Ñ presencial + face a face

– a dance creation experience in the era of popularization of digital technologies

Ñ presencial + face a face – uma experiência de criação em dança na era da popularização das tecnologias digitais

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ABSTRACT

This text recounts the process of creation, exhibition and operation of the choreographic project "Ñ Presencial + Face a Face" which explores easily accessible and widely disseminated technological resources such as smartphones, the internet, cameras and platforms like YouTube and StreamYard. The central hypothesis of the text is that the use of these communication technologies, already familiar and relatively easy to handle, interferes with fundamental aspects of dance creation. To substantiate this hypothesis, the text engages with concepts such as Dance with Technological Mediation (SANTANA, 2006) and presents choreographic models like Lisa Naugle's Distributed Choreography (2002), Telematic Dance (SANTANA, 2016), and Choreographic System (SCHULZE, 2005).

KEYWORDS: Dance-Technology; Cyberculture; Telematic Dance; Videodance; Urban Dances.

RESUMO

Este texto relata o processo da criação, exposição e funcionamento do projeto coreográfico Ñ Presencial + Face a Face, que explora recursos tecnológicos de fácil acesso e amplamente difundidos, como smartphones, internet, câmeras e plataformas como *YouTube* e *Stream Yard*. A hipótese central do texto é que o uso dessas tecnologias de comunicação, já familiarizadas e relativamente simples de manusear, interfere em aspectos fundamentais da criação em Dança. Para fundamentar essa hipótese, o texto dialoga com conceitos como Dança com Mediação Tecnológica (SANTANA, 2006), e apresenta modelos coreográficos, como Coreografia Distribuída Lisa Naugle (2002), Dança Telemática (SANTANA, 2016) e Sistema Coreográfico (SCHULZE, 2005).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Dança-Tecnologia; Cibercultura; Dança Telemática; Videodança; Danças Urbanas.

Ñ presencial + face a face – a dance creation experience in the era of popularization of digital technologies

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Popularization of Digital Information and Communication Technologies

Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs) represent various digital media, such as video editors, video platforms like YouTube, meeting platforms like Google Meet, digital photos, digital whiteboards, digital cameras, among others. The Internet is one of the main DICTs, and its connectivity capacity defines one of the central characteristics of DICTs. DICTs differ from ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) like radio and TV; one of the main distinguishing features is connectivity. These digital technologies are present in many people's lives, influencing aspects of daily life, both in personal relationships (romantic, familial, friendships) and work contexts[2].

The impact of these technologies on dance production is similar to what happens in other areas of life. Several artists have been incorporating resources such as QR codes instead of printing graphic materials, using video editing in creative processes (even in works for traditional stages), and forming WhatsApp groups to exchange files (video, photo, audio) during the construction of their work.

Thus, it is understandable that as the dance context (teaching, creating, producing) is permeated by these technologies, these resources naturally tend to appear in compositions. This creates a situation where it is not necessary to draw a distinction between works of dance and technology, as everyone is immersed in this environment and constantly uses digital communication and information technologies like videos, the internet, cameras, virtual drives, clouds, WhatsApp Messenger, Telegram, among others.

The change in society's relationship with art, due to technical innovations such as the invention of photography and later cinema, was identified by the German philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) in the seminal text **The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction[3]**, published in 1936. According to Benjamin, the evolution of mechanical

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[2] TIC? TDIC? Tecnologia Assistiva? Educacional? Social? O que significa cada? https://www.ar-quer.com.br/techterra/tic-tdic-tecnologia-assistiva-educacional-social-o-que-significa-cada/ last visited on 19/12/2023.
[3] Portuguese translation of the first version of "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (1935-1936), written in French by Walter Benjamin and Pierre Klossowski. This translation became more widely known in Brazil.

reproduction techniques, as opposed to manual reproduction, altered structural elements in art, including originality and authenticity, since the notion of copy, historically used by artists for purposes like teaching apprentices, as a strategy for disseminating original pieces, was modified. due to new techniques/technologies, it was no longer possible to detect a copy from the original.

Walter Benjamin notes that art has always been linked to ritual and cult functions, derived from its connection to magic and religion. However, he observes that the emergence of photography interfered with these functions by changing the criterion of authenticity. In cinema, the ability to replicate films without perceptible differences from the original is the central core of what we call cinema. Thus, the pursuit of the original no longer makes sense, as it did in arts like painting and sculpture.

Another aspect pointed out by Benjamin concerns the possibility of reaching the masses. In other words, as works of art can be distributed on a larger scale and reach a greater number of people, there is a change in the perception and meaning of art by the public. Therefore, considering the relational condition of art (sender/receiver) and that the perception of the artistic phenomenon has historicity, changing over time and space, it is essential to take into account the conditions, including the degree of proximity and familiarity with the artistic object, its materiality, and the techniques implemented in it.

It is intriguing to consider what Walter Benjamin's reaction would be to the proliferation of photos and videos everywhere, especially on social networks like Instagram and TikTok. Not only is there a widespread dissemination of images, but there is also access to cameras and editing programs that, compared to the early forms of image manipulation in cinema, are practically micro-editing islands. In other words, there has not only been a change in perception due to access to created and disseminated images but also due to access to the techniques and equipment that create these images.

Immediately, these reflections are more obvious in fields such as Journalism, Visual Arts, and Theater; perhaps Dance, given its nature anchored in movement, has made the awareness of the interference of new technologies in this art take a bit longer to be identified. However, it is already among us, whether in dance production contexts like Videodance and Photodance or in various instances of dance production, including

teaching, creation, dissemination, and the structuring of artistic proposals. This is largely because dance artists deal with these technologies in their daily lives, not just in artistic activities.

This text exposes the experience of creating, exhibiting, and operating the choreographic project "Ñ Presencial + Face a Face" and articulates with central issues in contemporary dance creation. Aspects such as the relationship with the audience, the available digital technologies, ways of operating in accordance with or subverting the original functionality of certain technologies, the relationships established between performers/technicians and choreographers, and the access and consequent proximity/intimacy of individuals (artists and the audience) with technologies are central to the discussion.

"Ñ Presencial + Face a Face" premiered in September 2021, with funding from the Aldir Blanc Law. Two versions with different casts were created at the time, one in the city of Viçosa-MG, with performers/dancers Jean Carlo and Alex Leco, and another in Uberlândia with performers/dancers Renato Estevo and Jessica Marques. Camila Oliveira and Vanilton Lakka were in charge of the streaming operation, and they worked on both versions. Marcelo Santos was responsible for executive production, and the overall concept is by Vanilton Lakka. For this text, the images used will be from the Uberlândia cast, but both versions are available for viewing on YouTube.

Platforms

In "Ñ Presencial + Face a Face", three platforms/softwares are used: StreamYard, OBS and YouTube. StreamYard allows modifying the layout, changing the positions of the performers on the screen, which is not possible on other platforms. Through this function, it is possible to organize images of performers from right to left, up and down, or even replicate images using pre-recorded images.

Video call and meeting platforms that became popular during the pandemic, such as Zoom and Google Meet, have limitations regarding screen manipulation, while StreamYard allows for a simple and instant level of editing. Operators can thus perform real-time editing, manipulating the entire scene reference, always following the previously defined script

and coordinated with the performers/dancers according to the proposed use of space mediated by the camera.
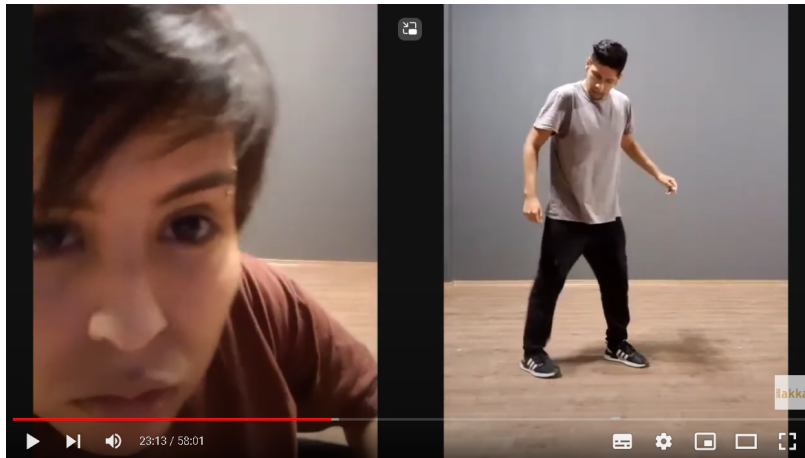

Figura 1: Split-screen layout with two parts, each filled by two dancers. On the left, a dancer with brown skin, short, straight black hair, and dark brown eyes positions her face close to the screen, occupying the majority of the space. On the right side, the dancer has white skin, black hair, and is dressed in a gray-toned shirt and black pants, black sneakers with white stripes, with a gray wall and beige floor in the background.
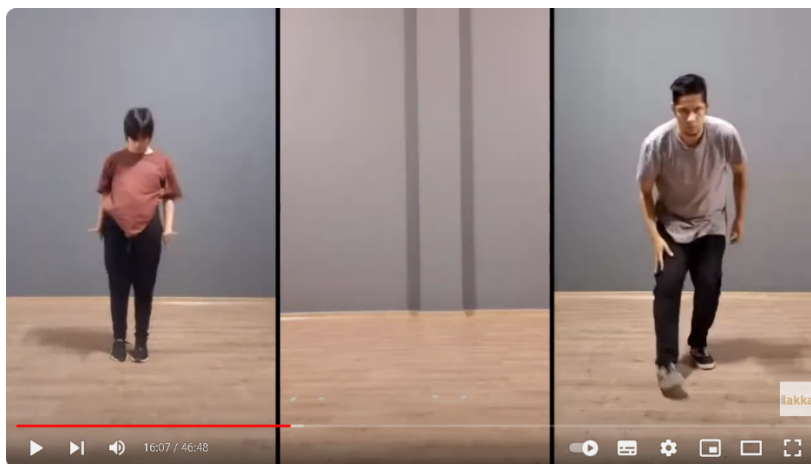

Figura 2: The screen layout is divided into three equal parts. On the far left is a dancer with brown skin, black hair, a burgundy shirt, black pants, and black sneakers, against a background with a gray wall and beige floor. In the middle of the screen, there is only a gray background and beige floor. On the far right, there is a dancer with white skin and black hair, wearing a gray shirt, black pants, and black sneakers, against a background with a gray wall and beige floor.

Figura 3: The screen has a layout divided into three images, one larger in the center, occupying most of the screen, against a background with a gray wall and beige floor. On the right side of the screen, there are two smaller screens. In the upper screen, there is a dancer with brown skin, black hair, a burgundy shirt, black pants, and black sneakers, against a background with a gray wall and beige floor. In the lower screen, a dancer with white skin, dark brown eyes, and black hair has their face close to the screen, occupying almost the entire space.

The StreamYard is a studio platform that facilitates closed calls among participants, and to reach more people, it is necessary to redirect to a platform like YouTube in real-time. This way, it is possible to reach the audience, accessing the presentation through a specific channel. It is worth noting that YouTube is used to disseminate the work and reach the audience, but there is no direct interaction between the audience and the performers, except for chat contacts that allow the audience to leave messages. However, these messages do not interfere with the choreographic project's structure and/or script.

Smartphones, cameras, and computers

The cameras used in "Ñ Presencial + Face a Face" are smartphone and computer cameras. Initially, we started using the performers/dancers' smartphones because we found that it would be possible to do the work with these cameras, as the planned angles and connections with the platforms were feasible. However, we soon discovered that having specific smartphones/cameras for the job would be necessary, as cameras and phones with different specifications generated irregularities in the images.
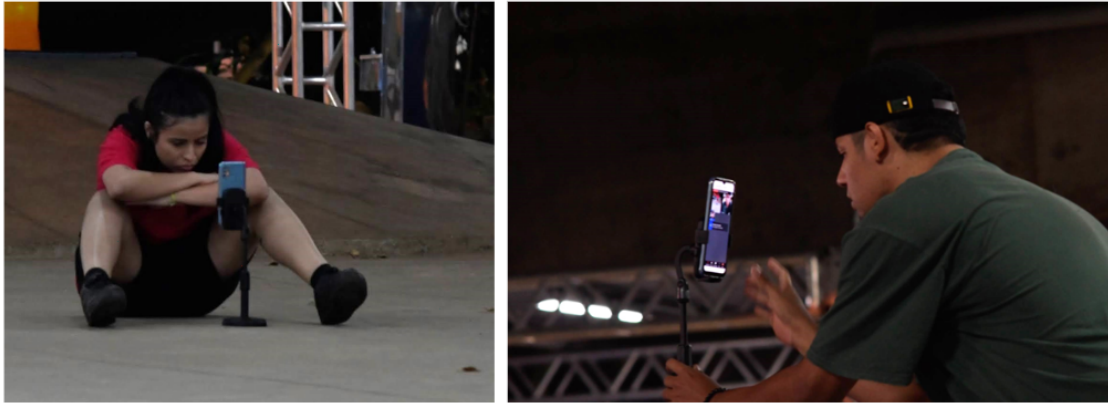
Figura 4: There are two images side by side. In the left image, dancer Jessica Marques has brown skin, black straight hair, wearing a red shirt, knee-length black shorts, and knee-high socks, and black sneakers. She looks at a smartphone in front of her, positioned on the ground with a stand. On the right screen, dancer Renato Estevão, with fair skin, is wearing a green shirt and a black cap, operating a smartphone with a front camera and a stand. Credits to Alexis Oliveira.

Knowledge of camera shots and angles was applied, such as the 1st shot, in which the performers/dancers gained greater importance, emphasizing them over the rest of the image. In the 2nd shot, the performers/dancers are positioned further from the screen, highlighting a larger portion of their bodies as well as the external environment.
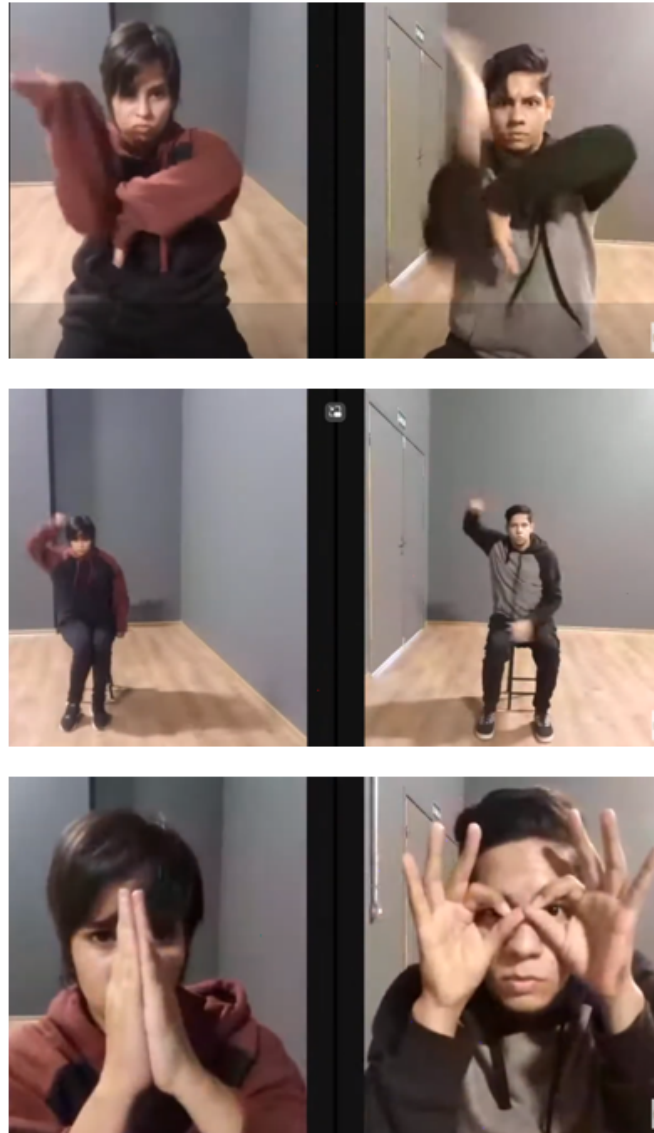
Figura 5: There is a sequence of images organized from top to bottom, and all the images are divided into two parts, one on the right and the other on the left. In the first image, on the left side, dancer Jessica Marques occupies the left side of the screen, has straight black hair and brown skin, wears a black blouse with wine-colored sleeves, and makes geometric movements, in a frame that cuts at her torso, with a gray wall and beige floor in the background. On the right side is dancer Renato Estevão, with short black hair, white skin, wearing a blouse with black sleeves and a gray torso. The background is a black wall and gray floor. In the images below, the configuration of the dancers remains the same, but the angle changes. In the second image, the angle is wide, capturing the entire body of the dancers, while in the third image, the focus is on the face and hands. The sequence of images explores the following shots: American shot, Medium shot, and Close-up.

In addition to the necessary knowledge about the camera, angles, and shots, it was necessary to explore manual operation features on smartphone cameras, such as activating and deactivating screen rotation, as cameras/smartphones were sometimes used horizontally and other times vertically.
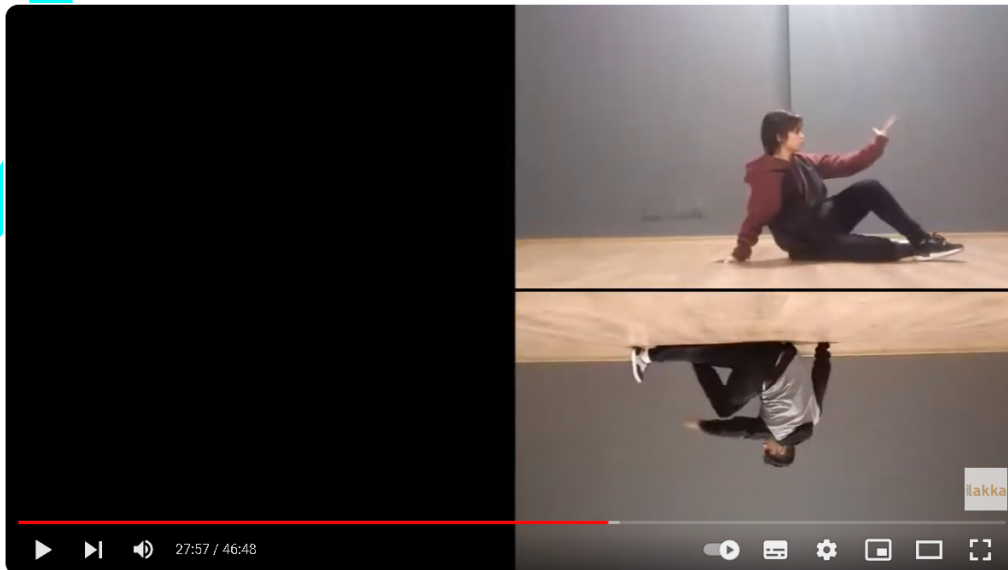
Figura 6: *In this image, the manual rotation of one of the cameras is evident, not a movement made by the stream operator. The screen is divided into three parts, with 50% of the screen on the extreme right entirely black without an image. The remaining 50% is divided into two parts. In the upper part, dancer Jessica Marques, with brown skin and short black hair, wears a blouse with wine-colored sleeves, a black torso, black pants, and black and white sneakers. She is in a seated and sideways position, with a gray background and beige floor. In the lower image, dancer Renato Estevão, with short black hair and white skin, wearing a black-sleeved blouse and a gray torso, is seated upside down. In the image, the beige floors of the images touch.*

Thus, it can be said that the performers (dancers) also take on the role of operators during the presentation, as mastery of the smartphone and knowledge of angles and shots is necessary. In other words, knowledge of body techniques or dance matrix codes alone is insufficient to act as performers.

Regarding computers, at least two computers and two operators/editors are required. Platforms like YouTube and StreamYard are used on computers within a browser, eliminating the need to download specific programs. The computer cameras play an important role, as they allow entry into the StreamYard call during editing and, at times, entering the screen with a black screen or replicating a banner with pre-recorded images.
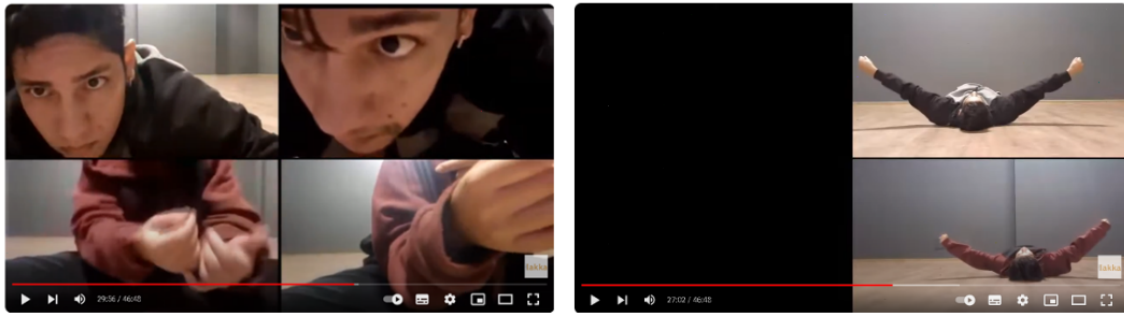
Figura 7: There are two screens above, both divided into four cameras. On the left side, the screen is divided into four parts, with Renato Estevão on the top, featuring the dancer Renato Estevão with short black hair, white skin; in both images, the dancer's face fills the entire screen. In the bottom images, there is the dancer Jessica Marques, emphasizing her arms and hands, with her face not visible.

Overall, two cameras are manipulated by the performers/dancers, with a third strategically positioned at the center of the stage. The OBS software is employed, allowing the simulation of a fourth pre-recorded camera. Additionally, the computer camera of the stream operator is utilized, transmitting pre-recorded images in the scene below.

The audio used in the performance is replicated from a pre-recorded video through the screen-sharing feature. The screen is not shared in the YouTube broadcast but only within the StreamYard studio. However, the audio is made available to the entire audience, including both spectators and performers.
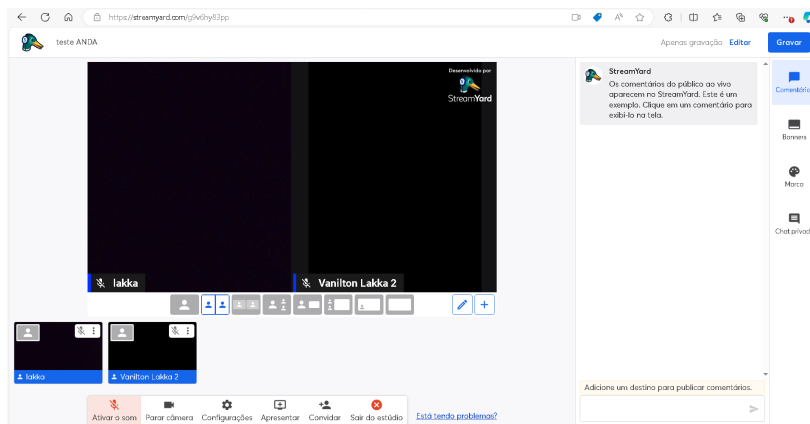

Figura 8: Layout Stream Yard, in the center of the fabric, it is possible to identify the fabric that will be transmitted via YouTube. Below, there are several small fabrics informing the ways of fabric division. Below, in the two middle fabrics, it is possible to identify the people who are in the room. This panel is only accessible to people who are inside the call and receive the link.

*Figura 9: Panel showing the distribution of people in a Google Meet call.
Note the difference compared to the StreamYard panel.*

Another important aspect is that a link to the StreamYard session is generated, which is shared with all participants via WhatsApp or email. This allows the performers and operators to join the same session within the platform/studio on their own devices. In other words, there is a coordination of both recent and not-so-recent technologies.

Figura 10: The image is divided into two parts. On the left side, you can see the opening screen of "Ñ Presencial + Face a Face" with the visual identity. On the right side is the QR Code that links to the complete video of the project. It is also possible to access the video via the link below: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvDXQr0VTCM[4]

Movement Matrices and Platforms

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[4] Link to "Ñ Presencial + Face a Face," version with the cast from Viçosa, featuring Jean Carlo and Alex Leco. https://youtu.be/KMHU9-wXrOU access on 19/12/2023.

In "Ñ Presencial + Face a Face," the interpreters (dancers) participating in the choreography were chosen for their motor skills derived from Urban Dance practices and their mastery of codes related to these dances. Among the various styles of Urban Dance used, I emphasize the following: Popping, Robot, Wave, House, Hip Hop Dance, Finger Tutting, and Breaking, focusing on Foot Works and Freezes.

An interesting fact is that most of these dances/techniques occur while standing, except for Breakdance, which includes various solo techniques. This is relevant as the camera's use in composition is directly linked to how the movement matrix utilizes the dancing body in space.

Regarding camera usage, complementary relationships are highlighted, where the movements of the two interpreters complement each other through image capture direction and real-time editing, exploring symmetry and asymmetry in bodies and on the screen. Dances like Finger Tutting and Popping show greater ease in constructing such compositions.

These dances gained prominence around 2010, mainly on YouTube. Channels like StatusSilver[5], specializing in Finger Tutting dances, saw their most visited videos published between 2012 and 2015. Renowned choreographer Jay Funk[6], known for the Samsung commercial "unleash your fingers"[7] and work as a Movement Designer in Marvel Studios' film "Doctor Strange," is currently part of the Finger Circus Crew[8].

However, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic, Finger Tutting performance videos and tutorials saw a resurgence on the internet in the 2020s, particularly on TikTok. The vertical layout on TikTok, in contrast to YouTube's standard, and the addition of editing effects not present on YouTube contributed to a renewed experience for users.

In "Ñ Presencial + Face a Face", platforms like TikTok and Instagram are not utilized, nor are the editing features present on these platforms. However, the interaction with the Urban Dance world and content produced for these platforms served as a research environment for the choreographic project.

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[5] Link to the YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/statussilver accessed on 19/12/2023.
[6] Link to Jay Funk's Instagram channel https://www.instagram.com/jayfunk_jd/ accessed on 19/12/2023.
[7] Link to the "Unleash your fingers" commercial https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aCxtfOBRbM accessed on 19/12/2023.
[8] Link to the Crew's Instagram https://www.instagram.com/fingercircus/ accessed on 19/12/2023.

Dance-Technology Interfaces and Some Formats

Creating "Ñ Presencial + Face a Face" required exploring digital platforms and their interplay to discover unpredictable uses. This involves subverting the original functions of both software and hardware. Such subversive technical movements have frequently occurred in art history, not just with recent technologies but also with older ones. As one of the consequences, there is an expansion movement, giving rise to the creation of new possibilities within the art itself, with new formats and languages. This is the case of the relationship between Dance and the camera.

> There is an extensive inventory of designations for the relationships between Dance, Cinema, and Video languages. Most of this distinct nomenclature comes from the English language: Choreocinema, Camera choreography, Video dance, Videodance, Video-dance, Cinedance, Filmdance, Screen dance, Dance for the camera, among other terms. Various authors and researchers from different places will use them in diverse ways – combining names, separating them, joining them with hyphens – depending on assumptions grounded in some form of hierarchy, understanding the existence or non-existence of hybridity, the chronological relationship of terms, the thought that arises from discussions of languages for a specific creation, whether it has a feminine or masculine article accompanying it. In other words, a set of justifications that cater to the diversity of thinking, creating, performing, and elaborating this intersection of Dance languages with Audiovisual. (GUIMARÃES, 2017, p.106)

SPANGHERO (2003) identifies three relationships between dance and the camera: recording, adaptation or translation, and Screen Choreography.

> [...] **recording** in a studio or on stage, adapting an existing choreography for audiovisual purposes, and dances specifically conceived for the screen. The first type of practice involves nothing more than recording the original choreography with one or more cameras without significant alterations. The camera guides our gaze to better see the choreography, revealing details and distances that wouldn't be visible from the theater audience, but it does not generate any other thoughts beyond recording. The second type of practice between image and dance is adapting or transducing **an existing choreography to another medium**, involving camera capture and the computer environment. The third way of relating dance and image is called screen choreography: these are dances designed specifically for projection on the screen. This practice involves the dance transition from one medium to another, like in other cases, but conceived as a process loaded with transformations that build new concepts. These dances are created for the body of the video and for the eye accustomed to living with television, video, and cinema. (SPANGHERO, 2003, p. 37)

This term, Screen Choreography, aligns with GUIMARÃES' (2017) structural relationships, focusing on composition rather than simple recording or adaptation of existing works.

In recent years, the number of Videodance works has been gradually increasing, driven by creators participating in specialized events or those integrating such works into broader dance festivals.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a surge in dance projects incorporating cameras and other devices, along with increased events and calls for artists utilizing these technologies as it became a primary mode of production. Festivals like Aldir Blanc, the SESC Dance Biennial 2021, and the 29th Edition of the Triangle Dance Festival shifted their programming to virtual activities.

Telematic Dance, like Videodance, involves the use of cameras and cinematic language in a structural relationship within compositions. However, unlike Videodance, Telematic Dance doesn't exist solely for the screen; it uses the screen as one of the mechanisms for its realization, along with cameras, computers, and the internet. Telematic Dance establishes a mediation between dancer-camera-network-dancer, emphasizing real-time interaction.

> [...] In telematics, the dancer interacts with a two-dimensional body, devoid of smell and sound, presented to their remote partner through the lens of a camera. Dancers adopt a different way of perceiving and acting in space. With guide screens, meaning monitors displaying the result of the two layers of images [...], the dancer moves to see their image (their double, their avatar) move and dance with the remote partner (SANTANA, 2006, p. 129-130).

The choreography "Versus" by Ivani Santana in 2005 is a notable example of Telematic Dance in Brazil, connecting three cities: Salvador, Brasília, and João Pessoa, with performances and musicians linked through the new multigigabit infrastructure "Rede Ipê."

In the current context, technologies like video calls have become individualized and commonplace, no longer carrying the novelty they once did. The relationship between dance and telematics has evolved accordingly.

Ñ Presencial + Face a Face doesn't aim to create a Telematic Dance piece, but many structural relationships in the project are based on the idea of communication via cameras, computers, and projectors among interpreters. However, the physical co-presence of the dancers and the stream operator in the same space distinguishes it from what could be categorized as Telematic Dance. It is also not Videodance, as it occurs in real-time. Nor is it the transmission of a choreography created for a physical space, as the entire construction is based on camera manipulation techniques like framing and angles, aiming to create a specific experience and perspective for the viewer.

This project represents a constant movement of updating foundational notions such as dance, body, choreography, and technique, altered due to the integration of digital tools, resulting in hybrid productions.

> With the emergence of digital technological devices, Mendes (2010) emphasizes that dance has expanded its scenic and technical resources. These have come to be utilized in different stages of the creative process, whether as documentation, scenic elements, or as part of choreographic configuration. (TEIXEIRA, 2017, p. 94)

To illustrate changes in the choreographic concept, TEIXEIRA (2017) enumerates some concepts/models emerging from the current context, emphasizing Distributed Choreography and Choreographic System.

> The concept of "distributed choreography" was initially described by Lisa Naugle (2002), characterizing performances in remote physical spaces connected through video conferencing and internet transmission. It is an approach in digital dance that combines real-time interaction, video, choreography, sounds, and digital images. In this telematic environment, the performers' bodies are projected onto screens that, according to the author, create a virtual fourth dimension. (TEIXEIRA, 2017, p. 119)

This type of approach aligns with the propositions of Telematic Dance and dance with technological mediation, carried out by Ivani Santana since the 1990s with the research group Poéticas Tecnológicas: Corpoaudiovisual. This has resulted in works such as VERSUS (2005), Por Onde Cruzam Alamedas (2006), and (in) TOque (2008).

Schulze's (2005) concept of a "Choreographic System " considers all elements participating in the system as artifacts, including the rehearsal

space, notebooks, and digital resources. Schulze prefers this term over "choreographic process" to encompass the various relationships present in contemporary dance creation.

Digital artifacts are increasingly integrated into choreographic projects, serving various purposes such as recording, scenic elements, and part of the choreography's configuration. They have become part of people's everyday lives, influencing dance and how individuals interact with the world.

Not Just Existing, but Being Close

"Ñ Presencial + Face a Face" is a hybrid dance project using easily accessible and widely disseminated information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as smartphones, the internet, cameras, and platforms like YouTube and StreamYard. It reflects the familiarity and proximity individuals have with these technologies, altering the production of works (not just dance) and how the audience perceives these propositions.

There is a change in the production and reception of dance works utilizing these technologies on a different scale from the early experiences with Telematic Dance. This shift, driven largely by values aligned with the current phase of capitalism, is relevant and worthy of attention as it alters central concepts like choreography, body, dance, leading to new understandings like Distributed Choreography or Choreographic System.

This trend is likely to continue with the popularization of technologies like Augmented Reality or Virtual Reality[9], which, combined with sensors and interfaces like glasses, can create immersive and interactive environments. However, these technologies are still relatively unexplored by artists, possibly due to equipment and software costs or difficulty accessing relevant information.

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[9] Virtual and augmented reality: what is it, how does it work and what is the difference? In Positivo do seu Jeito. https://www.meupositivo.com.br/doseujeito/tecnologia/realidade-virtual-e-realidade-aumentada/ accessed on 19/12/2023

Walter Benjamin's observation from 1936 regarding the popularization and massification of cinema remains relevant. The increased availability and intimacy with these technologies generate changes in central artistic phenomena. In essence, technology needs to exist and must be within society's reach, often at an intimate manipulation level, shaping people's daily lives, as art is made of culture, and culture is part of life, including Digital Culture.

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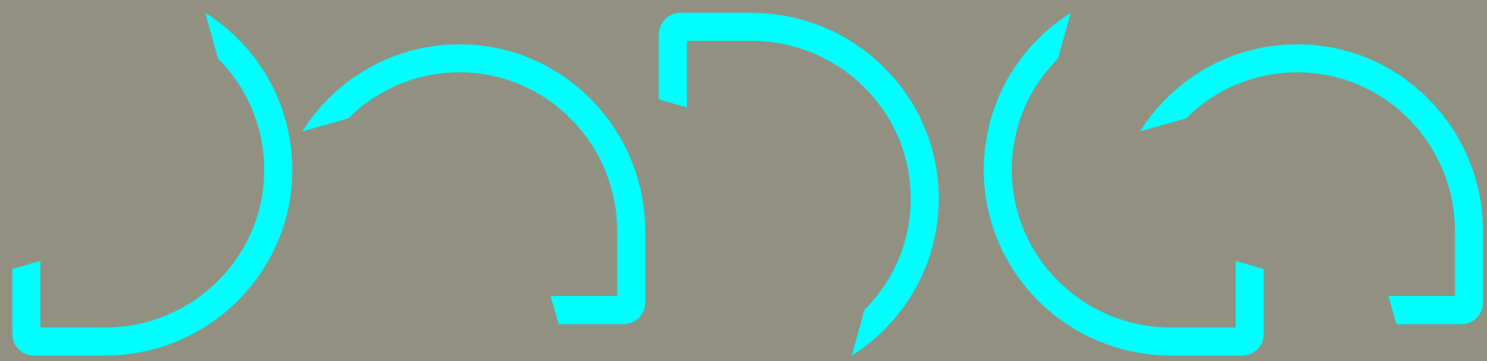
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