



PERFORMANCE  
PHILOSOPHY

---

## REFLECTIONS ON CURATORIAL ARTICULATION PRACTICES. A COLLECTIVE DOING: THAT'S WHY I DON'T WRITE ALONE

MARIO LOPES DAS GRADUATE SCHOOL, AMSTERDAM

This writing is not, nor will ever be, genuinely mine: I gather, I agglomerate; in conversations I rethink; in encounters I revise ideas; in movement I reshape things; I use and disuse theories and definitions; I quote those I call by name and honour those who shared ideas and their existence with me in non-linear times. All this is present in the words that follow and especially in my doing.

For a long time, the term "curator" has triggered noises and conflicts in me. I question the practices and market logics operating within our viral system, which I call PACACO-bi: Patriarchy, Capitalism and Colonialism within a binary structure. I name "PACACO-bi" this syndemic virus of our history, which affects us as humanity and governs us as a society.

For this reason, considering myself a curator is a permanent conflict in each experience where I act as such. I try to exercise a curatorial practice that, on principle, combats this viral system, constantly asking myself: Is it possible to break with the logics immanent to the capitalist system, at the same time freeing myself from the patriarchal place of power? Is it possible to overcome the binary logic and colonial methods of action pervading social relations?

I constantly wonder about the relationships created from these systemic structures, where architectural and institutional constructions, associated with institutionalised bodies and financial capital, impose power over curatorial practices, artists, multidisciplinary teams and 'publics'. What is the nature of these relations and how can they be transformed? What are the consequences of these mechanisms and how to consciously oppose them?

I see these relationships, for the most part, as vertically toxic and violent. I think of verticality as the idea of power overlapping existences, dreams and desires from top to bottom. According to these vectors, different roles are constructed. This is also the role of the curator who, while providing spaces and budgets on the one hand, is also able to oppress, format and discard practices, on the other.

Taking these reflections as a starting point, I question my work. My whole practice seeks to dismantle this syndemic structure.

Time is a key factor in curatorial practices. I remember that within *veiculoSUR*, an itinerant residency platform active since 2015 and coordinated by me, we had several transformative encounters, but a special occasion marked me. Through the encounter with a wise holder of ancestry and deep knowledge of the technologies of the Indigenous peoples, I came into contact with another understanding of timeline, which definitely transformed my practices.

How do we—western or westernized—locate past, present and future with our bodies as a starting point? We have learned and been trained to construct the past behind us, the present at this exact point we are and the future as being in front of us. What I learned then, and have been reconstructing and repairing within my brain architecture, is the possibility of inverting these senses. Today I understand the future as something that lies behind us and, as much as we cannot see it, we can feel the vibrations of those who have already passed by our present point and continue to drive us (our ancestry). The present, on the other hand, is at the nearest edge of our body, and the past would be in front of us, where everything we generate in presence ceaselessly makes up the fabric of our everyday life. That is, we are facing our memory and history, thus confronting the consequences of our doing—permanently.

I need to redefine and reuse the word "curatorship" through my practices. Curating, for me, means going through some specific steps. I will explain how I think of them, what understanding of relationships they contain and therefore what ways of doing they generate:

### 1.

#### **Displacing myself from my own place, in space-time, to meet with other places and existences and open myself to crossings**

In physics, the **displacement** of a body is a vector quantity (it has modulus and direction) defined as the variation of the position of a body in a given interval of time. Thus, the displacement vector can be obtained by the difference between the initial and final position. If an object moves with respect to a referent, then the position of the object varies. This change in position is known as displacement.

**Choreography** is the planning and organising of the movements of bodies and objects in space-time and generating a trace, path, writing or record. Displacement as choreography is a technology

that comes from the desire or need for changes and transformations of scenarios(out), states(in) and dream activations.

### Displacement as choreography

To think of transtopia as a transformative power is to think of it as a starting point and not as a destination. This implies an exercise of displacement and, therefore, it requires a repositioning of our senses and meanings to enter the other-place and the other-history. This exercise requires special attention to reproduce choreographic thought – in displacement; that is, to choreograph our movements as ways of learning how to move in other directions.

## 2.

### To wish and dream of meeting up again with those who have passed through me and left traces or fragments

I started talking to the trees again. When I was 40 years old, I was living in Helsinki. Walking towards the Baltic Sea I slipped and leaned on a tree. At the same moment, flashes of memories came to me. I remembered my dear grandmother, Rita Nery, when I was about 5 years old, taking my hand and putting it on a tree, her hand on mine and she started singing. She whispered in my ear: son, you can talk to the trees. Western time passed by my mind: the PACACO-bi chip was already implanted in my mind and the disbelief of my grandmother's teachings completely materialised. Only at the age of 40, on the other side of the Atlantic, in the Baltic Sea and near the Arctic Sea, did I dream the past, reactivate the matriarchal-ancestral technology and start talking to the trees again.

 <https://vimeo.com/487755188>

Wishing and dreaming of re-encounters makes it possible for me to meet people who make me dream of the past and speculate about futures; reuniting with people that displace me and generate conflicts. It makes it possible to meet existences that reactivate matriarchal-ancestral technologies and allow us to afro-transcend. The re-encounters are the desire to architect the aquilombing of a commune on a route of escape from this time.

### 3.

#### To plan and articulate reunions through a structured platform for the deepening of our intersections (of that which makes me wish and dream)

To describe the intercalation of my work as curator and creator, as choreographer and performer, I use the terms **articulator-choreographer** and **choreographer-articulator**, whose fundamental idea is to articulate bodies, spaces, ideas and people.

Choreographic articulation creates spaces of interference and allows encounter, sharing, conflict, reflection, displacement and construction of other narratives. I seek to build spaces of collectivity, residences of coexistence, entangled localities and mobile formats of sharing practices and responsibilities.

As a choreographer and performer I invite other bodies to interfere in my corporeal investigation through the notion of articulated choreography, promoting the encounter with several artists in different locations. I experiment in displacement, challenging hegemonic aesthetic formats, taking as a starting point the social and historical inscriptions embedded in my own body.

### 4.

#### Agglomerate existences in the same space-time

I build a relationship first of all with people and not with works-objects.

I build a relationship primarily with embodied existences and not concrete architectures or physical institutional spaces.

I build a relationship out of desires and trust, out of many conversations, food and shared residences.

I build encounters between people, trusting them.

I thought I built collectives, but now I think I deconstruct individualities.

### 5.

#### Stimulate and provoke an experience, to ferment, to conflict ideas and to dismantle patterns

I have been researching and investigating "conflicts of social norms and strange bodies": mobility, encounters, crossroads and compositions, social norms and their repercussions on the body and movement. I constantly try to recognize, despite distances and differences, other ways of creating

and converging ideas that displace my own actions. Although this coming and going does not always imply the cognitive opening necessary for the apprehension of other worlds, the strength of the act is to position myself within the reach of the senses: to dislocate the body is to expose myself to sensations not yet experienced. The contact with diverse realities, together with the occupation of distinct architectural spaces and the relationship with those who live here/there, are opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, for the estrangement of myself and for the artistic creation from constantly renewed points of view.

I did not study cultural management, nor was I trained as a choreographer. The in-between place I occupy demands from me constant readaptation and well-articulated movements. The anatomical terminology of "articulation" describes this intermediate place as a point of union that, at the same time, guarantees great mobility to all the connected parts in the body.

### Exploding pre-established ways of doing

**Strange bodies and conflict of norms** is an investigation of the social codes of behaviour, processes of physical adaptation and moments of confrontation with the body that are perceived as foreign on account of language, skin colour or ways of being. Those who are recognised as foreigners seek strategies of camouflage that allow them to enter and penetrate 'norms'.

The codes of a society or a place change according to current aesthetics, ethics and fears. Bodies at borders are subjected to physical/psychological tests. The strange bodies that perform the codes are plunged into a process of integration, where integration means the attempt to disintegrate the newly arrived body from its own culture.

After the research of 'foreign bodies', I started to understand that it is only through entering into conflict with norms that it is possible to signal a path towards another social construction. One of the striking examples during my life and period of social integration in Munich was in the official social integration course: there I met people from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa.

One day a colleague asked the teacher if she had correctly prepared an invitation in German. The invitation was to a neighbouring family, whom she did not know yet, as she had just moved into her new flat. The teacher, when reading the invitation, promptly corrected my colleague, saying that: "here in Germany you cannot knock on the door of a neighbour you don't know and invite him to your house for lunch. The neighbour is not your friend. We have to respect other people's spaces." As I asked how it was possible for her to say that, she replied, "it is our culture, it is our rules, our norms and it is my responsibility to teach our customs."

Resisting norms, questioning what is given or the 'how-should-be', is the only way to build a society where people do not simply co-exist but can live the complex and liberating interface of relating to others.

**Visualise the scattered and chaotic fragments as a landscape. Contemplate them collectively for as long as necessary**

I enter into conflict with norms and do not follow the apparently given norms (as they are often not put into question). I stand for value of knowledge in time and not for value of money in time. I seek to build a continuous relationship with others: one that relies on non-linear time rather than an extractive relationship to the present.

**Discreate. To perceive the organic intersections generated by fragments, remnants or traces in space-time.**

Today, capitalist economies pressure us to be creative at all costs. And this practice of building an individualistic creative being leads us to being gladiatorial in the arenas we enter until we wither, atrophy and disintegrate. To discreate is to generate something—without thinking of creating—in relation to other people and their ways of doing. Discreation is the practice of doing in community.

*Do not confuse drifting with being lost. Enjoying the drift is the best part of the journey.*

## 6.

### **Caring for and accompanying transformation processes triggered in collective gatherings and experiences**

Since 2008, together with the articulator Maelys Meyer, I conduct the platformPLUS, in which artists and curators stay together in residence experiencing the collective process of living together and discreating.

In parallel, since 2015, I coordinate, with my partners Marcela Olate, Maelys Meyer and Thais Ushirobira, the *veiculoSUR*, an itinerant residence that builds a displacement from South to North from Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, France, Germany and Finland.

In both projects, the practice is of continuity: the realisation of new layers activated by the artists in each edition. A great spiral, where everyone sees themselves composing, is being formed. From the first collective experience a relational interface is built, which will continue for a lifetime. We are talking about building spaces for training, sharing technologies, fermenting strategies, re-appropriating ownership of one's own existence, counter-academicism and an Afrotransstropic community.

## 7.

### **Linking spaces for sharing tracks, the point of being and what has been generated during the journey**

*Stop listening to the future and project the past.*

How to share what has been generated with institutions? How to invite them to the projects and ideas and involve them as an integrative part? How to do projects not “for” or “by”, but with institutions?

In the public call for the current edition of the *veiculoSUR 2020/21/22*, open in six different countries, we invited representatives of all collaborating institutions to be part of the meetings with the artists interested in being part of this 3-year displacement. The important thing was to create relationships with the people involved and strengthen the process: to create a connection, a close dialogue and a listening practice to get in touch with who they are, whereof and with whom they come. The aim was to disarticulate the obligation of a final product, and to stimulate the desire to accompany these people and to share the process of each artist.

From this relationship building, the unfolding and reverberations of the experiences lived in the residence will be constantly monitored.

## 8.

### Alienation, the Earth and Humanity

The term **humanity** refers to the whole of the human species, the whole formed by "we" human beings, but not only that; **humanity** also refers to human acts of compassion and solidarity, acts in which we are able to help our neighbour.

The construction of this humanity is bankrupt. This PACACO-bi virus alienates us. It teaches us a timeline where the future is in front of us and the past behind, which makes it impossible for us to build futures considering the past, as it seems to fall into oblivion. Native peoples understand time from another logic, where the past is in front of us and the future behind.

With the past in front of us, everything we build and generate in the present makes up the fabric of history and memory. Visualising the past that we weave, our responsibility with all the actions, bodies, objects and components also comes into view. With the future on our backs we cannot see it, but we feel the accumulated energy that goes through our bodies to keep us dreaming and active in the construction of the present. Our bodies in this in-between place are transtopic, they allow transit and movement for the construction of the present, intertwining desires and dreams for a future.

As Ailton Krenak (2021) says, in this idea of Humanity, we separate Humanity from the Earth (Nature). We consider the earth/nature as a resource and not as part of a whole. The rivers, mountains and trees for this humanity are resources and for the Indigenous peoples they are part of the community, they are a grandmother or grandfather or any member that transits to another plane.

## 9.

### **Then, my own reconstruction, reorganisation and recomposition of yet another mutant body in constant movement.**

I was taught that dreaming is utopian. Afrotranstopia is first of all realisation. It is a political question of making dreams said to be distant to black existences. The real utopia is to think of a world where existences can execute their own being. We are children of a technology of original peoples from both sides of the Atlantic. We speculate our future of Black bodies.

From this speculation and dreaming grows Afrotranstopia. Afrotranstopia is this intersection between technologies, existences and afrotranscendence.

\*\*\*

this text is not, nor has ever been genuinely mine:

it will be reused, added to; in conversations, remembered; in encounters, revisited; in movement, experienced; and used to construct theses and denominations, to drive other ideas and practices and to follow interconnections, leftovers and foams to be recreated all the time.

### **Works Cited**

Krenak, Ailton. 2021. *Interview Roda Viva with Ailton Krenak*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtPbCuPKTq4>

### **Biography**

Mario Lopes is a Brazilian born in São Paulo choreographer, articulator and master student at DAS Choreography - Amsterdam University of the Arts. After more than 15 choreographic works realised in Brazil, Germany, France, Mexico, Switzerland and Finland I am now working on the last part of my trilogy called "Movimento" in collaboration with artists from São Paulo, Munich, Maputo, Helsinki and Lyon. Due to the pandemic, "Movimento III\_Celebration, post-tsunami foams", became a choreographed film, premiered in August 2021 at FRESTAS, Contemporary Art Triennial of SESC São Paulo, in Brazil, and embraces the concept of Afrotranstopia, which I keep developing with the support of a large collective of Afrodiasporic artists. At the moment, besides developing a digital platform for dance creation with my partner Victor Pardino, CEO of Sense of Space, I am working on the adaptation of the film for the stage.

Recent awards and grants: [2022] NPN Stepping Out [2021] Einzelprojektförderung für Freie Tanzschaffende, Kulturreferat München [2021] AVEK - Förderung von Filmproduktionen in Helsinki [2021] Grant Holland Scholarship [2020] Stipendium - Kulturreferat München

<https://mariolopesvs.com/>

© 2022 Mario Lopes



Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).