

A WEBPAGE IN TWO ACTS



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"The term choreography has gone viral. In the last five years it has suddenly mobilized as a general referent for any structuring movement, not necessarily the movement of human beings. Choreography can stipulate both the kinds of actions performed and their sequence or progression. [...] Sometimes designating minute aspects of movement, or alternatively, sketching out the broad contours of action within which variation might occur, choreography constitutes a plan or score according to which movement unfolds. Building choreographic space and people's movement throughout them. [...] Web services choreograph interfaces; and even existence is choreographed. Choreography, then would seem to apply to the structuring of movement in highly diverse occasions, yet always where some kind of order or desired to regulate that movement "

(Rosenthal et al, 2010)

ON CHOREOGRAPHIC THINKING

Both media design and choreography make use of formal language structures to compose and give a sense of order, often by creating compositional methods (Loupe, 2010) on how to organize and distribute elements in space and time.

1 The ChoreoGraphic Glossary links choreographic concepts with coding functions. The new vocabulary brings new meaning and produces a new imaginary around the act of coding. Find here a link to the code/glossary: pzwart1.wdka.hro.nl/~jo/notebook/series/glossary.html; and the installation in which it was displayed: vimeo.com/171592736.

The flexibility of code allows for a combination of possibilities, not only for the live performance setting, but also for the use of the code itself by other designers, just as in any choreography that can be re-interpreted, re-created and adapted. The code serves as a generative tool for new possible outcomes in the creation of graphics for interfaces and a way of playing with the choreographic logic. Therefore, this method promotes disciplinary openness, by sharing ideologies and methodologies and questioning structures of collaboration and of intellectual property.

The documentation is delivered in an open-ended format, following Free/Libre Open Source (FLOSS) models/philosophies. The source code for the project *WebPage Act I, II, III*, is available on: github.com/JoBCB

To reflect on how elements relate to each other and to the whole, is to come to understand how spatial decisions inherently set a specific rhythm and flow to the outcome, which is perceived in the moment it is being accessed or performed. Composition is, then, an ensemble of spatio-temporal choices.

Design scripts and dance scores are the result of a composition process, which defines the space and time for a series of actions to unfold. In design, scripts are written with programming languages and are executable by a computer, and can be used to create information displays on screens or actions in a web browser.

Similarly, choreographic scores define a set of rules and the conditions for certain actions, the main difference being that this will be executed by human (bodies). Thus, both scores and scripts hold the question of performance, the possibility and responsibility for action.

From an understanding that the media environment is constantly changing and communication methods are shifting, the question arises of whether the meaning and role of design should be rethought. Graphic interfaces and web tools are embedded in intricate ecologies of interdependent infrastructures, subjects and subjectivities, codes, data, applications, laws, corporations and protocols.

"Most computation is no longer standalone, it operates as part of an architecture of servers, software, networks, and social, cultural and commercial systems." (Fuller, 2006).

All these multiple layers of complexity bring a sense of instability to media design work, speaking to the inherent nature of choreography which deals with the idea of something constantly being done. Specifically, in the context of this project there are many interlaced ones, for instance the politics of web standards: starting from the language itself (HTML/CSS/JavaScript) to the browser (Firefox, which is free and open source).

Choreographic thinking and methodologies address questions of unpredictability, indeterminacy, immateriality, spatial and temporal paradoxes that can inform design on how to respond to the digital logic. As in as considering the indeterminate interactions between scripts, machines and users, and the complex interrelations, dependencies and contingencies of design. In short, its performative stance. Choreographing Design\Designing Choreographies is a re-articulation of the two disciplines at a fundamental level: choreography and media design, a co-formation of compositional and thematic concerns. The work that follows is influenced by both fields of knowledge and aims at finding a common language. A hybrid methodology that makes invisible forces (elements of choreography) appear as physical manifestations in media design.

A DUAL SYNTAX

"In every sphere of human action, grammar is the establishment of limits defining a space of communication." (Cox and McLean, 2012)

For the series *WebPage Act I, II, III*, Joana Chicau created a specific grammar or vocabulary that links choreographic concepts from post-modern dance with web-coding functions. The new vocabulary¹ brings new meaning and produces a new imaginary around the act of coding.

This technique follows the concept of esoteric programming languages, also called esolang, used when writing software, integrating a new grammar into an existing one. Although an esolang doesn't have a proper functionality, it is used in combination with other programming languages to explore alternative ways of composing and writing code. Chicau started using esoteric programming languages as an attempt to overcome the abstractness of algorithmic code, and simultaneously as a way to develop my own design language, which derives from choreographic concepts.

In *WebPage Act I, II, III* the esolang is the combination of choreographic concepts with programming languages, mostly web-based, such as JavaScript. In my code every JavaScript function aims to translate a choreographic concept, which is only visible in the browser in the moment of performance.

A LIVE PERFORMANCE

The performance starts with a standard webpage, followed by the opening of the web console. The screen is now divided in two stages: the *frontstage*, the interface a user normally accesses and the 'backstage' or the web console in which programming languages can be ran. In the web console Chicau is calling, juxtaposing and manipulating different functions from a glossary of code, while simultaneously displaying the varied outcomes of graphic elements in the screen. These functions are named after choreographic concepts, which are assigned to specific web design actions. While the computer interprets the code, the audience will be interpreting and start wondering about the relation between the *choreographic vocabulary*¹ within the code and its immediate outcome.

The screen becomes an open stage, providing the audience the access to the methodology and the tools used during the performance. The performative aspect of the act of coding is a way to make more transparent the process of composition and to enhance the nuances and transient character of coding. The liveness of the work, guides the audience through its creation, and helps them follow the steps both at a technical and conceptual level, meaning that the way the piece unfolds reflects the conditions of its creation: not by looking at an object but by being part of an event. This way, allowing the audience to engage with the making of the compositions while exposing and articulating the multiple dimensions of the code. After the live coding part follows an enactment of choreographic physical movement.

As in choreography, web-design also deals with space, time and movement qualities. It has been defining ways of moving, collectively or individually, through fluid nonetheless complex landscapes of information displays, networked spaces, and multimedia environments. The performance being presented and the notion of *choreographic coding* is a technical as much as social, cultural and aesthetic experiment which can be expanded both at the level of web-design as well at the one of choreography.

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