Performative Aesthetic Action and Theatrical Narrative in Digital Environments: Insights from the 20th Annual Lisbon Academic Theatre Festival and the Production of a Digital Media Art Artefact

A Ação Estética Performativa e Narrativa Teatral em Ambiente Digital: Reflexões em Torno da 20.ª Edição do Festival Anual de Teatro Académico de Lisboa e da Produção de um Artefacto de *Media Art* Digital

Ruben Ferreira

Performative Aesthetic Action and Theatrical Narrative in Digital Environments: Insights from the 20th Annual Lisbon Academic Theatre Festival and the Production of a Digital Media Art Artefact

Ruben Ferreira

https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7962-3126

Centro de Investigação em Artes e Comunicação, Faculdade de Ciências Humanas e Sociais, Universidade do Algarve, Faro, Portugal

This article examines aesthetic and performative action within a digital context, focusing on the impact of digital devices on theatrical performative narrative, in the context of creation and in the context of exhibition. The study highlights the productions from the 20th edition of the Annual Lisbon Academic Theatre Festival, which were presented online during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the development of a video-performance specifically created for a digital media art artefact. The aim of this performance is to understand the aesthetic phenomena resulting from the transition from physical performance to digital space. Methodologically, the article provides a brief historical contextualisation of video as a recording medium and aesthetic element in theatre performances. It also situates the three artistic languages explored in this study — video, film, and performance — alongside their interconnections within the festival's productions. In addition to examining the sensory signs that emerge from the intersection of performance, video, and the visual arts within the framework

of the artefact's video-performance, this study analyses both that performance and those from the festival using Pedro Veiga's (2022) grid, which categorises the intersection of agents and vectors in cyber-performance, reappropriated and expanded for this investigation.

Keywords: video, cinema, video-performance, cyber-performance, digital media art artefact

A Ação Estética Performativa e Narrativa Teatral em Ambiente Digital: Reflexões em Torno da 20.ª Edição do Festival Anual de Teatro Académico de Lisboa e da Produção de um Artefacto de Media Art Digital

Este artigo explora a ação estética e performativa em contexto digital e foca na análise da influência dos dispositivos digitais na narrativa performativa teatral, tanto em contexto de criação como em contexto de exibição. O estudo abarca as produções da 20.ª edição do Festival Anual de Teatro Académico de Lisboa, apresentadas online durante a pandemia da COVID-19, e a produção de uma vídeo-performance criada especificamente para um artefacto de media art digital, visando compreender os fenómenos estéticos da transição da performance física para o espaço digital. Metodologicamente, este artigo traça uma breve contextualização histórica do recurso ao vídeo como registo e elemento estético de performances teatrais e contextualiza as três linguagens artísticas convocadas para este estudo — vídeo, cinema e performance —, bem como as suas influências nas produções do festival. Para além da observação dos signos sensoriais que emergem da experimentação do cruzamento entre a performance, o vídeo e as artes plásticas, no quadro da vídeo-performance do artefacto, este estudo analisa essa mesma performance, bem como as performances do festival, a partir da grelha do cruzamento dos agentes e dos vetores da ciberperformance, de Pedro Veiga (2022), reapropriada e expandida a esta investigação.

Palavras-chave: vídeo, cinema, vídeo-performance, ciberperformance, artefacto de media art digital

Introduction

This study highlights aesthetic and performative action within a digital environment. It examines the technological influences — on the creation, exhibition, and audience interaction — of the theatre productions presented at the 20th edition of the Annual Lisbon Academic Theatre Festival (FATAL), which took place online in 2021.

While the transition from in-person performance spaces to digital environments is not a recent phenomenon, it has been significantly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift has introduced a range of changes and constraints for the university theatre groups that regularly participate in FATAL. These challenges emerged during the creation process, particularly during rehearsals conducted via

videoconference, and extended to audience interaction and the groups' traditional collective relationships.

The absence of the traditional theatre and festival atmosphere prompted amateur artists to explore alternative languages in their projects, ranging from video art to cinema. In this context, two primary questions arise:

- To what extent might the streaming and live streaming of FATAL's theatre productions have incorporated cinematic language?
- How have the technological devices employed in creation and exhibition influenced the aesthetics and narratives of the performances?

These questions, which guide this study, unfold in relation to the technical and artistic nature of the festival's 12 theatre productions.

The history of video in the performing arts, from its initial use as a recording tool to its incorporation as an integral element in performances, illustrates a trajectory of continuous innovation and adaptability. In this context, Célia Vieira and Rosimaria Sapucaia (2022) argue that the transition from physical to digital performance is rooted in the traditional histories of theatre and dance. They add that this evolution reflects the ongoing adaptation of technologies to enhance the aesthetic effects and meanings of performances.

With the onset of the pandemic in Portugal in 2020, the need for social distancing and mandatory confinement, as noted by Mariana Letras (2023), has led to an unprecedented acceleration in the adoption of technologies by artists and institutions, who have turned to digital formats as new spaces for creation and interaction. This context prompted the current study, which analyses the recordings of the shows from the 20th edition of FATAL using the grid for intersecting vectors and agents of cyber-performance developed by Pedro Veiga (2022), which we adjusted and expanded in this article. Additionally, we include an analysis of a digital media art artefact whose genesis is linked to video-performance. In our expanded grid for examining the vectors and agents of cyber-performance, video-performance, and the digital media art artefact, we documented the technological and communicative patterns observed in the performances.

Introducing Video Into Performing Arts Practice

The integration of video into the performing arts represents a significant expansion of expressive, participatory, and narrative capacities. It has offered artists across various disciplines a dynamic medium for exploring new dimensions of time, space, and interactivity, thereby profoundly transforming the performance experience.

The origins of video as an artistic tool can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s when artist Nam June Paik began incorporating audiovisual media into his work. According to Fernando Flores Moletta (2022), Paik is regarded by

many historians as the founder of video art. His notable works include *TV Cello* (1971), created in collaboration with cellist Charlotte Moorman, in which stacked television sets formed a cello that Moorman played using a traditional bow; *Global Groove* (1973), a seminal video that blends images of cultural dances, performances, and commercial videos synchronised with sound, reflecting on the future of global communication and the impact of television media; *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* (1984), a live satellite event that connected artists from around the world and anticipated streaming processes; and one of Paik's most ambitious works, *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii* (1995), a map of the United States created from hundreds of television sets, filled with vibrant images representing the culture of each state, highlighting media saturation. As Moletta (2022) points out, it is evident that by using television sets, Paik aimed to transform the passive relationship between the viewer and the medium.

It is also important to highlight Jeffrey Shaw in this study. Influenced by movements such as Fluxus and Viennese actionism, Shaw has been a key figure in exploring the intersection of video and performance in large media since the 1960s. With a focus on interactivity, the artist has incorporated video and new technologies to revolutionise the spectator's experience. His intention to explore new media, supports, and spaces is exemplified in *Smokescreen* (1969), a work that concealed the façade of Swansea University behind a smoke screen. Additionally, as Carolina Fernández Castrillo (2012) notes, *Corpocinema and MovieMovie*, created in Holland in 1967, were crucial in introducing the concept of expanding the visual environment. These projects fused diverse elements and generated a dynamic interplay of images and sounds within a complex multi-screen environment.

Castrillo (2012) notes that Shaw was inspired by the Wagnerian concept of the "total work of art", seeking new methods of media interaction to approach the ideal of totality. She describes his projects as expanded cinema environments, including *Continuous Sound and Image Moments*, created between 1966 and 1971. This intermedia performance explored the use of mobile screens to generate effects of depth and movement. In addition to the screens, other material elements were introduced, such as inflatables and pyrotechnics, which enhanced the interactivity of visitors as they navigated between the images, which were also projected onto their bodies.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the intersection of performance and video became increasingly prominent, serving both as documentation of processes and as a hybrid artistic practice. Artists such as Bruce Nauman began to explore the combination of live actions with video recordings. Nauman gained recognition for his experimental approach, blending various artistic languages, including performance, video, sculpture, and installation. He often transformed the documentation of the creative process into an artistic work itself:

> often, his performances were private affairs — exercises conducted in his studios, recorded but not necessarily presented to an audience.

> Rather than producing marketable objects such as paintings or sculptures, the physical process of creating art became a work in itself. In this context, the camera served as the Other or the public. (Gomes, 2012, p. 9)

Thus, through the intersection of performance and video, Nauman contributed to pushing the boundaries of contemporary art and challenging traditional norms of stage representation.

In the 1970s, performer Dan Graham actively investigated audience behaviour during his performances. According to RoseLee Goldberg (1988/2012), the artist aimed to merge the roles of active performer and passive spectator within a single individual, employing mirrors and video equipment. The performers could observe themselves while executing actions, thus becoming spectators of their own activities. In T*wo Consciousness Projection(s)* (1973), Graham heightened this awareness by having two individuals verbally express how they perceived themselves in front of the audience. A woman examined her own face in a video while a man looked through the camera. In this dynamic, both individuals served as active parts, contributing to the performance while simultaneously acting as passive spectators, watching each other. Later, the artist further developed this technique by incorporating elements of time and space to create effects that encompassed the past, present, and future. In *Present Continuous Past* (1974), the mirror reflected the present moment, while the video displayed past actions, generating a sense of continuous temporal flow. Consequently, when viewers entered the mirrored space, they initially saw themselves in the present, but after a brief period, they could observe their past actions portrayed in the video.

In the 1980s, the Italian group Falso Movimento began creating small installations that explored cinema within the aesthetic framework of the 1970s, characterised by experimentation and authorial expression while addressing controversial subjects from a realistic perspective. Goldberg (1988/2012) notes that the group made a sudden shift in its aesthetic direction, opting to use video representations of metropolitan landscapes on large sets. A notable example is *Tango Glaciale* (1982), in which the group transformed the stage into a kind of cinema screen, employing various sets within a single theatre space to evoke a house, a swimming pool, and gardens through projections.

By the end of the 20th century, with the ongoing advancement of technology, new types of performance began to emerge. In the early 1990s, as Rocha et al. (2023) note, the first performance experiences in virtual environments appeared through chats and MUDs[1], initially in text format and later incorporating graphic elements. Within this context, one of the first documented performances was *Hamnet* (1993), an 80-line adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, presented in a chat format by the Hamnet Players group. Subsequently, these variations in performance began to expand into virtual worlds such as Second Life and

---

[1]Multi-user dungeons, dimensions, or domains are text-based virtual worlds where users can create characters and interact within a shared space using only written language.

Upstage, collectively referred to as "cyberformance". This term, coined by Helen Jamieson (2008), combines "cybernetics", "cyberspace", and "live performance". Jamieson adopted this designation to circumvent the dichotomy between the concepts of "virtual" and "real", opting to avoid terms like "online performance" or "virtual theatre" for this new category.

Within this framework, José Bidarra et al. (2023) suggest that technology plays a dual role simultaneously, acting as both an intermediary and an active participant in the creative process. In these types of performances, performers may share the same physical space while others participate remotely. Certain segments can be pre-recorded and edited, and the audience can interact from a distance, thereby enriching the artistic experience, as noted by Pedro Veiga (2022).

During the lockdowns of 2020, performative acts within everyday contexts became intertwined with video and cinema through videoconferencing interfaces, leading to projects like *Host*, directed by Rob Savage. Faced with the constraints of the pandemic, this film demanded a unique approach from the entire technical and artistic team, particularly the actors. Luciano Marafon and Denize Araujo (2021) highlight that *Host* adhered to the principles outlined in Bekmambetov's manifesto, which set specific rules for place, time, and sound for creating films in virtual environments. In terms of place, the setting is generally within virtual reality, where each computer screen belongs to a character, and the action never shifts beyond that space. Regarding time, the action unfolds in real-time, creating an uninterrupted flow with real-time editing and no visible transitions. All sounds originate from the computer environment, enabling the viewer to discern the specific space or screen from which the sound emanates.

In *Host*, each element was meticulously planned, with the visual effects drawing inspiration from traditional film effects techniques, such as the sound of a chair being dragged or a door closing. Each actor and actress acquired the necessary skills to apply Zoom interface effects during the recording process independently and learned how to interact convincingly with the computer camera (Marafon & Araujo, 2021).

The integration of video into the performing arts, from its initial experimentation to complex contemporary hybrid practices, illustrates a remarkable trajectory of innovation and expansion in the expressive and communicative possibilities of both disciplines. Furthermore, cinema has had a notable impact on the performing arts, particularly theatre, with figures like Jeffrey Shaw playing a pivotal role in formulating the concept of "expanded cinema". The artist has focused on exploring how digital technologies can shape new ways of storytelling and experiencing art (Castrillo, 2012). His immersive works prompt us to question and reformulate conventional artistic practices, establishing him as a key figure in the evolution of the intersection between art and technology. Similarly, Nam June Paik played a crucial role in cementing video sculpture within art history, as Moletta (2022) points out. Bruce Nauman, who moved beyond using video solely as a recording medium to blending it with multiple

artistic languages, has become a landmark figure in the history of performance art (Goldberg, 1988/2012).

Empirical and Methodological Framework: Performance, Film and Video

In his first performance, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), Allan Kaprow introduced the term "performance art" in his book *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (1965; Toro, 2010). His definition of "performance" established a foundation for a new field of study that has since expanded into various disciplines, including theatre. While the concepts of "performance" and "theatricality" are interrelated within the performing arts, Fernanda de Toro (2010) argues that performance specifically refers to the act of performing in front of an audience, emphasising the actions conducted by the artist. This term is broad and encompasses various forms of presentation, ranging from theatrical performances to dance, poetry readings, and even performances in public spaces that extend beyond the conventional stage. In contrast, theatricality refers to a set of elements that contribute to the construction of a distinct dramatic universe, such as the use of scenery, costumes, and lighting, which enhance the audience's understanding of the narrative.

Theatricality is closely associated with creating an immersive and often illusory experience underpinned by the visual and auditory elements characteristic of theatre. In contrast, performativity, while connected to performance and theatre, extends beyond the traditional boundaries of these art forms. According to Cláudia Madeira (2020), performativity permeates all facets of life, impacting everyday behaviour, professional practices, the internet, the arts, and language. The terms "performative" and "performativity" encompass a range of meanings, reflecting the diversity and complexity with which actions and discourses are shaped by social reality. Thus, the concept of "performativity" compels us to recognise actions that contribute to constructing that very reality. In this sense, these concepts coexist within the performative space, whether physical or virtual, where theatricality enhances the performance, providing it with depth, context, and meaning through performativity.

At the crossroads of performance, video, and cinema, the three concepts discussed hold particular significance. Video's capacity to capture and manipulate time and space opens up new possibilities, enabling artists to investigate non-linear narratives and immersive experiences. Consequently, both video and cinema — especially within the realm of expanded cinema — integrate into performances, creating a dimension that intricately blends reality and fiction.

According to Radael Júnior (2015), video, which initially served as a bridge between 20th-century cinema and the digital imagery of computers, began to lose its distinct identity by adopting characteristics from both cinema and computing. To counter this trend, it gradually developed its own language and established

a unique realm known as "video art". In the context of video-performance, Wayner Tristão Gonçalves (2018) has conducted an in-depth analysis of the concept, proposing a fresh perspective on the relationship between performance and video art, as well as the notions of time and space. By integrating video into performance, artists can manipulate time and space in ways that are unattainable in straightforward live performances, thereby introducing a new dimension to the performance art experience, where temporality and spatiality become fluid.

Video and film are media that are closely aligned with reality and have developed into artistic languages capable of constructing worlds and narratives that would not be achievable through the work of performers and actors alone. However, the primary distinction between the two lies in their approaches to representing reality. Júnior (2015) notes that cinema focuses on capturing or reproducing reality in a clear and straightforward manner, while video presents reality through layers of distortion and fantasy, where interference plays a significant role in shaping the work's aesthetics. In the shift from live performance to video-performance or cyber-performance, these layers of distortion facilitated by digital technologies provide new avenues for expression and interaction, transforming how performances are created, experienced, and perceived. With video tools, artists can explore new dimensions of theatricality and performativity, with video evolving from merely a recording to an integral component of the performance. In this manner, video-performance and cyber-performance intertwine theatricality and performativity, creating a place where time, space, and the performer converge.

Throughout the mandatory lockdowns of the pandemic, the performing arts adapted, with artists turning to digital media as a substitute stage for artistic creation and performance (Letras, 2023). This shift sparked a new wave of experimentation within the performing arts, encompassing streaming and live streaming, as well as digital and interactive experiences on platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams (Veiga, 2022).

As we have observed, video has evolved far beyond being merely a record of performances; it has become an integral component of the artwork itself, imbued with its own distinct meanings:

> the video-performance functions as a means of recording a unique event situated in time, serving both as an archive or document and as a standalone work. It employs the language of cinema and video to assemble elements from prior performances. (Gonçalves, 2018, p. 82)

Conversely, video in cyber-performance embodies a digital era that delves into interactivity, virtuality, and connectivity, broadening the expressive and perceptual possibilities of performance and other technologies. It challenges the distinctions between reality and virtuality, presence and representation (Veiga, 2022). Videoconferencing — a technology enabling real-time communication between individuals in different locations — has become particularly significant for

the evolution of cyber-performance, simulating face-to-face interaction through cameras and audio systems on electronic devices. In addition to the traditional videoconferencing platforms previously mentioned, artists utilised various virtual environments during the lockdowns, such as YouTube, Second Life, Facebook Live, and UpStage. Platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram were also extensively employed to stream artists' video-performances.

Veiga (2022) argues that cyber-performance is defined by its capacity to forge hybrid spaces that connect the physical and virtual realms, thereby challenging the boundaries of materiality that shape both the narratives of the works and their aesthetics. The author points out that cyber-performance encompasses a hybrid timeline within its structure, which includes the time of the story, the definition of the temporal structure of the fictional universe, the duration of narrative events, the indication of the programme schedule, and the determination of the interaction time with the audience. This interplay of times and spaces enables diverse scenarios, such as performers sharing a physical space with an audience participating remotely or works that incorporate pre-recorded and edited segments to create an immersive experience. To analyse these elements, Veiga (2022) developed a grid of intersecting vectors and agents inherent to cyber-performance (Table 1), highlighting the interfaces, spatial and temporal structures, and the roles of each agent involved.

Agents Vectors	Cyber-performance	Performers	Technology	Audience
Spatial structure	Local space/remote space/physical space/virtual space/hybrid space/…	Local space/remote space/physical space/virtual space/hybrid space/…	Local space/remote space/physical space/virtual space/hybrid space/…	Remote space/physical space/virtual space/hybrid space/…
Temporal structure	Synchronous	Synchronous/ asynchronous/hybrid	Synchronous	Synchronous/story time/plot time/programme time/interaction time/perceived time/…
Functions	Communicate/display/ engage/participate/ interact/create/ disseminate/monetise/ hybrid/…	Performance/scenography /dramaturgy/ choreography/technical support/technology operation/hybrid/…	Communicate/display/ engage/participate/ interact/create/ disseminate/monetise/ hybrid/…	Watch/participate/ appear/interact/hybrid/…
Interfaces	Videoconferencing/social networks/chat/voting/ hybrid/…	Cameras/microphones/ sensors/computers/ videoconferencing/social networks/chat/voting/ hybrid/…	Cameras/microphones/ sensors/computers/ videoconferencing/social networks/chat/voting/ hybrid/…	Cameras/microphones/ sensors/computers/ videoconferencing/social networks/chat/voting/ hybrid/…

Table 1: *The intersection of vectors and agents*
Source. Veiga, 2022, p. 14

The Annual Lisbon Academic Theatre Festival During Pandemic Times

The University of Lisbon launched a university theatre festival in 1999, incorporating it into the city's cultural programme. University theatre is one of the most notable extracurricular activities for students in Portugal, owing to its socio-cultural and historical significance, as demonstrated by the impressive longevity of some theatre groups, some of which have been in existence for nearly 50 years.

In 2021, Portugal experienced a notable shift in its cultural landscape due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. FATAL, which traditionally facilitated live encounters and interactions, was compelled to reinvent itself, leading to the first and only online edition of the festival to date (https://fatal. ulisboa.pt/2021/).

The festival screened the following shows via its Facebook page:

1. *Quebra* (Breakaway), by Tubo de Ensaios — Theatre Group of the Academic Association of the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Lisbon, depicted the intimate dynamics within a family. Presented in a cinematographic language with asynchronous presentation, it featured a variable narrative time, characterised by various scene cuts and static camera angles determined by the videographer. The video featured various physical spaces and was directed by Gabriel Branco, Beatriz Nogueira, and Catarina Silva, with editing by Beatriz Nogueira. The cast included Mafalda Potier, Catarina Silva, Albino Almeida, Pedro Matos, Beatriz Nogueira, and Fátima Gomes.

2. *No Common Language*, by University Theatre of Porto, was presented as a recorded performance on a theatre stage, bringing the narrative into the present with an asynchronous presentation. The production's relevance is evident, aligning with the contemporary theatrical scene. However, the viewer's attention was largely drawn to the camera movements, and the scene transitions with image overlays were quite prominent. The group showcased a performance that resulted from a research process into scenic languages, employing image projection as an exercise in blending these languages. The production was directed by Susana Oliveira and featured performances by Margarida Silvestre, Patricia Xará, and Susana Henriques, with set design and video created by Helena Guerreiro.

3. *Cântico Negro* (Black Chant), by the Theatre Group of the University of Beira Interior, was presented as a live performance recorded on a stage filled with technical equipment and broadcast asynchronously. Similar to *No Common Language*, the narrative's timeline brings us back to the present, where nothing transpires and nothing changes. This performance, which included dance segments, was filmed in a single take, with only a few close-ups, capturing the entire bodies of the actors/performers. With no

cuts in the video and the recording done from the centre of the audience, the camera's perspective mirrors that of a spectator at a live event. The production was directed by Rui Pires and co-created and performed by Edmilson Gomes, Helena Ribeiro, Mário Fonseca, Nina Schneider, and Sara Cruz.

4. *Viver a Máscara – O Corpo, o Jogo, a Festa* (Living the Mask – The Body, the Game, the Celebration), by the Ethnography and Folklore Group of the Coimbra Academy, was a collective creation that explored the construction of humanity through the lens of the popular mask. Recorded in a black box setting with the same shot, it provided the audience with the sensation of being a viewer rather than the camera, allowing for the freedom to look away. Like the other productions, the recorded narrative returned to the present, and this performance also incorporated image projection during the scenes.

5. *Pelo Menos Hoje* (At Least Today), by the Students' Theatre of the University of Coimbra, was a recorded performance that captured the immediate reality of the state of emergency as it was established. The recording begins with the audience entering the theatre, all wearing protective masks, while images are projected onto three screens on the stage. Filmed with a static camera and without zooms or close-ups, this setup allowed viewers to direct their gaze freely. A clear dialogue emerged between the actors on stage and the projections on the screens, adding a sense of depth between the viewer's computer screen, the theatre space, the onstage action and the three screens in the background. Directed by Liliana Caetano, the performance featured actors Ane Gabilondo, Anna Roha, Carolina Quaresma, Fernanda Andrade, Gabriela Guedes, Inês Bertelo, Larissa Alves, Lia Vieira, Lucas Brito, Mailson Santana, Maria João Ribeiro, Naomi Machado, Susana Nóbrega, Vero Chiriboga, and Wilson Domingues. Pedro Ramos designed and edited the video.

6. *9 Personagens à Janela* (9 Characters at the Window), by the University of Lisbon Staff Theatre Group, was presented as a film composed of intertwining monologues from isolated characters navigating life during the pandemic. The film featured diverse shots, extensive camera movements, and various physical settings, each reflecting the unique spaces of the individual characters. Directed by Dora Bernardo, the production featured original texts by Alexandra Oliveira, Dora Bernardo, Filipa Cardoso, and Margarida Liberato, along with poems by Alexandra Oliveira, Fernando Alves, and Fernando Pessoa. Uniquely, the actors made all recordings themselves in their own homes. The cast included Alda Guimarães, Alexandra Oliveira, Armando Almeida, Conceição Freitas, Cristina Oliveira, Fernando Alves, Filipa Cardoso, Hugo Louro, and Margarida Liberato

7. The performance *Só* (Alone) by the University Institute of Lisbon Theatre Group could not be analysed in the context of this research as the video is no longer available in the FATAL archive. However, information from the

festival's website indicates that the show was presented via live streaming and involved sharing a creative process. It was directed by Ana Isabel Augusto and performed by Margarida Pereira, Marta Laranjeira, Miguel Costa, Mónica Parreira, and Olinda Bento.

8. *Aquele que Diz Sim. Aquele que Diz Não.* (The One Who Says Yes. The One Who Says No.), by the Theatre Course of the School of Arts at the University of Évora was an adaptation of a 1930 text by Brecht that reflected on the pandemic situation in 2021. The actors were depicted moving through a spacious area, wearing protective masks and dressed in black, with their faces painted white and no stage props. The camera remained static, featuring zooms and superimpositions during video transitions. The piece was staged by Paulo Alves Pereira, with Daniel Silvério, Daniel Ribeiro, Catarina Silva, Madalena Oliveira, Manuel Prazeres, and Sara Paiva adapting the scenic space. The video was recorded and edited by Luís Marino.

9. As with *Só*, it was not possible to analyse the show *Dia de Ação de Graças* (Thanksgiving Day) by the New Theatre Group of the Students' Association of the Faculty of Science and Technology of NOVA University Lisbon. However, once again, it was a live-streaming performance. Sandra Hung served as the artistic director and was joined by Bárbara Novado, Beatriz Nunes, Cármen Duarte, Carolina Dias, Gonçalo Barradas, Gonçalo Durães, Joana Lameira, Matilde Abreu, Pedro Machado, Pedro Tavares, and Roberto Bullitta.

10. *Rockaby*, presented by the Nova Theatre Group, was a video composed of monologues reflecting the theme of isolation during the pandemic. Filmed outside the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at NOVA University Lisbon, it employed various camera movements and shots, adhering to a cinematic approach. The live-streaming cyber-performance was directed by Marina Albuquerque and featured performances by Beatriz Afonso, Catarina Palma, Jessica Pires, Júlio Barros, and Mariana Antunes.

11. *4 Ionescos*, presented by the Academic Theatre of the University of Lisbon, featured excerpts from various works by Eugène Ionesco. The group developed a cyber-performance that addressed the challenges posed by the pandemic, utilising the Zoom platform. This live-streamed project draws parallels with the film *Host*, as it captures the sounds of computer mice clicks and actors adjusting their cameras, yet maintains an intriguing sense that we are witnessing a previously live scene. The actors' direct engagement with the camera and the opportunity for audience interaction contribute to the broader context of cyber-performance. The project was directed by Júlio Martín da Fonseca and performed by Sara Félix, Luís Miranda, Rosa Couto, João Nabais, Joana Santos, and Mário Brito.

12. *Vanitas*, created by the Theatre Initiation Group of the Coimbra Academy, was a video-performance recorded in various physical spaces featuring

multiple shots, sound effects, and continuous narration. This performance, which heavily utilised bodily expression and visual arts, was specifically designed for screen viewing, where the video interacted with the performers' bodies and their relationships with objects. It depicted vanity as a cardinal sin and included performers Ana Luiza Filomeno, Bernardo Agostinho, Camila Costa, Edicleison Freitas, Elara Miller, Guilherme Veras Santos, Jorgette Dumby, Letícia Galdino, Lorena Sallit, Luiz de Sá, Maria Rui Cunha, Ruan Demarco, Sabrina Carilo, and Simão Almeida, with Elara Miller and Sabrina Carilo responsible for recording and editing the video.

Our examination of the videos from the FATAL projects, the majority of which remain accessible in the festival's archive, leads us to conclude that while some of these videos were initially intended for documentation, they have subsequently evolved into artistic works within the festival context. This transformation will be further explored in our categorisation, which is informed by Pedro Veiga's grid (see Table 1).

Video-Performance in a Digital Media Art Artefact: *Dão Água aos Mortos que Já Não Têm Sede*

I began to develop various performance projects incorporating video during the COVID-19 pandemic as a natural response to the confinement period and the growing demands of an increasingly digitalised and interconnected society. As a theatre artist, this paradigmatic shift has transformed my approach to the creative process, allowing me to explore the integration of performance and video, which has enriched my artistic works.

Video, which I previously used solely for documenting or extending the lifespan of ephemeral performances, has evolved, during and after the pandemic, into a crucial component in the creation of complex and multidimensional artistic experiences. *Dão Água aos Mortos que Já Não Têm Sede* (They Give Water to the Dead Who No Longer Thirst; Figure 1) exemplifies this shift; it transcends the label of a mere video performance and can even be likened to Nam June Paik's video sculptures. The establishment of this video performance as a digital media art artefact reflects the capacity of the performing arts to adapt and innovate in tandem with technology.
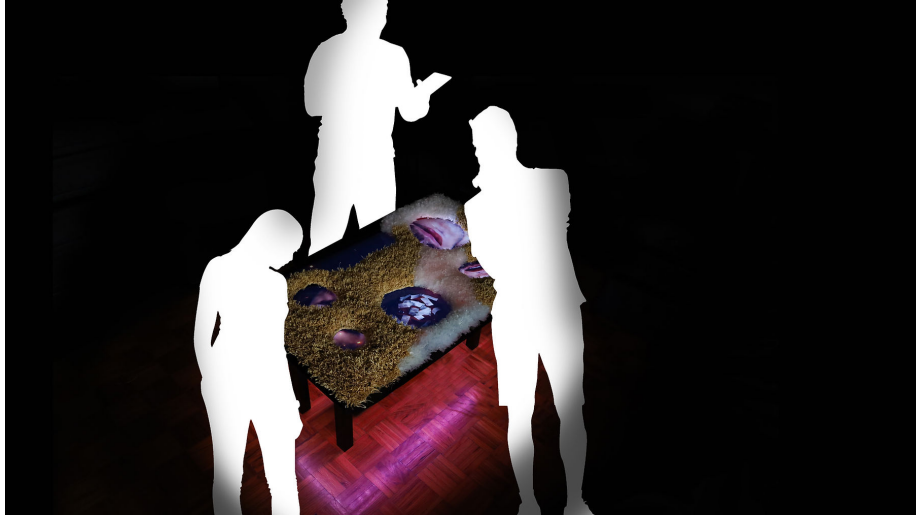
Figure 1: *Digital media art artefact* — Dão Água aos Mortos que Já Não Têm Sede
Credits. Ruben Ferreira

The artefact was produced using the a/r/cographic method, which involves a process of creation and research in digital art that enables artists and researchers to progress simultaneously in multiple directions (stages). This approach facilitates new developments of the artistic artefact and enhances other projects within the same research line (Veiga, 2021). The work was publicly presented in Lisbon from July 17 to 19, 2024, at the "Circuitos: Exhibition of Digital Media Art" to serve as a reflection of human interaction with the environment and address the climate emergency. It provided a profound experience that merged art and activism (artivism), prompting viewers to confront environmental realities through a sensory experience that integrated performance with video. In addition to the digital aspects, the performance engaged with the natural and manufactured physical elements of the sculpture, creating an atmosphere that piqued the spectators' curiosity.

The performer played a pivotal role in conveying the message and emotion of the work. Acting as a communicative bridge between artefact and audience, he utilised his body to raise questions about society and its impact on the environment. His body became a vehicle for emotional expression, projecting feelings and reactions through gestures, facial expressions, movements, sounds.

Luciano Vinhosa (2020) asserts that the performer's body is inherently an image capable of producing further images, whether through photography or videography. In the artefact (Figure 2), the human body transformed into a living canvas, upon which the narrative was illustrated, representing both humanity as a whole and specific elements of nature.
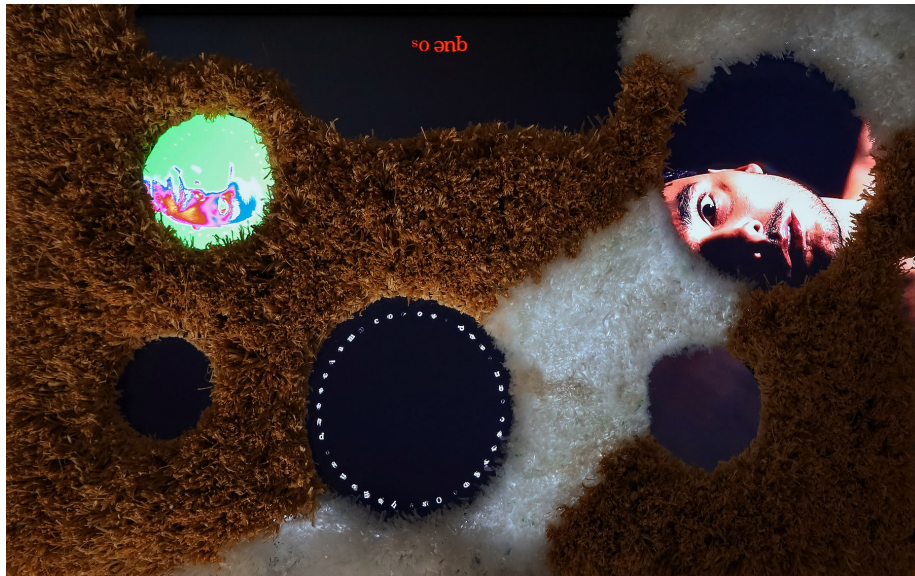
Figure 2: *Sensory experience of the video performance*
Credits. Ruben Ferreira

Dão Água aos Mortos que Já Não Têm Sede transcended mere visual display, evolving into a multidimensional sensory experience. The integration of sensory elements — sight, sound, touch, and even smell — was designed to forge a deep and personal connection with the viewer, aiming to evoke an urgent response to the pressing challenges of climate change.

- Visual experience: the seven screens were strategically arranged to illustrate the transformations of the natural environment, transitioning from vibrant states to desolate scenes in consonance with the performer's body. This visual progression not only reflected the degradation caused by human impact on the environment but also immersed viewers in a reality that many choose to overlook.

- Auditory experience: the video-performance's sound layer was crafted to evoke both nature and humanity, featuring sounds such as winds whistling through imagined landscapes and sighs and groans lamenting unrecoverable loss. These auditory elements wove their own narratives, heightening the emotional intensity of the experience and enveloping the audience in a tapestry of beauty and unease.

- Tactile experience: touch was probably the most innovative sense explored in this artefact. Viewers had the opportunity to engage with the work physically, interacting with various textures, from the roughness of straw to the deceptive softness of plastic. Each texture symbolised different facets of our environment and the human actions that impact it. This interaction

15

transformed the spectators' experience from mere observation to active participation.

- Olfactory experience: the work held significant potential to engage the spectators' sense of smell. The substantial use of straw highlighted its organic aroma, serving as an invisible yet omnipresent element that amplified the sense of urgency and environmental deterioration.

In light of the above, we can relate *Dão Água aos Mortos que Já Não Têm Sede* to the aesthetics of Jeffrey Shaw's *Continuous Sound and Image Moments*, albeit on a smaller scale. The seven screens created effects of depth and movement, while the incorporation of sensory elements enhanced the interactivity between the audience and the artefact. As the video-performance did not adhere to a linear narrative, it allowed spectators to construct their own visual journeys, similar to the video-performance *Vanitas*, the only one of its kind in the 20th edition of FATAL.

Analysing the Vectors of the FATAL Shows and the Digital Media Art Artefact

In this study, we have observed that digital technologies have significantly transformed the performing arts landscape. Video-performance and cyber-performance have introduced numerous interactive and media-driven forms, blurring the conventional boundaries between artist, artwork, and audience.

The grid of intersecting vectors and agents in cyber-performance (see Table 1) provided a valuable analytical framework for the case studies in this research. For this study, we expanded and adapted this grid (Table 2) to include key elements within its vectors — space, time, functionality, and interfaces — which are crucial for understanding how performances unfold in digital contexts. Additionally, we redefined the agents as variations of performance, adding two new types: the "video-performance" and the "digital media art artefact", which incorporates video performance at its core. To enhance readability and analytical clarity, the expanded grid now classifies "agents" as everything defined by the artistic teams — the show itself, including text, staging, scenography, and technical aspects. As these elements lie outside the main focus of this research, we leave their detailed analysis to studies on audience reception. On the other hand, the vectors are now organised in columns and encompass all elements related to the technologies, including the narrative that accompanies these vectors, allowing us to discern what shapes the visual narrative. This re-appropriation aligns with Veiga's (2022) observation that "the table is not intended to list the various intersections and their possibilities exhaustively, but merely to highlight potential directions" (p. 13). Therefore, based on the viewing of the theatrical and performance projects from the 20th edition of FATAL, along with the outcomes of the digital media art artefact, the following table has been generated.

Vectors Agents	Spatial structure	Temporal structure	Functions	Interfaces	Narrative

Vectors Agents	Spatial structure	Temporal structure	Functions	Interfaces	Narrative
Not analysed due to the inaccessibility of the videos					
Só (May 14, 2021, at 8 pm)	Not determined/Facebook digital space	45 minutes	Not determined	Facebook/not determined/viewing devices	Not determined
Dia de Ação de Graças (May 15, 2021, at 7 pm)	Not determined/Facebook digital space	40 minutes	Not determined	Facebook/not determined/viewing devices	Not determined
Cyber-performance					
4 Ionescos (May 18, 2021, at 8 pm)	Each performer's physical space/Facebook digital space/virtual space for audience interaction via comments/hybrid space/remote space	Synchronous/75 minutes/live streaming	Communicate/ display/engage/ participate/interact/ create/disseminate/ monetise/hybrid	Zoom video conference/Facebook /viewing devices	Determined by the author/actors/ digital and virtual space/spectators
Video-performance					
Quebra (May 10, 2021, at 6 pm)	Various physical spaces (bedroom, kitchen, café, police station, car)/Facebook digital space	Asynchronous/27 minutes/live streaming	Communicate/ display/create/ disseminate/ monetise	Camera/ microphones/ Facebook/viewing devices	Determined by the actors and videographer (film language)
No Common Language (May 10, 2021, at 7 pm)	Physical (stage)/digital (projections on stage)/Facebook digital space	Asynchronous/60 minutes/streaming	Communicate/ display/disseminate/ document	Camera/microphones//Facebook/viewing devices	Determined by the actors
Cântico Negro (May 11, 2021, at 7 pm)	Physical (stage)/digital (projections on stage)/Facebook digital space	Asynchronous/45 minutes/streaming	Communicate/ display/create/ disseminate/ document	Camera/ microphones/ Facebook/viewing devices	Determined by the actors/final visual narrative determined by the videographer
Viver a Máscara (May 12, 2021, at 7 pm)	Physical (stage)/digital (projections on stage)/Facebook digital space	Asynchronous/23 minutes/streaming	Communicate/ display/create/ disseminate/ document	Cameras/ microphones/ projector/Facebook/ viewing devices	Determined by the actors/final visual narrative determined by the videographer in the final scene
Pelo Menos Hoje (May 13, 2021, at 7 pm)	Physical (stage)/digital (projections on stage)/Facebook digital space	Asynchronous/45 minutes/streaming	Communicate/ display/create/ disseminate/ document	Cameras/ microphones/ projectors/Facebook /viewing devices	Determined by the actors
9 Personagens à Janela (May 14, 2021, at 6 pm)	Various physical spaces (each actor's space)/remote space/Facebook digital space	Asynchronous/60 minutes/streaming	Communicate/ display/create/ disseminate/ monetise	Cameras/ microphones/ Facebook/viewing devices	Determined by the actors and videographer
Aquele que Diz Sim. Aquele que Diz Não. (May 15, 2021, at 6 pm)	Physical (large room)/Facebook digital space	Asynchronous/17 minutes/streaming	Communicate/ display/create/ disseminate/ monetise	Cameras/ microphones/ Facebook/viewing devices	Determined by the actors and videographer
Rockaby (May 17, 2021, at 8 pm)	Physical spaces (outside the Faculty of Science and Technology of NOVA University Lisbon) /Facebook digital space	Asynchronous/75 minutes/streaming	Communicate/ display/create/ disseminate/ monetise	Cameras/ microphones/ speakers/Facebook/ viewing devices	Determined by the actors and videographer
Vanitas (May 19, 2021, at 7 pm)	Various indoor and outdoor physical spaces/Facebook digital space	Asynchronous/20 minutes/streaming	Communicate/ display/create/ disseminate/ monetise	Cameras/ microphones/ Facebook/viewing devices	Determined by the actors and videographer
Digital media art artefact					
Dão Água aos Mortos que Já Não Têm Sede (July 17 to 19, 2024)	Physical/digital	Asynchronous/3 minutes/viewed live in person/viewing time variable according to the viewer	Communicate/ display/engage/ interact/create/ disseminate/ monetise/hybrid	Camera/ microphones/ television/ headphones	Determined by the author/performer/ digital and virtual space/spectators

Table 2: *Expanded grid for analysing the vectors and agents of cyber-performance, video-performance and the digital media art artefact*

Data on the recordings of *Só* and *Thanksgiving* could not be collected because these videos were no longer accessible in the festival archive. From the analysis, and grounded in the concepts of video, cinema, cyber-performance, and video-performance, only the *4 Ionescos* project emerges as notable for its creation of hybrid spaces. In this work, audience interaction and participation have the potential to influence the narrative, situating it firmly within the realm of cyber-performance.

After examining the expanded grid for analysing the vectors and agents of cyber-performance, video-performance, and the digital media art artefact (see Table 2) and considering the descriptions of the shows previously presented of this study, we conclude, in agreement with Gonçalves' (2018) view on video-performance, that this involves a dual issue — video as both documentation and as an independent artwork. In other words, *No Common Language, Cântico Negro*, *Viver a Máscara*, and *Pelo Menos Hoje* transcended the function of mere recordings of performances, becoming digital artistic works crafted for a specific audience within the context of the FATAL programme.

Drawing from the performance variations examined in this study, only *Vanitas* and *Dão Água aos Mortos que Já Não Têm Sede* align with the video-performance aesthetic. According to Júnior (2015), this aesthetic involves video working in tandem with abstract body performance, embedding a hidden reality within layers of distortion and fantasy, and transforming interference into key elements that shape the interaction with the performers' actions. In both video-performances, the video served as a fundamental component of the work's aesthetic and visual narrative.

In *Quebra*, *9 Personagens à Janela*, and *Rockaby*, the videographer's choices, including closed and open shots, camera movements, and post-production techniques, shape a significant portion of the visual narrative. This demonstrates an intention to capture reality in a clear and precise manner, aligning closely with cinematic language.

Final Considerations

Drawing from the vectors outlined in our expanded grid for analysing the vectors and agents of cyber-performance, video-performance, and the digital media art artefact (Table 2), it becomes evident that the digital device not only facilitates but also expands and redefines the practice of artistic performance. Among the most significant vectors in this analysis is space, which highlights a distinct difference between physical and digital spaces, with the latter offering opportunities for manipulation that go beyond traditional physical constraints.

Temporality is another essential vector. In cyber-performances and video-performances — particularly those that extend beyond mere documentary formats, such as some of the FATAL shows we examined earlier — time can be distorted or fragmented. The interaction time, as defined in the table above, un-

derscores specific instances where the audience has the opportunity to influence or alter the course of the cyber-performance.

In the digital age, the image space often becomes the performance space itself, given the myriad possibilities for editing and capturing images. This shift enables discussions around video, cinema, and performance, as well as hybrid processes that encompass experimentation, documentation, and artistic works intended for viewing in digital spaces.

This article underscores the pivotal role of performativity and theatricality in the evolution of contemporary artistic practices within the fields of video-performance and cyber-performance. The examination of the works showcased at FATAL, alongside the digital media art artefact *Dão Água aos Mortos que Já Não Têm Sede*, demonstrates how emerging digital technologies facilitate a reconfiguration of the boundaries between the real and the virtual, as well as between the performer, the artwork, and the audience.

This research not only provides a pertinent analysis of a distinctive edition of the largest academic theatre festival in the country — celebrating its 23rd edition in 2024 — but also offers a valuable contribution to the documentation and reflection on the evolution of university theatre in Portugal, in a context where only six editions of the *Revista FATAL*, published between 2008 and 2013, recorded information on previous editions. Moreover, it makes a noteworthy contribution to the field of performance and digital media art by illustrating that digital technologies and their interfaces serve not only as exhibition platforms but also as crucial elements in the creation of new aesthetic and narrative forms.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

Biographical Note

Ruben Ferreira is an artist-researcher with a focus on the intersections between digital media art and theatre. He completed the Technological Specialisation Course in Photography (2012) at the Escola Universitária das Artes de Coimbra and holds a degree in Artistic Studies, with a Minor in Arts and Heritage (2018) from Universidade Aberta. He earned a master's degree in Performing Arts (2021) from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at Nova University and is currently a PhD candidate in Digital Media Art at the University of Algarve, in collaboration with Universidade Aberta. Ferreira has worked with various theatre companies as an actor, set designer, and cultural communication specialist. He also works at the University of Lisbon's Cultural and Social Affairs Unit. Recently, he completed the Free Summer School Course in Theatre Genetics at the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences at the University of the Algarve and participated in the "I International Conference 'Creation Processes'" organised by the Research Center in Arts and Communication.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7962-3126

Email: rmff.ruben@gmail.com

Address: Campus da Penha, 8005-139 Faro

References

Bidarra, J., Veiga, P. A., Sapucaia, R., Wexel, J., Tavares, M., & Costa, S. (2023). Desenvolvimento de um modelo pedagógico virtual paras as artes performativas digitais. *RE@D - Revista de Educação a Distância e Elearning, 6*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.34627/redvol6iss1e202301

Castrillo, C. F. (2012). Jeffrey Shaw, un pionero en el arte de los nuevos médios. In P. Amador, M. R. Ruíz, T. López, & J. Cubas (Eds.), *Imagen, cultura y tecnología: Medios, usos y redes. Actas del Segundo Congreso Internacional sobre Imagen, Cultura y Tecnología* (pp. 24–33). Universidad Carlos II. http://hdl.handle.net/10016/14004

Goldberg, R. (2012). *A arte da performance: Do futurismo ao presente* (J. Camargo & R. Lopes, Trads.). Orfeu Negro. (Trabalho original publicado em 1988)

Gomes, C. (2012). A performance e o filme: Da Fluxus à performance digital. *artciencia.Com, Revista de Arte, Ciência e Comunicação*, (15), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.25770/artc.11602

Gonçalves, W. T. (2021). O design atuando como imagem autômata na vídeo performance. *Actas de Diseño,* (35), 82–86. https://doi.org/10.18682/add.vi35

Jamieson, H. V. (2008). *Adventures in cyberformance - Experiments at the interface of theatre and the internet* [Dissertação de mestrado, Queensland University of Technology]. QUT ePrints.

Júnior, R. (2015). A videoarte da década de 1970, o cinema de atrações e o regime de mostração. In S. de Jesus (Ed.), *Anais do VIII Seminário Nacional de Pesquisa em Arte e Cultura Visual: Arquivos, memórias, afetos* (pp. 924–936). Núcleo Editorial FAV; UFG.

Letras, M. B. (2023). *Os usos do Instagram no cenário cultural português: A música e o teatro no contexto da pandemia de COVID-19* [Dissertação de mestrado, Universidade Nova de Lisboa]. RUN. http://hdl.handle.net/10362/159311

Madeira, C. (2020). *Arte da performance, made in Portugal - Uma aproximação à(s) história(s) da arte da performance portuguesa.* ICNOVA – Instituto de Comunicação da Nova. http://hdl.handle.net/10362/112024

Marafon, L., & Araujo, D. (2021). O cinema das mídias digitais: O filme a partir do computador e do celular. *Libero,* (47), 34–51.

Moletta, F. F. (2022). Video-sculpture: The contemporary contribution to the theme in Portugal. *CAP - Public Art Journal*, *4*(1), 48–61. https://doi.org/10.48619/cap.v4i1.670

Rocha, R., Vieira, C., Tavares, M., & Guerra, I. S. (2023). Da performance digital à ciberperformance: Transformação, transposição e inovação. *Rotura – Revista de Comunicação, Cultura e Artes*, *3*(1), 12–27. https://doi.org/10.34623/cnqz-6d53

Toro, F. de. (2010). O que é performance? Entre a teatralidade e a performatividade de Samuel Beckett. *Urdimento - Revista de Estudos em Artes Cênicas*, *2*(15), 149–172. https://doi.org/10.5965/1414573102152010149

Veiga, P. A. (2021). Método e registo: Uma proposta de utilização da a/r/cografia e dos diários digitais de bordo para a investigação centrada em criação e pratica artística em média-arte digital. *Rotura – Revista de Comunicação, Cultura e Artes,* (2), 16–24. https://doi.org/10.34623/y2yd-0x57

Veiga, P. A. (2022). Ciberperformance: Da transposição à inovação. In *Proceedings of VIII Congresso Internacional da Associação Portuguesa de Literatura Comparada "Olhares Cruzados: Representações das Epidemias nas Artes. Da Catástrofe à Resiliência"* (pp. 1–17). APLC. http://hdl.handle.net/10400.2/15348

Vieira, C., & Sapucaia, R. (2022). CyPet e a ciberperformance no contexto arte-educativo: Resistência e criatividade em cena. *Revista Iberico-Americana Para Comunicação e Cultura Contra-Hegemónica, 1*(6), 175–193. https://doi.org/10.23925/2318-5023.2022.n6.e60820

Vinhosa, L. (2020). Videoperformance: Corpo em trânsito. *Revista Estado da Arte*, *1*(2), 293–303. https://doi.org/10.14393/EdA-v1-n2-2020-57782