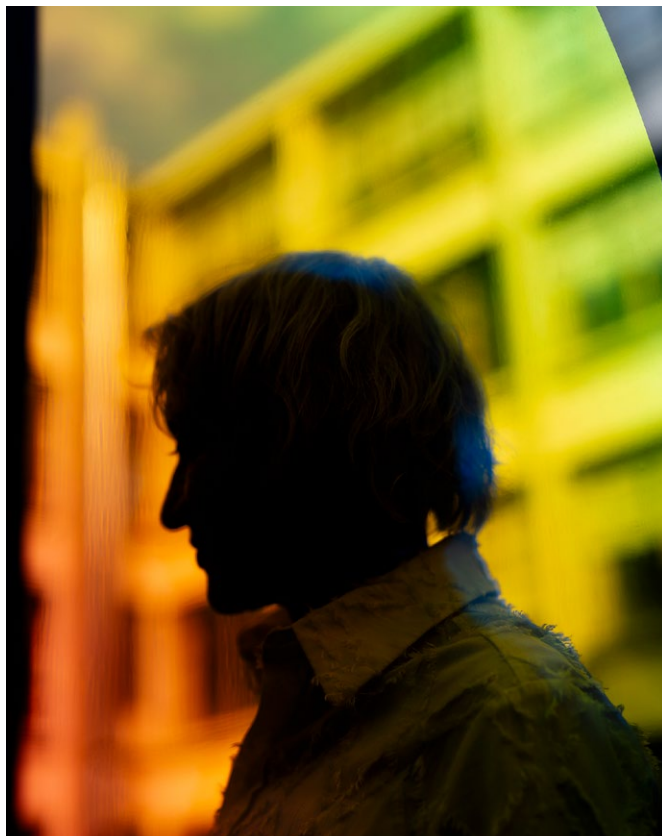
A few pieces later, when I worked on *Alibi* (2001) and *Visitors Only* (2003) in the context of my residency at Schauspielhaus Zürich, the work was more theatrical and more focused on states, portals, and different realities. It was about energies and forms and spinning, about the idea that we have different ages in our body, about fragments and narratives.

A big turning point was making the piece *Hunter* (2014), a solo piece. It was about a healing journey, about transpersonal memory, and the study of quantum physics, shamanism, and healing family lineage. This brought me into contact with shamanism, witchcraft, energy work, and tantra, and all these kinds of studies that have scores, materials, and protocols, like Osho meditation, dynamic meditation, and kundalini yoga. Somehow, these studies do not call themselves art, but they have a physical energy, a movement practice, and a methodology.

In 2016, I made this piece with Tim Etchells where I’m dancing and he’s describing what I’m doing. It’s called *Shown and Told* (Stuart/Etchells 2016). He keeps on saying, “it sounds like, it looks like, it seems like...” and just giving every moment a different imagination of what I’m doing. I really love this piece! It makes me feel expanded as an improviser, as a dancer. I mean, now I’ve set it more and more, so that I’m meeting his language. But in the beginning, it was quite improvised.

And then, in 2020, there were no theatres, and I was invited to work on the roof of Haus der Kulturen der Welt. That’s what started my interest in video.

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Image 2
Portrait of Meg
Stuart. Copyright
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Would you say that you also became a video artist?

MS: I like the idea of improvised filmmaking or improvised video making. I think it's an interesting genre, and there have been some interesting improvised moments in the history of cinema. Think about filmmakers like John Cassavetes or Wim Wenders.

Video work also allows you to work with people for short, intense periods. Aside from that, I just think that video cameras are an accelerator. The camera was always in the room throughout my practice, recording every rehearsal and every show. Often, we learn from those videos, or we consult them. It's interesting to make that relationship more intentional, more deliberate. Instead of the camera simply being there, we perform for it. The witness becomes larger.

Thank you.

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