



WELCOME TO IMMATERIALITY

Report about my participation in
PACAP5 at Forum Dança in Lisbon, Portugal
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A professional musician, a friend of mine, is learning to play a new instrument. He told me how frustrating the disbalance is that he experiences: on the one hand he had a great advantage by already knowing how to read music, and even knowing in great detail what the music he wants to make should sound like. On the other hand, he missed the motorics to realize this, 'as if I can see the destination very clearly, there is just a gap in the road that brings me there'.

Despite having made performative work for over ten years, being educated in a fine arts context made me sometimes feel the way my friend described when making performances. I know what I want, and it's not that I'm unsatisfied with the performative work so far, I just knew that there was so much more within performance that I felt unable to access. The process of making a sculpture is in many ways similar, but in some major ways also very different from working with human beings, let alone to perform myself. This was my motivation for participating in PACAP5, a 'performing arts advanced program' in Lisbon, Portugal.

The program was open to performance makers from all art disciplines, though the program was taking place in a dance school, Forum Dança, and was curated by João Fiadeiro and his team, who are rooted in dance. As it turned out, I was the only participant professionally working in fine arts. The rest of the group consisted mainly of dancers, but also some musicians and theater-makers were there. Nationalities varied from Spanish, Danish, French and Italian, to Portuguese, Uruguayan, someone from the USA and relatively many Brazilians. I took Portuguese classes on the side for two hours a week. The course was bilingual, meaning we spent a lot of time translating from English to Portuguese and vice versa, which took a horribly much time but helped my understanding of Portuguese a lot.

Depending on their interests and availability, participants could opt for a 3, 6 or 9-month program. In order to do the second and third block's participants had to attend the previous ones, meaning the number of participants decreased as the course progressed: 26 in the first block, 18 in the second and 10 in the third and final one. I decided to take part in the first bloc, focussing on the study and experimentation of improvisation through Real-Time Composition ('Composição em Tempo Real' in Portuguese, or CTR in short), and the second bloc, on collaborative practices starting from a shared question. During the third block, which is taking place as I write this, I will be in residency at AIR351 in Cascais, not far from Lisbon. This way I can still be involved from



a distance, while having more resources at my disposal that suit my fine arts practice, like a studio, tools and studio visits from local and international curators.

CTR is a collective improvisation system that follows a very clear set of rules and avoids individual authorship. Its main rules are the following.

- Don't explain: *You don't have to make sense, you just have to be present. Your job is to stand, not to understand. To take position, not to compose.*
- Do don't correct: *Accidents are the portals to change. Coincidences will happen as long as we don't try to make them and the answer is there. We just make the trouble and stay with it.*
- Don't play twice: *No one does two positions in a row. Always ask yourself 'does the situation need me? Is the situation changing from the inside? Is it coming to an end or is it starting to loop?'. We are all responsible for everyone's acts.*

There is a clear 'in' and 'out', usually divided by paper tape, and works best with a group of about 4 to 10 players. Outside of the playing field, there is a modest variety of objects and materials that can be used in the play: usually some wood, paper, markers, tape, lights and microphones. Someone (can be anyone, and is not decided upon upfront) takes/makes a 'first position', a clear and simple gesture, movement or place in the playing field, that the next player, the 'second position' will have to respond to. Usually the 'third position' is the position that 'confirms the game'. Some reflections I wrote down during our many hours of training CTR: **(1)**

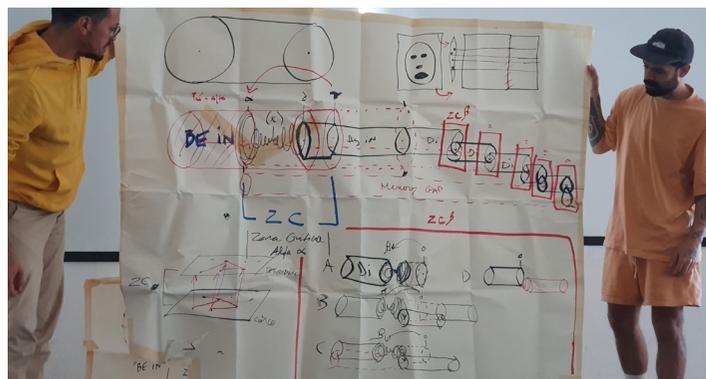
1. I realize that more than others, I feel a tendency to plan in advance. I could see that coming, because - let's face it - live improvisation is terrifying and not something I am very used to. But what I did not see coming, is my desire to record things. In visual arts, I am so used to being able to hold on to things, materialize them and save them for later. We make beautiful things all day and at the end of the day they are all gone and become something we can never see again. Sometimes I have the feeling that every single one of those images we make during rehearsals is one option less for our final presentation. After all, we don't want to repeat anything. At the same time, every beautiful image that emerges gives more hope that the possibilities are endless. That gives confidence. Maybe that is the training. When I shared this thought with a fellow participant, he grinningly said 'welcome to immateriality'.



In the second block we started off by sharing our affections from the first block, bringing references to those and organizing them in groups. Those formed the basis of the formation of the groups in which we started having a collective creative process. I teamed up with Brazilian philosopher and choreographer Bruno Levorin, starting from the phrase 'to remove something is to add an absence' and our shared question: how to make the absence tactile? In our process sculpture and choreography beautifully came together in tactility. It resulted in a performance titled 'one and three ways to touch something' in which we used imagination as a tool to sustain the conversation between the two of us and other objects. We generated a lot more material than we could apply in this single work, and I can very well imagine us continuing this collaboration in the future.

Both blocks were regularly interrupted by workshop weeks from guest teachers or collectives. Here is some of my notes from one of the most remarkable ones: **(2)**

Another good week was one in which the collective *Hormigonera*, consisting of light and sound professionals from the theater scene, introduced us to their world of Scenic Devices, with which they research the autonomy of materials. A very generous and well prepared workshop week, that came a lot closer to my own artistic practice.



My favorite was the workshop by a collective of film makers called *Orquestina de Pigmeos*. They took us on many long walks, introducing us to a score they developed, in which we 'opened' kind of frames of attention for each other, using our hands and some minimal movements. We repeated that same thing the second day, but now with a focus on sound. On the third day we were invited to add a layer of sound ourselves, either acoustically or on a device we would bring. It resulted in absurd and mind blowing experiences like these: all of us, a group of about 15 people that day, walking on the street in silence, then cramming ourselves into a laundromat to stare at a washing machine while playing dramatic classical music on a boombox. In the afternoons we did some exercises in smaller groups. It was a very inspiring week. I digged the simplicity of the score that was yet so playful and effective.

During the entire six months, Forum Dança kept updating a schedule of performances we could visit, for which they had managed to get us group discounts. It was incredibly helpful to see such a wide range of performances of others, often one sometimes even two or three per week. This is something I normally can not afford the tickets for, let alone afford taking this much time for.



2. We have a two week-long workshop by a choreographer and dancer from the USA, called Lisa Nelson. Apparently a legend and a heroine of many of my classmates, but with my visual background I had never heard of her. She speaks refreshingly little and immediately gave us very physical, at first mostly individual assignments. We walk, crawl and roll around the room for hours while she asks us to concentrate on different things each time. Walk with your eyes open, stand still with your eyes closed, walk with your eyes closed, stand still with your eyes open. Use your hands to touch your face, use your face to touch your hands.

The first days I felt a lot of resistance, nausea even. I did not feel involved at all. I had many critical thoughts, especially about myself. Theoretically it was helpful to experiment with being a thing, to 'DO art' instead of 'make art'. But I felt lost, too far removed from my comfort zone. I wanted to be engaged with the others, to WATCH, not close my eyes, but to make images.

Now in the second week I manage to surrender more. Being with myself, concentrating on my own body and not on how it looks or what it does, but on how what I do feels from the inside. And I think this is exactly her point. She says 'it is remarkable how readable it is where our attention is'. I did not expect that we would get to a point where assignments like 'let your wait float into the floor' or 'walk on your skeleton' have become completely possible and logical.





There were many challenges and problems as well. The bilingual nature of the course at times got very frustrating. Despite the many lessons I took, six months is simply too short to learn a language that is as far from your own as Portuguese is from Dutch. It made me feel isolated at times, especially during the second block where I was one of the only two participants who understood very little still.

Secondly, we struggled with attendance a lot. After being incredibly lucky and not experiencing a single covid infection in the group during the first block, the second was very spotty because almost every single one of us got infected, one after the other. Also, many other participants were in a much more precarious position than me: they did not have the financial support that I had to attend the program, which made them have to work on the side, sometimes taking entire weeks off to do jobs for money. All of it together created fatigue, some friction and chaos at times.

Lastly, though I felt there were some good reflection and feedback tools in place during the first block, they dwindled, and in the second one we were left more and more on our own. The group cohesion suffered from that. Also, CTR can be a violent tool, because it deals with reality, and evidently different forms of oppression and aggression can seep into the work as well. Sometimes we lacked aftercare for that.

What I cherish and take with me is the valuing process over interpretation and judgment. Especially during the first block we never focussed on 'what are we looking at and (why) is this interesting?'. This was a very different approach from what I'm used to, and very valuable for me at this point in time for both my own artistic practice and in my teaching practice as well.

Another fragment from my notes: **(3)**

During PACAP5 I have been informing those interested via social media, mainly in Instagram Stories, which I have collected in a highlight that remains available on my profile. After this report a few more posts will follow in which I share some of the reflective thoughts I mentioned earlier, and of course mentioning again the sponsorship I received from Gerbrandy Cultuurfonds, Stichting Niemeijerfonds and Stichting Stokroos. I have just started my residency at AiR351 in Cascais, where all that I gained in PACAP5 and the network of performance professionals that it brought me, will be of great benefit to the new work I am developing here and in the future.



3. A goal I formulated up front was to 'further define my performance tools'. This is really what is happening. I am finding words for things that I was already doing, but did not know how to name or even distinguish. I am learning about myself that as a performer I have a good sense of materiality. Now that I am not surrounded by other visual artists, I notice that I understand more quickly than others how materials (will) react. At the same time, it becomes clear to me that I was less than others aware of the role of my own body, that I have less of an idea of my own objecthood, as it were. Which in itself is rather ironic and perhaps not at all coincidental, since I have often described raising exactly this awareness in my audience as an important goal of my work.

