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VIDEO ARTICLE

Visualizing Embodied Research: Dance Dramaturgy and Animated Infographic Films

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This video essay introduces a new form of visualization of embodied research, called “animated infographic films.” In these films, techniques like motion graphics, 3D modeling and camera animation are used to invite the viewer to enter the choreographer’s studio. Here we invite you to come into the digitally re-created studio of João Fiadeiro and engage kinesthetically and empathetically with selected examples of his compositional and dramaturgical strategies.

These infographic films are based on the results of a study on three signature solo works from different stages of Fiadeiro’s choreographic work. The research has been carried out within the framework of the BlackBox Arts and Cognition Project.

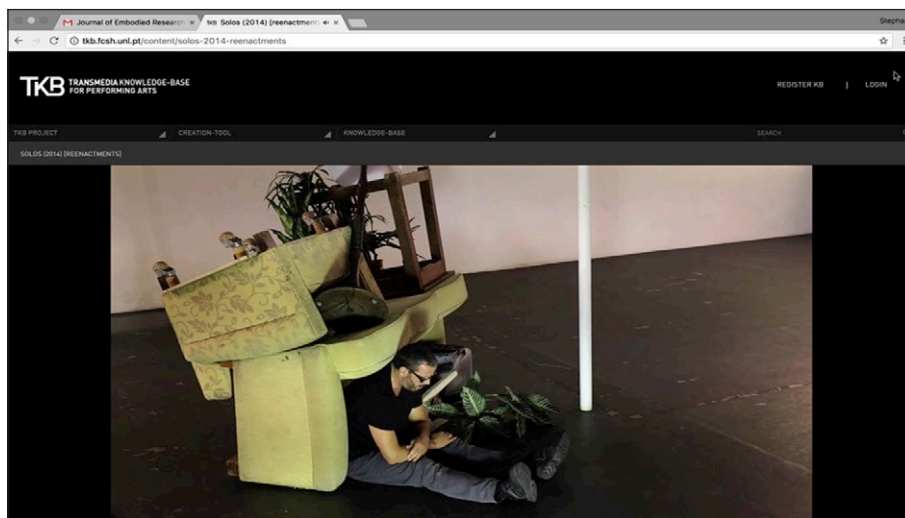
Keywords: dance dramaturgy; contemporary choreography; infographic films; João Fiadeiro; BlackBox

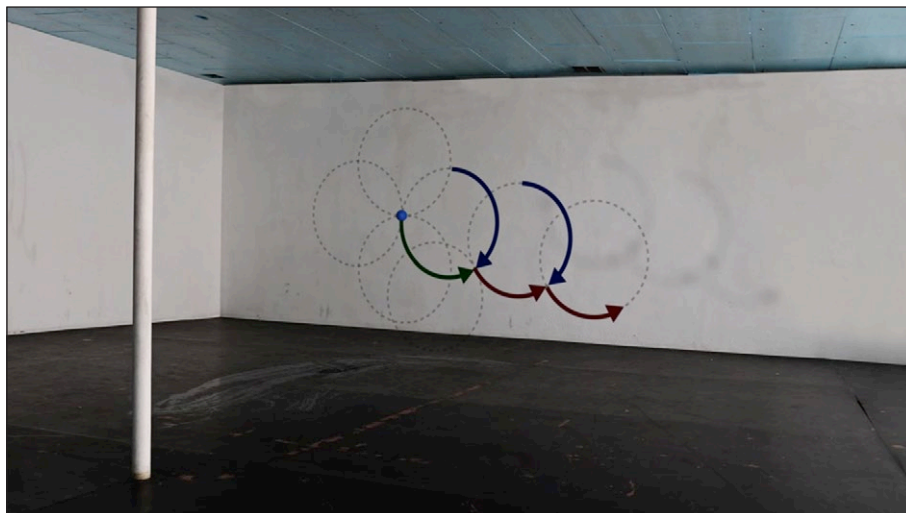
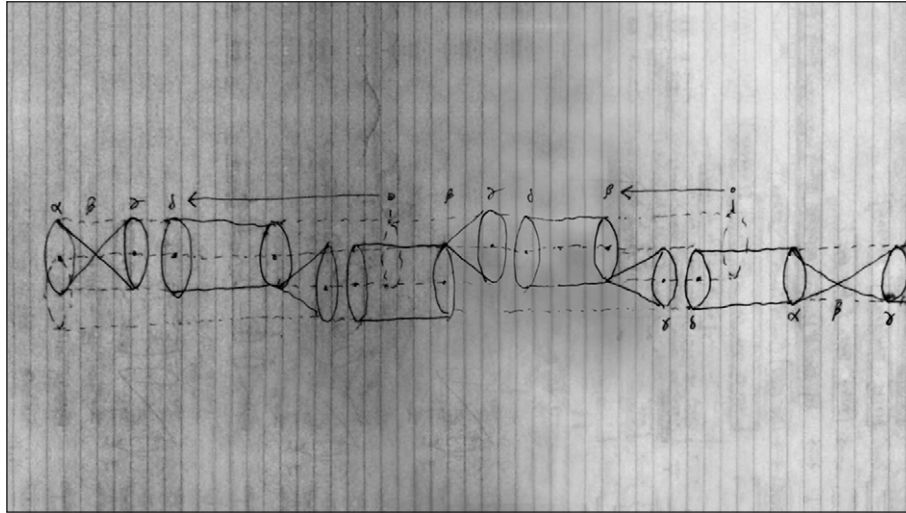
VIDEO ARTICLE

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STILLS FROM THE VIDEO ARTICLE





VIDEO ARTICLE TRANSCRIPT

[00:10]

[Stephan Jürgens:]

This video essay introduces a new form of visualization of embodied research, called “animated infographic films.” In these films, techniques like

motion graphics, 3D modeling and camera animation are used to invite the viewer to enter the choreographer's studio. Here we invite you to come into the digitally re-created studio of João Fiadeiro and engage kinesthetically and empathetically with selected examples of his compositional and dramaturgical strategies.

For the most part, our infographic films are based on the results of my study on three signature solo works from different stages of Fiadeiro's choreographic work. This research has been carried out in the framework of the BlackBox Arts and Cognition Project.

BlackBox Arts&Cognition

<http://blackbox.unl.pt>

[Website screenshots]

[Carla Fernandes:]

BlackBox is about revealing what is rarely visible to audiences of performing arts.

It is funded by the European Research Council, for five years, and it's hosted by NOVA University in Lisbon at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. Our Arts&Cognition Lab mainly focuses on the analysis of the hidden and very complex knowledge behind the scenes of the work of Portuguese choreographer João Fiadeiro. He was the first case study of our project, amongst three main artists during the duration of BlackBox. We have accompanied Fiadeiro while he was creating his most recent solo works and performances, by filming workshops, by interviewing him, but above all by being present during the whole rehearsal processes.

Actually, BlackBox is in its essence about translating words, gestures, mental images and full-body enactments, into different kinds of visualizations,

which will then work as our outreach products. In this sense, we have produced by now four animated infographics films, 3D representations and a one-hour long documentary on the work of João Fiadeiro, which are all available online in our collaborative platform. As a complement to BlackBox there is TKB, a Transmedia Knowledge-Base for performing arts, which works as an open and dynamic platform for all interested artists at national and international levels, and where most of the works of João Fiadeiro are also stored and freely available online.

[Website navigation]

[Jürgens:]

The BlackBox website provides detailed information about our case studies and research output. Here we navigate to the SOLOS | Enactments case study about three signature solo works by Fiadeiro. We are introduced to information about the performance cycle, as well as to the why and how of the animated infographic films we have produced.

This link will take you to an article providing detailed information about the making of the films. The column to the right lets you access the infographic film on the top, and provides a link to the conventional video documentary of the stage performance below.

We will now see extracts from the stage performance of a signature solo work entitled “Este corpo que me ocupa”, which translates to English “This body that occupies me”.

[03:40]

Este corpo que me ocupa

Estreia em Outubro de 2008

no Teatro Chão de Oliva, Sintra

Re-posição em Novembro de 2014

no Atelier Real, Lisboa

Performance João Fiadeiro

Concepção João Fiadeiro e Paula Caspão

Textos Paula Caspão e João Fiadeiro

Assistência de ensaio e dramaturgica

Carolina Campos e Daniel Pizamiglio

[Text projected in Portuguese during the performance:]

At this very moment, a group of people enters a room. They came from different places, each in its own way and time. Between small talk and some greetings, they find their places in one of the sides of the space. Some are occupied with the reading of a text projected in the wall, others need more time to empty their bodies of the thoughts and activities of the day. They all notice that there is a fallen plant in the ground. Slowly, silence will be all they share. The rest is on hold.

[Texts read aloud in Portuguese during the performance:]

In the empty streets of a city, in the middle of the night,... an undecided man side by side with a motionless plant,... a vaguely disturbing couple – from the point of view of an insomniac woman in the terrace of a 7th floor.

A man who abandoned a fallen plant and came back to the spot of the crime feeling terribly guilty.

The unexpected encounter between a plant doing as if it was dead, and a science-fiction writer looking for some inspiration.

A big party not far from here, yesterday night, where the guests – already quite drunk – ... decided to stage a contemporary version of Sleeping Beauty.

The reproduction of an artistic installation on horizontality,... presented at the Gulbenkian Modern Art Museum, 5 years ago.

An interesting experiment, conducted in a laboratory of the Neuroscience Department of a University somewhere in Texas,... about the strategies of camouflage practiced by certain humans in closed spaces.

The man in position of deep contemplation is delighted,... because for the first time in his life he is enjoying the possibility of not reacting immediately to things.

[Jürgens:]

What we are going to see now is the infographic film about the conceptual ideas and dramaturgical principles that underlie Fiadeiro's solo work "Este corpo que me ocupa".

[12:30 – Infographic film]

Este corpo que me ocupa

(2009, 2014 at Atelier Real)

In collaboration with Paula Caspão

[Jürgens:]

"Este corpo que me ocupa" – "This body that occupies me"

João Fiadeiro has called this solo work a "meta-piece", meaning that his choreographic modus operandi is the topic and material of this work.

The piece can be seen as a study of an instant of time, exemplified by a pot plant that fell down sideways and remains center-stage during the entire piece. Fiadeiro has divided this 2014 version of the piece at Atelier Real in nine scenes, organised in four parts which have different aims.

Part one is sharing a state of attention or sensorial consciousness different from what the audience usually experience in their everyday lives. Short texts are projected onto the wall, which introduce the question of the

fallen plant in scene one. Through a succession of fragments of stories and histories projected during scene two, the audience is invited to connect with the particular space and time they have just entered.

1. Fiction or Reality?

[Jürgens:]

Fiadeiro carefully creates text fragments that mix fiction and reality, so the audience can share his perception of the complexity of reality.

One of the text fragments can be seen as the synthesis of the piece and reads: “Each square meter of the house contains remains and traces of thousands of people and places, which in turn carry thousands of remains and traces of other people and other places.”

Consequently in each city where Fiadeiro performs the work, he carries out research of relevant stories and information zooming in and out of the centuries, decades and years of peoples lives in these places.

Sintra

Casa de Teatro

Barcelona

La Caldera / La Porta

Lisboa

Atelier Real

[Jürgens:]

In the case of the 2014 performance at Atelier Real, Fiadeiro has shared in great detail which elements of the text fragments are factual or fiction. This scale helps to visualise different compositions with mixes of factual and fictional material, historical documents and credible or possible stories.

fact

documental proof

fact & some fiction

50–50

fiction & some facts

plausible fiction

fiction

[Jürgens:]

Here we see the different kind of text fragments mapped to their respective geographic location. At the Atelier Real the stories are predominantly factual and provide interesting details that help the audience to connect with the place surrounding them. Outside of the Atelier Real however, there is a wider range of texts reflecting the complexity of the different dimensions of our reality with its “thousands of remains and traces of people and places”.

In scene three a dialogue is projected on to the wall, which could be the conversation between any two members in the audience. Although the talk seems informal and relaxed, it serves as an introduction to some important premises of Fiadeiro's choreographic thinking.

Throughout scenes four to seven Fiadeiro explores a central theme in his work, the “presence of an absence”. The fallen plant on the floor is in a state of in-between-ness. It does not tell us, what has happened before, it's just present. So how does Fiadeiro show what is absent, what is not there? He explores the properties and possibilities inherent in the situation of the fallen plant: for example, its position, the geometry, its expressiveness, and its possible pasts and futures. In each of the four scenes Fiadeiro creates a different hypothesis through a different arrangement of the fallen plant and other objects. Then the audience hears a voice off presenting three possible pasts for the situation.

In the empty streets of a city,
in the middle of the night,
an undecided man side by side
with a motionless plant,
a vaguely disturbing couple,
from the point of view
of an insomniac woman
in the terrace of a 7th floor.

A man who abandoned
a fallen plant and came back
to the spot of the crime
feeling terribly guilty.

The unexpected encounter between
a plant doing as if it was dead,
and a science-fiction writer
looking for some inspiration.

The first shooting day
of a Japanese film set in Sintra,
about the harmonisation rituals
of a samurai who learned his
warrior art practicing with 4 plants.

In a public garden,
the collective suicide
of 4 plants that were unsatisfied
with their life conditions.

[Jürgens:]

Some texts reveal his sense of humor, as in this present example. This possible past is actually so absurd that the audience intuitively recognises

that Fiadeiro is experimenting with the state of in-between-ness of the plant.

In the zoo of Lisbon,
a lion managed to escape
and frightened the decorator
of the new orangutan space,
who had just arrived from the
greenhouse with a new set of plants.

[Jürgens:]

This possibility on the contrary is very credible. The more the audience engages with the stories and verifies the credibility of the suggested possible past for the plant, the more they can sense the state of in-between-ness that Fiadeiro explores.

A man who tried to move objects
from a distance only with
his mental power, who – after 20 years
of uninterrupted practice –
achieved his goal.

The main image featuring
in the generic of a documentary
– recently broadcast by
the Venezuelan TV – about some
unpredictable behaviours observed
in certain plants living in captivity.

A big party not far from here,
yesterday night, where the guests
– already quite drunk –

decided to stage a contemporary version of Sleeping Beauty.

[Jürgens:]

Fiadeiro's witty humor also allows the audience to engage playfully with the conceptual and philosophical nature of his work and discourse.

The reproduction of an artistic installation on horizontality, that was presented at the Gulbenkian Modern Art Museum, 5 years ago.

An interesting experiment, conducted in a laboratory of the Neurologic Science Department of a University somewhere in Texas, about the strategies of camouflage practiced by certain humans in closed spaces.

[Jürgens:]

Fiadeiro calls scene eight an "intermezzo". Here the audience is not presented with another hypothesis anymore, but rather with an affirmation. The text the audience hears describes the state of in-between-ness as an interval, as a prolonged situation of immobility.

Scene nine finally reveals the factual past of the fallen plant, which in reality has fallen off a stool. This is the instant of time studied during the entire work. Conceptually, the piece begins and ends here. Fiadeiro will not perform any further action. Instead, he asks audience members to replace him. The piece ends when the audience members accept his invitation and join him on the sofa.

[19:02]

[Jürgens:]

The following infographic film presents key concepts and principles of Fiadeiro's Real Time Composition method graphically. We invite you to come into Atelier Real, where Fiadeiro has taught workshops for many years, rehearsed works and presented it to varying audiences in a number of different formats.

[19:21 – Infographic film]

Graphic models developed by João Fiadeiro

[Jürgens:]

João Fiadeiro's CTR (Composition in Real Time) method was developed and systematized throughout the past twenty years and provides unique training for the performer in improvisation and composition processes.

Fiadeiro frequently visualizes essential concepts and ideas of his method graphically. Some graphic models have evolved over the years to complement the studio practice. These models have been designed and tested in close collaboration with many artists and theoreticians. The graphics use notions imported from geometry, mathematics or physics, combined with philosophical, social and artistic concepts. This film will re-create some of the CTR method's key concepts and graphic models, based on our own personal workshop experience, interviews and working sessions with Fiadeiro during our case study.

Conventionally, time is perceived linearly. The dot marks where we are in the present and the lines indicate that we come from the past and are heading towards the future. Fiadeiro proposes that, besides looking at time in the conventional way, we zoom out and become aware that this timeline is, after all, part of a very large circle. The notion that time is circular helps to

highlight a key premise of his work: that everything – actions, thoughts, ideas – have a lifespan and will eventually end. By accepting the end as a possibility, we become more sensitive to the conditions of the here and now, and minimize the influence of past experiences or future expectations in decision-making.

The CTR practitioner trains to inhibit the tendency to react immediately in a given situation. Time for decision-making expands and allows to perceive numerous possibilities. Questions can now be formulated and emerge from the situation itself. As the performers do not act solely based on their reflexes or habits, they can select from the different hypotheses inherent in the situation and can avoid ready-made solutions, which would prevent a new and creative relationship from emerging. The main criterion for decision-making is the sustainability of the situation. While based on his or her particular perspective every performer works collaboratively towards an end that is agreed upon by all.

The following cube model is a different way to represent this suspension of time. Each face of the cube represents a possibility, just as the numbers in the circle model before. As the performer chooses a possibility (number four in this case), a new future is created which, simultaneously, generates a new past. This graphic highlights another key premise in Fiadeiro's work: the choice of a different direction retroactively re-writes the past.

The following model describes how this spiral dynamic is generated in a shared and collaborative composition in real time. The dot represents the exact moment a first performer takes an action and thus establishes a "first position". This first position generates a series of possibilities of becoming as indicated by the dotted circles. Only if a second performer chooses one of these possibilities, a second position is established, which creates a first relation with the previous action. This first relation activates the first

action retroactively, and simultaneously activates the emergence of new possibilities and tendencies in the collective composition, as illustrated by the dotted circles. The next performer, here represented by the second blue arrow, then chooses one of the possibilities inherent in the first relation. In doing so, he or she establishes a third position and second relation, which confirms the previous relation and thus clarifies the direction the composition is taking, as shown by the red arrows. This action will inaugurate a spiral figure, a central concept for the understanding of the *modus operandi* of this proposition. The spiral moves in both directions concurrently.

This conical figure demonstrates how time in Fiadeiro's view expands simultaneously in the two directions of past and future. Looking at it from the inside, we see a spiral movement or dynamic. More precisely, the spiral dynamic has its origin in the periphery and expands from there to the full size of the territory explored in the improvisation.

So far we have visualized this spiral movement as continuously growing. But if we take the complexity of an improvisation into consideration, we find that there are always different forces in relation to each other, which put the sustainability of the system constantly at risk.

Sustainability is the consequence of the meta-stability of the system. This is reached when a group of improvisers is able to avoid situations of too much convergence, which leads the action to a dead end, or too much divergence, which causes the system to disperse. Meta-stability is the improviser's ability to adapt to what the situation needs based on the principle of repetition with difference.

In conclusion, the spiral dynamic describes the nature of the processes happening inside Fiadeiro's circular perception of time.

[26:16]

[Jürgens:]

As we have seen, infographic films are significantly different from conventional video documentaries. In fact techniques such as motion graphics, 3D modeling and camera animation represent a step towards what we could call “embodied film making”. Through the use of these techniques the viewer immerses kinesthetically and empathetically as if she or he was participating in a workshop at the Atelier Real. Engaging in this way with Fiadeiro’s highly conceptual and philosophical artistic method allows for a more embodied experience of the cognitive dimension of his art. Additionally, infographic films can visualize complex dramaturgical ideas and structures clearly, which audiences in live performance situations habitually experience more intuitively, or even subconsciously.

performance mode

conference mode

8 of 13 scenes in I am here

shadow/dress

spot

neon

dance in the dark

dark 1

dark 2

dark 3

(dark 4)

(dark 5)

discovery of image

discover image

cut

disappear into pigment

fold

(carry)

(unfold)

(disappear)

[Jürgens:]

We invite you to explore our infographic films on Fiadeiro's solo work on our BlackBox website.

Recording, editing and post-production
of the final version of this video article
André Silva Santos

Infographic films

Research and argument

Stephan Jürgens

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Stephan Jürgens & Francisco Henriques

Produced by

Carla Fernandes

Motion Graphics and Sound Design

João Pedro / blackframe

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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