PERSONARE

dispositivo para "good vibrations"

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Abstract

Thinking of the concept of technic, technology and apparatus, in this study we consider that the apparatus includes two layers: a technical layer and a geo-political layer. From these considerations on, we will reflect upon the functioning of the device within the *Personare Embodied Varios Darmstadt 58* project, in a critical manner and from the Portuguese team's point of view. We shall refer to the technological options adopted by this team and underline the usage of improvisation relating body with its sonorities. Assuming that the project was a 'work in project' we look upon the *Personare* device as a telematic synchronization process that aimed to contain real presence and tele-presence on one only level.

Palavras-chave:

body, apparatus, telematics, improvisation.

1. Introduction

In order to prepare this article, we started out by reading the messages we texted with the Chilean and the Brazilian teams about the *Personare Embodied Varios Darmstadt 58* project which was idealized by Ivani Santana. The study was focused on the relationship between the body and its sonority but additionally we were also challenged by the telematic relation between different teams that are located far from each other. Rereading the initial messages led us to face a huge amount of technical issues as well as one difficulty: to find out a common basis for communication between the teams. This difficulty is a consequence of the different types of knowledge of each team that carried within themselves different fields but also the physical distance and different time zone. But despite all difficulties, the project improved.

The initial challenge was to conceive a device that was capable of including a more vast system convening two fundamental ideas: the idea of the body as a sonority producer and the idea of a whole new dimension of information flow in real time. The target was to conceive and carry out a performance that could embody those two ideas to be carried out simultaneously in three cities: Salvador da Bahia, Santiago de Chile and Lisbon.

A great part of the time speared for the performance's preparation – the project – was used to combine the work of these three teams. The hardware and software's choice and above all the distance combining of equipment turned out to be quite complex and painful tasks. For the ballerina based in Lisbon, most of the preparatory sessions were frustrating because instead of exploring her own movements, she often had to wait for long periods of time for the long distance connections to become operational.

The amount of compatibility problems among the equipment and software, revealed in itself the complexity of the device. We were conscious that we were making way in the establishment of the telematic network, even if the telematic connections, by themselves, were not entirely original.

How can three teams on three different locations be able to put on a coherent performance, combining their own poetics in real time within a more vast and creative project? The concept of 'location' within telematics dancing and its particular complexity is related to a space-time analysis relation of its performance through the internet. According to Glesner: 'telematics and distributed performances dissolve the spatial (but not the temporal) unity between performers and spectators and distribute the scenic space into diverse remote sites.' (Glesner apud Bailey et al., 2008: 41). In other words, the spatial dissolution is a safe fact but not necessarily the time issue. In fact, a great part of the difficulties we felt were in the shared time management area.

In any case, the project brought along a rising and very stimulating additional feature: the assumption of a relational Ibero-American hinge.

Adding this feature to the mentioned purpose of exploring the relation between the body and its sonorities, showed us we were facing an innovating and challenging project.

In this article we mainly want to reflect on these aspects and question results instead of only describing the technological issues the Portuguese team had to face. In fact, it´s important to reflect upon this, to prevent the project from becoming stifled in technical issues that however important they may seem, will not allow the development of a critical and forward reflection regarding the linkage between dance and technology.

2. What is an apparatus?

Does the expression 'technical' resume itself to 'technology'? Are they two synonymous nouns? It is of our conceptual knowledge that, although technical and technology intercept each other and are indifferently used in common language, these expressions are not equivalent. There is in fact a difference which is important to underline, a distinction to be clarified.

According to our perspective, the key word to understand technology is precisely the 'logy' suffix, which comes from Greek (as does 'technê') and brings us to speech structuring and articulation. As a result we may observe that technology is not conceivable separated from its social usage and its meaning's scope should be allocated more to knowledge production than to a repository of automation tools, instruments and components. Consequently, technology has always been transversal to all human activities and it comprehends instrument collections (such as the group of kitchen instruments, or war instruments) made by men and existing as physical objects and artefacts regardless of their obvious utility, such as body techniques (such as vocal techniques in singing or wrestling techniques), closely linked within the scope of movement actions. These two sides – object collections and the movement actions for manipulating those objects – are obviously connected and when successfully combined become a knowledge 'knot' and only under these circumstances will be considered a part of the technological area.

Throughout history of mankind we can see that all instrument collections exist in a relation with physicality: for example, kitchen instruments require certain choreography of gestures and a flavour technique, a weapon requires body display and a repertoire of movements, a scenic stage conveys, authorizes and amplifies a group of physical movements and a capacity of coding and decoding. Apart from this, the long history of human work is marked by the prosthetic relationship between hand and instrument[1].

So it is understood that technology in a broad sense includes all the knowledge 'knots' that characterize human social and economic networks. In each period, the knowledge 'knots' acquire their own features. This means that technology in each period establishes a dialogue with the social infrastructure, interfering with body acting

and along with its experiences, shapes that period's ideology. In a more narrow sense, the relation between an instrument collection and a group of knowledge 'knots' is similar to a constellation that combines with other constellations, giving way to the formation of a technology galaxy. So it is possible to imagine that each period is composed of a group of 'knots' and that the history arrow represents the dynamics that allows the 'knots' to be tied and untied according to a certain time gap.

It is at this point that the concept of apparatus makes its entrance.

In common language, the apparatus implies a certain organization of things capable of originating a specific effect. This is applicable to the military apparatus as to the scenic apparatus and is to be found since earlier ages. As an example, men were capable of conceiving and executing hunting traps at a very early stage that were no less than devices: organized groups of objects displayed in a certain way with predatory purposes.

In fact, by consulting any Portuguese[2] or English[3] dictionary we can realize that the expression apparatus has a wide range. Foucault adopted the apparatus wide range sense and underlined its relation and interference with speech production. To Foucault there is a seminal relation between the apparatus and politics, considering that all devices are submitted to a specific power game, related to a certain limit of knowledge that is an outcome of that very same game and at the same time, conditions it.

Agamben's interpretation consists on a review and update of Foucault's perspective. To this Italian scholar,

The term certainly refers, in its common Foucauldian use, to a set of practices and mechanisms (both linguistic and nonlinguistic, juridical, technical, and military) that aim to face an urgent need and to obtain an effect that is more or less immediate. But what is the strategy of practices or of thought, what is the historical context, from which the modern term originates? (Agaben, 2009: 8)

By answering Agamben's question, we resume today's concept of apparatus by allocating it to that of technology. So, we understand that apparatus, in a broad sense, designates a dynamic process of tying and untying knowledge 'knots', precisely the ones we previously decided were coincident with the concept of technology. In a more narrow sense each device is a kind of sense production bandage, more or less complex. This bandage is executed in two layers: the main technical layer and the geo-political layer.

3. The device's layers

But let's go back to the *Personare Embodied Varios Darmstadt 58* project and its appropriation by the Portuguese team to describe the two layers that it is composed of.

In order to respond to the telematics dance's features, especially the integration of a live performance mediated through multiple transmission channels through an influenced by creative processes internet, we adopted a network unification (See diagram 1) that ensure on one hand a connection between the ballerina's body on location and the transmission of her image and sound, and on the other hand the connection between sound and image reception from other distant locations (Salvador da Bahia and Santiago e Chile) and their projection to the scene.

In the Portuguese version we adopted 3 tools as a technical support for the telematics dance: a system for analysing movement in 3D XSens, an original programme developed by musician and composer Jonas Runa and a interactive presentation tool supplied by Software Isadora.

The 3D XSens presents a 17 movement sensor wireless interface, sized on a biomechanical model of the body that permits a synchronized registration to be transcribed to a 3D animation representation.

The programme created and used by musician and composer Jonas Runa changed XSens into a generating system of sonorities, which in itself allowed the exploration of new and interesting usage opportunities.

As a complement, the Isadora Software as a digital instrument for interactive presentation widely used in dancing, allowed us to programme a video interaction through sound data on scene, and its video projection in real time.

The three instruments supplied the Portuguese team with a basis to build a network of relations between body, sound and image, capable of being displayed in a dancing performance. The conceptual centre of the project was about the body as a sonority producer and so, ballerina Maitane Ussia's body obviously occupied the stage's dynamic centre. However, the Portuguese team's option was to bring visibility to all instruments and the team that was manipulating them.
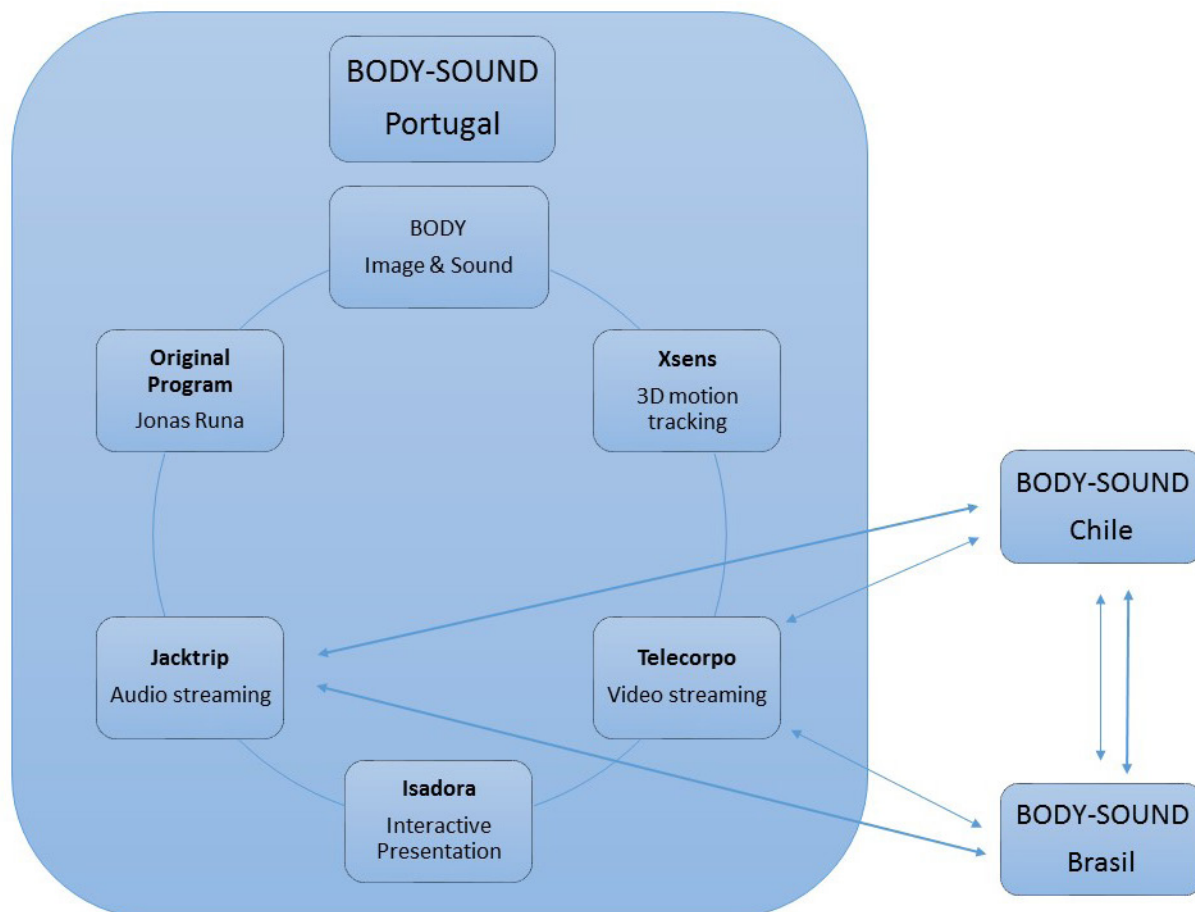
Figure 1. Dynamics between the different tools used in
Personare Brazil-Chile-Portugal

Figure 2. Scenes of the Personare device in Portugal. Maria
João Alves, FMH 2014.

Apart from the technical issues of the Portuguese device, it was necessary to adopt an internet connection that would allow us to have visual and audio information flows in real time, between Lisbon, Santiago de Chile and Salvador da Bahia. At this point we are at a different layer of the device that in fact allows the insertion of the Portuguese device in a more vast device characterized as geo-political. The geo-political nature of the device is due, not only to the fact that the project took place in three different locations, but above all due to the choice of such locations in telematics connection.

Despite the internet being today a privileged space of new communication and development channels and the development of new places for creativity, it's true that it is a vehicle for producing linguistics' dominances, especially the dominance of English. In choosing locations in Central and South America and the Iberian Peninsula - thus underlining a relational and resisting axis based on two languages (although this is not its dominant conceptual trace) Portuguese and Castilian (Spanish) - the *Personare* project has adopted a new centrality. In fact, it is known that the project is linked to the MAPA D2 platform, which includes in its purposes precisely the development of telematic relations between Portuguese and Spanish speaking people interested in the articulation of body arts with the digital technological devices.

4. The device while coming into operation

Dancing performance, as a practice that changes as the body is affected by cultural and technological modifications, is an idea that was put forward by Gunduz (2010, 71) and describes the way this project was faced.

The telematic nature of the Lisbon –Salvador da Bahia – Santiago de Chile project naturally brought different demands and the exploration of other ways to do things. Bailey et al. (2008) alerts us to the fact that telematic dancing explores space-time relations in its performance through the internet, in a context where the choreographic process is radically redesigned and relocated.

> (...) 'relocation' articulates a similar semantic movement or procedure. Yet, this is not only concerned with the conceptual/creative/idiomatic shift from one medium to another but also with shifts in the substance/context/affect of space. Given that the medium for choreographic practice, in its most essential terms, is the body moving in space and time, this radical revisioning has ontological and epistemological implications for the discipline. (Bailey et al., 2008: 42)

According to the same authors the dancing performance in a telematic involvement sharing multiple live and virtual spaces assumes the features of a "living" phenomena.

Johannes Birringer also showed that the telematic performance brings changes to the composition processes and presentation structure.

> This is no longer the modernist notion of composition; rather... (it) resembles a kind of postproduction of recording/recorded data, which in the case of dance includes bodily movements, gestures, sensations. The emphasis has shifted from the object of representation to the emergent situation, and the materialization of technology, itself. (Birringer, 2003: 8)

There are two aspects to underline in the Portuguese device: the inclusion of improvisation process during rehearsals and even during the final show, regulated in the structure adopted by the three teams, and the attempt to create an immersive environment. According to the improvisation process, these two aspects were sustained by a dramaturgical structure (see diagram 1) conceived by Ivani Santana and negotiated among the participants. This structure presented a notable range allowing different appropriations of each scene by each team. According to the immersive environment it's important to refer that, in the performance's context, there was an interest in offering spectators an experience in shared space assuming from the beginning the informality of 'being on stage'. The performance was organized in a way technicians were able to enter and exit, this happened mostly with XSens operator Rodrigo Martins and musician Jonas Runa. It is obvious that the entering and exit timings on scene were planned but the routes and details of the physical presences were improvised throughout the rehearsals. Also ballerina Maitane Ussia's presence, her movements were executed from a vast interaction chart, which finally allowed the performer´s initiatives in real time.

In the final performance improvisation had a very important role, not only regarding movement details of the team´s members on stage, but also regarding the selection of the set of connecting screens with the other 'stages' in Salvador da Bahia and Santiago de Chile, manipulated by Sophie Coquelin (the executive producer of the play of lights).
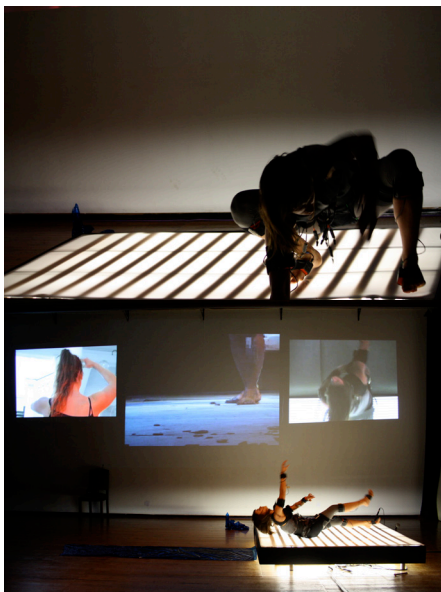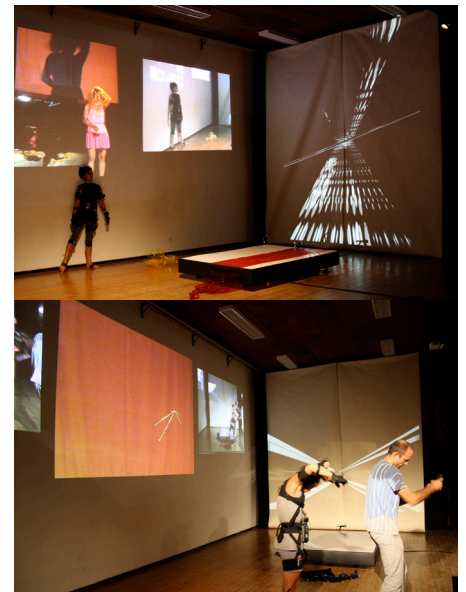
1st SCENE

*Body-sound:
Organic aspects*

2nd SCENE

*Body-sound:
Environmental disturbance*

3rd SCENE

*Body-sound:
Symbolic/synthesis*

Figure 3. Table 1. Dramaturgical structure Personare Brazil-Portugal-Chile, conceived by Ivani Santana. Images by Maria João Alves, 2014 FMH.

5. Conclusions: between the cacophony and harmony.

In fact the final performance that had two presentations ended up having the nature of a work in progress, from the Portuguese team's point of view. By thinking about the presence issue, being present, the subject´s identity from its sonorous existence, *Personare* turned out to be an excellent opportunity to review investigations on body(ies) and its(their) sonority(ies). Assuming the improvisation as a method, we have accepted the random component of artistic creation, including it in a coherent structure. Far from chaos we looked for an organic nature capable of containing the unpredictable.

On the body's level, the challenge was to explore the connection between bodies and their sonorities, not only rehearsing ways to make their visceral sections' audible but also to change body movement into an audible vibrations instrument. Or in other words, it was about going from the body's materiality to its digital synthesis and finally, from the present body to the tele-present body.

The development of the telematic connections revealed an extraordinary potential to the narrowing of the relationship between the artist's community. Natural tensions coming from different cultural contexts may be replaced by sharing a same creative goal. Lets say the differences are the same but physical borders end up being merged into another sharing space.

Obviously not all was good during the project's execution, but it is never too much to refer that even the unsuccessful part originated important material for future research. We are conscious that a removing process capable of clarifying the telematic network was left out. In other words, cacophony isn't good or bad but from the audience's point of view, it may generate serious comprehension difficulties. The final challenge turned out to be the production harmony instead of cacophony[4].

The apparatus internal harmonies and connection harmonies between the Portuguese apparatus and the other apparatus. Harmonies that made the performance more clear and allowed breaking through brilliance lines with in the volume of information that circulated among the three countries.

To resume the initial issue of the definition of apparatus, we may say that it was all about rehearsing a construction device of complexities but also of clarity. An apparatus capable of producing accumulations, but also capable of establishing cutting lines. An apparatus capable of synchronizing with other similar apparatus, but also susceptible of containing and hosting real physical presences in a restrained physical space.

In fact we are convinced that *Personare* aspired to a haptic condition, capable of refreshing and combining the participant's senses whether they were technical, performers or spectators.

Notes

1   In the past instruments were seen as extensions of the hands, although nowadays we can realize in a science fiction scenario, that the hand is the prosthesis of the instrument and that the latter often gains a complete and somewhat scaring autonomy.

2   In the Houaiss Portuguese Language Dictionary, the term device covers distinct areas such as military, biological, medical and judicial areas.

3   In the on-line dictionary Merriam-Webster, the term apparatus includes a set of materials or equipment designed for a particular use; a group of anatomical or cytological parts functioning together <mitotic *apparatus*>; an instrument or appliance designed for a specific operation". ´The term also defines 'the functional processes by means of which a systematized activity is carried out <the apparatus of society> (a) the machinery of government (b) the organization of a political party or an underground movement'.

4   Using the terms cacophony and harmony we are not only designating something related to music, but the set of vibrations, both sound and visual, present in *Personare.*

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