

EM FOCO

TABLE FOR UPSIDE DOWN PRACTICES

MESA PARA PRÁTICAS DE CABEÇA PARA BAIXO

MESA PARA PRÁTICAS AL REVÉS

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ABSTRACT:

In this paper I describe the collective performance entitled *Table for Upside Down Practices* (GALA et.al, 2019a). The particular performance(s) performed at *Table for Upside Down Practices* (GALA et.al, 2019a) are in a sense rehearsals of the particular positioning of upside down and a web of other various positionings and performances that emerged under this context. The performance assumed the performative conversational form in a long table with the participants. Departing from the idea of positioning as performative or even more mundanely as a position assumed in, with or within black bodies the conversational performance framed questions and speculated about particular positionings. In this regard, the performative table echoes Glissant's (2010) sensibility in a belief that things, concepts, ideas do not necessarily follow a transparent deductive course but are often the product of intuitively complex networks in relation. In other respects, these performance(s) reflect a relevant aspect of dance practice. As a praxis – without forgetting its highly oral facet – dance is characterized by “a radical hospitality” towards unfamiliar “languages, unknown processes without evident protocols or contracts” (GALA et.al, 2019) and in many respects opaque. Opaque to the body, the performers and other various intervenients under choreographic performative processes or trainings.

KEYWORDS:

choreography; opacity;
(non)performance; radical
hospitality

RESUMO:

Neste artigo descrevo a performance coletiva intitulada *Mesa para Práticas de cabeça para Baixo* (GALA et.al, 2019a). As performances realizadas na *Mesa de Cabeça para Baixo* (GALA et.al, 2019a) são ensaios do posicionamento particular de cabeça para baixo e de uma teia de outros posicionamentos e performances que surgiram neste contexto. A performance assumiu a forma performativa conversacional numa mesa longa com os participantes. Partindo da ideia de posicionamento enquanto ato performativo ou, mais mundanamente, enquanto posição assumida em, com ou dentro de corpos negros, a performance conversacional enquadrava questionamentos e especulou sobre posicionamentos específicos. Nesse sentido, a mesa performativa ecoa a sensibilidade de Glissant (2010) na crença de que conceitos e ideias não seguem necessariamente um curso dedutivo transparente, mas muitas vezes são o produto de redes intuitivamente complexas em relação. Por outro lado, estas performances refletem um aspecto relevante da prática da dança. Como práxis – sem esquecer sua faceta oral – a dança é caracterizada por “uma hospitalidade radical” para com “línguas desconhecidas, processos desconhecidos sem protocolos ou contratos evidentes” (GALA et.al, 2019) e em muitos aspectos opacos. Opacos em relação ao corpo, aos intérpretes e outros intervenientes envolvidos em processos ou treinos coreográficos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

coreografia; opacidade;
(não)performance;
hospitalidade radical.

RESUMEN:

En este artículo describo el performance colectivo titulado Table for Upside Down Practices (GALA et.al, 2019a). Las performances realizadas en la Mesa de Cabeça para Baixo (GALA et.al, 2019a) son ensayos del posicionamiento particular de la cabeza hacia abajo y una red de otros posicionamientos y performances que surgieron en este contexto. La actuación tomó una forma performativa conversacional en una mesa larga con los participantes. Partiendo de la idea del posicionamiento como acto performativo o, más mundanamente, como posición asumida en, con o dentro de cuerpos negros, la performance conversacional enmarcaba interrogantes y especulaba sobre posiciones específicas. En este sentido, la mesa performativa hace eco de la sensibilidad de Glissant (2010) en la creencia de que conceptos e ideas no necesariamente siguen un curso deductivo transparente, sino que a menudo son el producto de redes de relación intuitivamente complejas. Por otro lado, estas actuaciones reflejan un aspecto relevante de la práctica de la danza. Como praxis –sin olvidar su faceta oral– la danza se caracteriza por “una hospitalidad radical” hacia “lenguajes desconocidos, procesos desconocidos sin protocolos ni contratos evidentes” (GALA et.al, 2019) y en muchos sentidos opacos. Opaco en relación con el cuerpo, los intérpretes y otros actores involucrados en procesos coreográficos o de formación.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

coreografía; opacidad; (no) performance; hospitalidad radical.



TABLE FOR UPSIDE DOWN PRACTICES

ENTITLED TABLE FOR *Upside Down Practices* (GALA et.al, 2019a) is a conversational performance that was part of the programme “Where I Stand”, an event on black feminism which invited relevant Portuguese Afro-descendent artists and scholars. The particular performance(s) performed at *Table for Upside Down Practices* (GALA et. al, 2019a) are in this sense rehearsals of the particular positioning of upside down and a web of other various positionings and performances that emerged under this context.

The table had the duration of one hour and thirty-seven minutes, although as stated in the programme note (Gulbenkian Foundation, 2019), it was initially supposed to last only one hour. Such performances were performed and choreographed by all the participants involved around a long table. Here, I am including as participants both humans and non-humans. By this is meant that special attention has been given to place, substances, various forms of devices, and materials. They were all performers and part of larger conversation(s). The believe that disappearance, the hidden and opacity can be the potentialisers for intensive, close encounters between self, others and particular collaborative things is behind the setting up of these performances, of which various devices at the disposal of the participants are a fundamental part.

As a collective singular choreographed assemblage, the conversational table operates as a constellation of correspondences, positionings of particular performances that result from attending to a diversity of practices proposed by the participants. In contrast with attending to the singular presence of one performer whether in the form of a speaker or a host – the master of the house – often found in conference or theater settings, the intention is that of attending to an intertwined set of performances and practices. These particular performances are rendered visible by the different participants in a diversity of ways: body positionings, orally expressed reflections, disagreements, silences, emotive declared positionings, body experimentations and degustations. They distribute attentions, exchanges, repay debts in return or surrender participants to attending to the significance of silence(s) and its performance. Some of these manifestations supply information, even restore the body or in turn provide ammunition in the form of expressed dissensus. This later aspect served for disputed conversations around dissensus, disagreement, in its expressed emotive form or if some other particular forms of its expression should or should not be part of such a table. As one participant rightly said non-violent heated contention is part of daily family dinners so why should such expressions be eradicated from a performed conversation in an arts environment? Her interpellation questioned the aesthetics, (a)methodologies and practices erased under the guise of supposedly democratic consensus.

Perhaps difference, struggle, should not be limited to particular forms of expression always monitored by a master or a higher order? I highlight here the importance of dissensus in the current climate but also to how transparency and consensus can or have become themselves forms and sources of regulation. Often corresponding to a negation of particular expressions or forms of existence.

The setting of pre-destined roles does not allow for other ways of conveying knowledge or experience and places fixed roles even perhaps unwanted ones (in my case) on people. It is not a surprise that my choice from the beginning in adopting a nonperformative (MOTEN, 2017, pp. 101-107) positioning as a host found resistance.

My aim with these collective performances made together in the moment has been not only to oppose the tendency to value performance through visibility,

presence and productivity. It is also above all to reconsider the unconnected, the unseen and the hidden. To perform in the gaps (MOTEN, 2003) is more off limits than one is led to believe, particularly in institutionalized art spaces. In this regard it is worth noting a particular episode in a Facebook exchange with ‘the presumed chair’ of the section I would be part of, after sending all the materials to the organizers regarding the *Table for Upside Down Practices* (GALA et.al, 2019a).

The need for a fixed host or a directed fixed guidance in a table to set up conversations was assumed as a necessary condition by the person to whom the chair role had been attributed a priori. This was inferred and expressed in a Facebook exchange. And yet even upon my insistence that the table was about opacity and upside down as a positioning, it was difficult to convince this person that in my performance ‘we were all speaking’ and no one had pre-fixed roles or favoured knowledge about what would be happening as described in the detailed programme note sent in advance: “it will be written, generated and developing in similar fashion to the experiencing of my tentative practice. Interrupted by scores, aleatory procedures and other unexpected interventions” (GALA, 2019)

Such an idea seemed unconceivable, unfathomable, impossible to be imagined. The difficulty in letting go of a role and imposing particular roles on others was evident already then. Without further disclosure on this issue, I deliberately hid the fact that even myself as the event proponent would not know what devices would be actioned and as a consequence what materials (screen projections, uttered performances, positionings, body experiments) would be activated and performed.

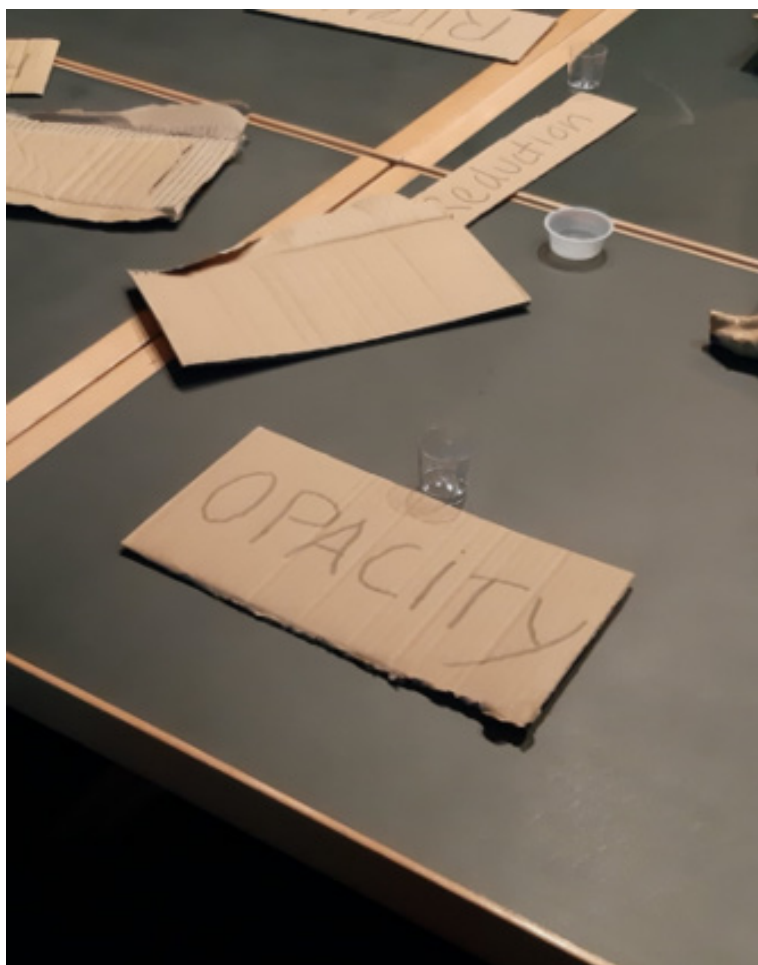


FIGURE 8 – Gomes, S. (2019) Table for Upside Down Practices. Multi Use Room, Museum of Modern Art Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation [Photograph]

The idea of transparency as expressed in the Facebook exchange is also a form of controlling specific discourses and formatting speeches on people by ascribing them a particular reductive visibility in institutionalized structures. Even when the invitation and formulation behind an event is one of a supposedly opening, of an opening towards alternative voices.

Often the inspection and regulation put in operation is larger than one is led to believe. This was a clear example to me how visibility can also be a source of regulation. Regulation insofar as it selects a few unique aspects of knowledge of their subjects and sets the particular performances and the terms of relation deserving consideration and permitted to be performed. This is a reminder that visibility might signify a reduction (GLISSANT, 1997) or a negation of particular dimensions of existence.

Ultimately, *Table for Upside Down Practices* (GALA et.al, 2019a) is also a proposition for alternative performances and positionings. My intention from the beginning

with such a set up was to call for other kinds of hospitality or hosting in the form of a performance. An experience that: “belongs to another order altogether, beyond knowledge, an enigmatic “experience” in which I set out for the stranger, for the other, for the unknown, where I cannot go. I do not know what.” (DERRIDA; CAPUTO, J., 1996, p. 112)

For this purpose, I decided to bring in devices of which I myself had no control or knowledge of. A variety of dispositifs were included in these preparations such as the cardboard pieces distributed on the table with written words or an unknown language to me. Thus, even the actual positioning and distribution of the cards on the table was given to different technicians and curators that helped with its preparation.

Such a deliberate set up is an invitation for an unconditional hospitality (DERRIDA; DUFOURMANTELLE, 2000), a hospitality characterized by the consistent practice of upsetting and frustrating the expectations of a directive univocal performance(s) or presumptions of particular promised performances. A performance open to inward disturbances, failures, unexpected tensions; punctuated by much needed provocations. Doing so opens hospitality up, it avoids the traps of normativity and fixed roles. It welcomes unknown guests, practices and ways of doing; aspects rarely acknowledged, tolerated or deserving consideration.

This manifests a radical openness to an absolute, indistinguishable other and it is only through such an approach involving distinct trainings and procedures that a particular shared multiple disposition is kept alive, open and loose.

The role of a host is deferred strategically, not even held up in sight in order to form a relation, as if the keys are given from the very inception to the guests. This is the case from the onset of the performance for instance the walk leading to the performative space relies on the participants own initiative. Here, the host of the table is camouflaged amongst the participants, anonymous. Participants were grouped outside and welcomed to walk towards the back of the stage through a sinuous badly lit corridor leading into a stage door. Rather than the habitual large, bright entrance of the actual auditorium the choice was for a subterranean-like passage into the performative place. There, a table measuring approximately nine meters occupied the central area of the stage. Some guests sat down on the chairs

at the table, few in the auditorium seats, others on the floor, while many took time having a look at things and particularities of the site, they were in. A sense of open choice is signaled from the very beginning where heading to the room is open to the initiative of the participants without any sort of guidance given.

Moreover, by giving the choice to establish the mode, direction of the performance or even a complete diversion of paths through a game with written cardboard pieces a significant decisive relevance is given to the visitors.



FIGURE 9 – Gomes, S. (2019) Table for Upside Down Practices. Multi Use Room, Museum of Modern Art Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation [Photograph]

It is worth noting the several signs of upsetting upon entering the performative space; perhaps the most noticeable is the image of the world projected upside down. So, in this initial opening into the conversational table, the idea of a call for other kind of terms of relation is signaled. This setting prepares the ground for a series of strategies or operations of refusal to perform fixed roles and upsetting comfortable positionings.

If often a host occupies the place of the master of the house in the conversational table, the host is camouflaged under a nonperformative (MOTEN, 2017, pp.

101-107) mode. In adopting such a nonperformative (MOTEN, 2017, pp. 101-107) positioning, and in my failure to adhere to the terms of what that role is supposed to be, I am also upsetting and frustrating the expectations of a directive performance or presumptions of particular promised performances. Here, I highlight the written presence of Cape Vert Creole language pointing towards a knowledge that the host is expected to perform. Clues like this are a recurrent part of the table. They form an important part of the devices at the disposal of the performers and set in motion the various performances, positionings or personal evocations that constitute the conversational table. As a result, there is a recurrent upsetting of roles but also the adoption of an “unconditional hospitality” (DERRIDA; DUFOURMANTELLE 2000) that insists on taking away the ground from the participants, prompting them to consider and imagine other knowledges, positionings or parts, even the one of hosts.

Such an aspect emerges in the repeated practice of failing to fulfill a promise of particular expected performances by the use of several devices: a card game, proposed physical positionings, images projected in the screen, objects at the disposal of the guests and ginger for degustation, visualization, touching or any other utilization. Additionally, this manifests a refusal to comply with particular expected performances of operationality and productivity.

Before the participants there is a host that lends herself to losing her positioning. A host that allows herself to become other, (an)other here in the sense of losing the role of the “master of the house”. Better yet a host, a speaker that maintains her ‘wall flower’ positioning and urges the awaited guest to venture inside as “the host (*hote*) of the host (*hote*).” (DERRIDA; DUFOURMANTELLE, A., 2000, p. 125).



FIGURE 10 – Gomes, S (2019) Table for Upside Down Practices. Multi Use Room, Museum of Modern Art Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation [Photograph]

As mentioned before, the direction taken by the conversation is mediated through the cards. It is not the initial host who chooses what is spoken – this results from the participants' aleatory choices. Sampling emerges as a prominent practice exercised through the cards but also through a 'detox rhizome' (ginger) inside several tiny containers, and through conversations, interruptions, silences or other various choices at the disposal of the participants. Of particular importance is the fact that the meaning of some of the words on the cards is itself unknown to the original host, while some of the participants might hold that knowledge. In displaying an unfamiliarity and incapacity to speak Cape Vert Creole I am not only frustrating the presumptions of particular promised performances but also gesturing towards the opaque. I, we, together continue following the initial darkly lit path, the ginger subterranean root on the table raw or peeled in containers exhaling the fragrance of its stimulating properties. Hereof, the intention is to excavate at the margins "making and

attending to the cultivated silences, exclusions, relations of violence and domination” (HARTMAN, 1997, p. 11). Putting them in relation to the particular performances happening before our eyes in the room within our table. It is a persistent reminder of the opaque as a source of vitality as well as a strategic resistance and a way of withholding and transmitting practices.

Additionally, by frustrating expectations this singular device opens questions of reductionism and how easy it is to fall into the trap of hasty presumptions about others. The first time this is prompted, two participants throw similar synonyms in Portuguese, aiding the performers, helping me and others around the table with the meaning(s) of the word: “rabeladu”.

Initially, I am not found out. My incapacity remains undetected, unexposed. I proceed to explain my incapability to speak the language by asking participants to contribute, many respond and get involved partaking new roles.

They open up a world of different significations and translations: leading to a reflection on the meaning(s) of that particular word which can translate as recalcitrance. For the guests in this language, it refers to the slaves who ran away, fugitives who constructed new communities and practices in Cape Vert. Inadvertently, our guests already occasioned us to delve into the margins of opaque languages and practices. In a sense the game with the cards is a challenge in how words are put to work differently, what they do, what they can lead this performance, this event to. What performances, articulations, associations can be made from them.

Further on, there is a word few people know, only one participant hesitantly suggests a translation, others are unsure, disagree. In preparation for our performance, I had asked Apolo de Carvalho to translate particular words as materials for the table. These are the words written in three languages (Portuguese, English and Cape Verde Creole):

Opacity secret disappeared (non)performance withdrawal recalcitrant resistant
fugitivity camouflage reduced refusal withholding ginger foot upside down upside
down hospitality radical paraontology

opacidade secreto sumido (não)performance retirada afastamento retiro
 recalcitrante relutante resistente inconformante fugitividade camuflagem
 reduzido recusa retenção gengibre caule de pernas para o ar de cabeça para
 baixo hospitalidade radical paraontologia

opasidadi Subi pintxa disfasadu senperformance saida risguardu rabeladu indisisu
 risistenti inkormanti fujitividadi kamufłaji indjutudu nega iper pirformatividadi
 ritenson jenjibri pe di planta di pe pa riba di kabesa pa baxu ospitalidadigasadju
 radikal paraontologia

Undisguised, I openly check my improvised personal ‘dictionary’ and the meaning is not the same. In form of provocation, I raise the possibility of Carvalho having tricked us. As a punctuation he left in the form of a trick to alert us. Perhaps he is reminding us that accessibility might have rules, that there are steps required in every relation. After all, there is a kind of caring or generosity, a reciprocity involved in the fostering of any relation. In doing so, the question of the right to opacity is brought to the table.



FIGURE 11 – Gomes, S. (2019) Table for Upside Down Practices. Multi Use Room, Museum of Modern Art Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation [Photograph]

In pointing out my not-knowing how to speak Creole, I am gesturing towards the idea that just because I do not speak it does not mean I am not allowed

to form a relation to it. But more, I imply another kind of relation, one that does not fall into exoticism and that allows for the author of those words to be opaque. As I refer at the table, I do not know if Carvalho did in fact lie to me when he translated the particular word that somebody affirmed to have a different meaning to the one given by him. In doing so, I am calling for the right to opacity and raising a series of ethical questions around the terms of the relationality proposed at the table. (Non)performance here emerges as a refusal (from the part of the host and perhaps from Carvalho) to perform what is expected to frustrate those expectations and by doing so opening questions of reductionism and exoticism.

But just as importantly, the incapacity of the host to speak this language lays bare other means of knowledge exchange and is a key for some of us to realize that even faced with the unknown perhaps one can form a relation with the opaque. This is a perfect example of Glissant's idea that ways of knowing do not emerge in a transparent or completely comprehensible path. Ideas often arrive to us rhizomatically, subterraneously, and in intricate steps of intertwined relations. As a consequence, an incapacity to speak a language does not necessarily mean one cannot form a relation which can be conducive to significant understandings or knowledges around it. This engagement with the hidden showed itself beforehand in the choice of materials at the disposal of the audience but also in the possibility of adopting a Creole language or of speaking between two languages rather than the usual traditional option where one has to opt for a single language to express oneself.

As a result not only there is a recurrent upsetting of roles that come with 'place', or with the instrumental use given to things (e.g. lectern, writing board) but also the adoption of an "unconditional hospitality" (DERRIDA; DUFOURMANTELLE, A., 2000, p. 83) that insists on taking away the ground from the participants in order to encourage and prompt them to new roles, even that of the host. Therefore, my interventions are punctuated by "a giving which gives beyond itself, which is a little blind and does not see where it is going" (DERRIDA; DUFOURMANTELLE, A., 2000, p. 112), by being led at times by a "not-knowing". Or on the contrary, interventions emerge in the form of provocations or deviations towards other paths or practices.

A diversion of this kind occurs literally within the body. The invitation to assume an upside-down position introduced straight after all the participants had assumed a comfortable role at the table is a shift of this kind. A shift in a practice. Here, such mediation between practices advances non-evident kinds of understandings and alternative ways of accessing knowledge often disregarded in the Western archive (SCHNEIDER, 2011, pp. 99-102). If that had been signaled already through these various devices (lectern, image projected, white board facing backwards to the audience seats) now performers were invited to bring themselves into new roles, imagine or experience what these can be.

The difficulty in assuming such positioning or the instability of experiencing verticality and gravity exposes the body into an unstable positioning, one where how one sees things is radically different. Not only does this position exposes the body into an unstable disposition where gravity and verticality are radically different, it sets the participants into arrangement(s), distribution(s) and sightings of a totally distinct order. To adopt a more fragile unknown positioning is way of opening up other ways of knowing and avoid normative formations.

In this respect, to “take away the ground”, to literally materialize this position within bodies, is also an invitation to realize the discomfort or unfamiliarity of such formation just as the first image of the world upside down or the horizontally placed lectern where the director of the museum and previous speakers had been speaking into an inclined auditorium. Such a proposal was verbally introduced by me through the following lines: “I would like to invite you before we continue with our table that we find a place in the room to find this position. What type of associations emerge from experiencing the world upside down?” (GALA, 2019b, 00:05:52-00:08:34)



FIGURE 12 – Gomes, S. (2019) Table for Upside Down Practices. Multi Use Room, Museum of Modern Art Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation [Photograph]

The various cues in the form of body propositions, cards, things upside down in the room and rhizomes play an important role in opening space for other ways of knowing. They prioritize sampling, assemblage, embodied positionings and impressions verbally expressed or propelled by the degustation of an aromatic rhizome as privileged modes for knowing.

In doing so, they foster a distinct form of care: a demand for attending to a network of practices and senses. But as importantly, its manifestation(s) is/are also diverse in form, content and matter. Hence, its performance making demands a constant mediation from all participants. Such attendance is not dissimilar to that of a gardener in a continuous process of mediation.

As a gardener one is always in a continuous process of mediation. This kind of ‘making’ is one that demands learning to listen, ability to read what the table or the moment requires. Just as in a garden where there is a constant process of back and forward, between attending to human needs or desires, and those of the plants. Here, the mediation is between different worlds, practices, performances. Glancing at the image of the cardboard cards (GOMES, 2019) dispersed on the table one cannot avert thinking of Glissant’s idea of the “Creole Garden”

(Edouard Glissant: *One World in Relation*, 2010). As a network of practices, the performance resembles the garden in the sense that various positionings in the form of a multiplicity of practices, modes of expression, and cultivated silences, are articulated and constantly in the making. Glissant's "Creole Garden" refers to small clandestine gardens created by slaves on their own initiative away from the enslaved work as a source of nutrition. These arrangements were cultivated and tended in such a way that dozens of different trees and scents mutually protected one another.

In the garden, subterranean roots interconnect, mix and help each other. The *Table for Upside Down Practices* emulates this idea in its multiple calls for tending to a network of distinct practices and knowledges. It opens up the possibility of "difference without separability" (SILVA, 2016), just like the position of 'upside down' in that it articulates within itself a relation between quite distinct forces ideas – 'the up', 'the down' – inseparable within the same plenum and in relation. The idea of a difference through exchange without losing oneself. Such cohabitation of practices calls for articulations of various orders of the visual, oral, bodily, smell, colour, tactile or even taste. But this also implies a mingling of distinct timings that cohabit side by side.

American anthropologist Anna Tsing speaks of a "polyphonic assemblage" where multiple rhythms cohabit side by side to describe a cultivation process that contrasts with that of commercial farming. There, different plants grow together within distinct timings creating "world-making projects, human and not human" (TSING, 2015, p. 24). It is also this non-synchronous temporality that opens up the possibility of generative encounters, in one experience where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension.



FIGURE 13 – Gomes, S. (2019) Table for Upside Down Practices. Multi Use Room, Museum of Modern Art Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation [Photograph]

Here, ginger root plays an important role at the table. It is placed on the table bare or peeled cut in small pieces ready to be tasted, releasing its aroma. It is a minor but an important detail. When unpeeled its colour is not dissimilar to the cardboard pieces lying on the table. Its fragrance is mainly due to gingerols which are one of its components.

Ginger's origins can be traced to the island region of Southeast Asia. According to Chinese and American biologists Zizang Dong and Ann Bode (2011, p. 132) ginger has been produced and used in the treatment of several conditions in India and China for over 5000 years. From India, it was carried by traders into the Middle East and the Mediterranean from around the 1st century CE. By the sixth century, ginger was widely used in Morocco and Andalusia. According to American Lebanese ethnobotanist Gary Paul Nabhan (2014, p. 155) in the 13th century, ginger entered trade networks through "Arabian ships that carried the rhizomes or the potted plants into the east coast of Africa reaching Zanzibar" and later Madagascar.

Ginger has been used as an aromatizing agent “long before history was formally recorded” (DONG; BONDE, 2011, p. 132). Like many medicinal herbs, knowledge of its healing properties has been orally transmitted. The first written Chinese record on ginger, dated c. 500 BCE, is attributed to Chinese philosopher Confucius. In the Analects (Confucius 10:8, p. 68) ginger is mentioned in the section related to dieting, providing details of its usage and warnings on its excessive consumption.

Famed for its several medicinal properties in treating asthma, nausea, and the teeth, it appears that gingerol is the primary component responsible for these beneficial effects. Its “in vitro antioxidant” (DONG; BONDE, 2011, p. 135) properties suggest a possible role in the prevention of the deterioration of cells caused by free radicals, the molecules produced by the body as a reaction to environmental stress and other strains.

Ginger is a sialogogue; in other words, it stimulates the salivary gland, inducing the production of saliva with its antibacterial properties. As a sialogogue it is known for its anti-bactericidal and anti-inflammatory properties protecting the teeth and preventing enamel demineralization. In Angola it is also chewed for its stimulating cognitive properties. I was myself introduced to this practice by my father in our long nights playing chess in Luanda. In the session at the Gulbenkian museum this was proposed to the participants. Ginger’s reputation as cognitive stimulant, as a detoxifying and restorative agent is another reason for its presence at the table. It operates as an emergency kit, indispensable in a gathering that invites dissensus. The rhizome which is the stem of the plant that grows horizontally under the ground producing roots is the major part that is ingested.

But perhaps the most unusual thing about ginger and another reason for its participation at the table is its actual origins. These are uncertain, by this I mean that ginger ‘does not grow wild’ so its ‘becomings’ are unknown. Its existence attests to and is a manifestation of the entangled lives of human and non-human, suggesting perhaps (un)intentional human selection. As such, it blurs the dichotomy between the artificial and the natural. Ginger’s presence bears witness to how biological and environmental change, techniques and practices, anthropological trajectories and sociocultural choices are inseparably linked. The complex entanglements of its becomings remain obscure until this day.¹

1 The complex (non-human-human) entanglements of ginger’s becomings seem to defy the botanical binary taxonomy categorization of “indigens-cultigens”. For some under this binary ginger would be a cultigen, a plant altered by humans. One can trace the origins of this type of taxonomy to the division between Culture and Nature that Moore (2015, pp. 17, 18) refers to. However, the opacity surrounding its venerable ancient longstanding cultivation practices and processes defies such categorizations.

Ginger is opaque both in its process of coming to existence but also as rhizome. It is a subterranean plant in a plurality of senses; its becoming is opaque and its existence rhizomatic. Additionally, ginger's medicinal restorative healing capacities are inseparable from all the other food intake. Dong and Bode (2011, p. 147) note that gingerols or any other ginger components operate in inter-reactivity to or dependency on any other food sources to induce their positive effects, and that without relation their benefits are unsubstantiated. It brings to the table a distinct rhythm, a secret delicate note. As a root it inter-connects many of the concerns performed at the table, functioning as an opaque subterranean presence operating at many orders. It performs an opaque infiltration, in many respects unresolved.

Only through an encounter where mixed-up contamination is performed, "new directions may emerge" (TSING, 2015, p. 25). This aspect is suggested in the initial moments by the host; by manifesting that my articulations would be done in an in-between language (between Portuguese and English) as this was the language, I expressed myself in: "my first language is Portuguese but right now I might be able to speak more one language than other and I mix them all" (GALA, 2019b, p. 00:13:32). At this very moment a refusal of fixity is suggested. Better yet, this hints at the possibility of a language 'in becoming', in formation undergoing training, unassembled; a language in the making as the table itself. Together with 'being upside down', both devices propose that "we release thinking from the grip of certainty and embrace the imagination's power to create with unclear and confused, or uncertain impressions" (SILVA, 2016). Both express a refusal for fixity, drawing on diverse ways of doing. Both gesture towards the prioritization of multiplicity to the detriment of stable 'universals'. As Tsing says, "everyone carries a history of contamination; purity is not an option" (TSING, 2015, p. 25). This suggests that even before this encounter, we are mixed up with others but more, that the diversity amongst all the participants human, non-human, and extra human, emerges from histories of empire and the annihilation of human and non-human populations, imperialism, extermination and exploitation.

In addition, contrary to what many artists might believe, we are all mixed up with projects with damaging effects and often reinforcing the normative power of performance.

The *Table for Upside Down Practices* (GALA et.al, 2019a) is not so pre-determined as it is composed of questions or tasks to which participants respond in real time it; is a call and response principle beyond conversation that guides the performance. Indeterminacy is the underlying principle along which the table moves.

However, to withstand unexpectedness, volatility, incompatibility, disturbance and non-simultaneity, without intentionally directing the ground according to a model, and materially shaping it, is extremely challenging. Should under any circumstances the ‘master of the house’ role reappear enacted by the proponent of the event? It is all too easy for normativity to slip back, be it in the form of performativities that have the desire to shut out multiplicity and distinct forms of expression – as one participant mentioned (GALA, 2019b, 00:33:16-00:35:02) – or other blurred unrecognizable forms. If the principle of multiplicity is to guide us perhaps other diversions and experiments of differing natures need to have their operability rethought.

Paths into these diversions need to be opened, in similar ways to the darkly lit initial corridor into the performative space at the opening or the detox emergency kit box. These are vital to reorient attention(s).

Interruptions by bringing attention to particular non-human presences or even slight changes in the room such as alterations in light might provide other generative contaminations and guide us through a shared training that is intensely bound up with the emergence of difference. For instance, the darkness installed during the viewing of a video could have been maintained or reinstalled in other occasions.

This being said, the non-determinacy given to the participants, the call and response in real time should remain the driving principles of the performance. This should be done in distinct appropriate ways – taking into consideration the variety of non-human ‘more than human’ natures at the table is the challenge. “Patterns of unintentional coordination develop assemblages” (TSING, 2015, p. 23); the mastering and fostering of the (un)intentional should be pursued. Such attending might demand from the proponent of the event a strategy to bring attention to particular non-human presences (scenographic element inside of which various objects are placed, lectern, unpeeled ginger, white board) in the room through

other call and response games inviting a dialogue with the participants. This is done by maintaining the door open to the emergence of difference and dissensus, and the choices given to the participants is the main task. Participants thereby liberate themselves of the idea of attending to 'other' as singular presence and attend this event as a rich web of practices inseparable in their multiplicity, inseparable from the opacity they emerge from.

The "creative, productive play—of science, as well as emerging ecologies, happens in patches" (TSING, 2015, p. 227). It is in the attending of these patches that new assemblages and relations are made. Yet, this demands an extremely attentive involvement from the original proponent of the event and the participants. But above all this offers a distinct path towards multiplicity and its distribution. To follow, to stay with this principle, to stay with this trouble means to avoid the trap of a universal horizon. It is a call to look at difference differently, one that perhaps makes players aware of their role in the construction of (an) upside-down practice(s). Additionally, it makes one aware of its particular positionings and surrounding opacities.

In doing so, it is necessary to pay attention to the trajectory through which disturbance emerges "as disturbance matters in relation to the way we live" (TSING, 2015, p. 161). Incompatibility or dissensus in the form of disturbance brings much needed multiplicity of voices and experiences; however, this requires "awareness of the observer's perspective" (TSING, 2015, p. 161). For instance, silences come in many forms, hearing them and realizing what relations of discomfort they might produce is vital.

Disturbances emerge in various dispositions, orders, states and expressions. Inscrutable, inaccessible silences, habitual roles and patterns of domination or performances towards the universal are some configurations that surfaced in this shared performance. Attendance is also care. What articulations or performances are chosen to be attended? What traps and roles and performances are to be avoided? Which disturbances should go unattended, avoided and deviated from or on the contrary followed? To be attentive and foster a multiplicity of voices that are often not heard. Here, it is the principle of multiplicity that such gardening should favour. It is perhaps only its repeated training that will enable the cultivation of such a multitude.



FIGURE 14 – Gomes, S. (2019) Table for Upside Down Practices. Multi Use Room, Museum of Modern Art Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation [Photograph]

The bringing to the table by the curator of the museum of a microphone at the end of the event (which was not part of my initial instructions of the table) is an interesting element rightly noted by some participants. It is only because such a device was not there during most of the conversations that it was noted. And yet it demonstrated that certain performativities are ingrained and that an awareness of them through hearing can be developed is of utmost importance.

From this perspective, the conversational performance can be seen as an open-ended training to bring into operation a multitude of positionings towards new futurities. On another note, this encounter is also a ‘demonumentalizing’ move regarding knowledge(s).

Firstly, it brings to the forefront practices and knowledges (conversation, medicinal agents, sialogogue, everyday practices, ginger, other unexpected vernacular knowledges) often disregarded and rarely featured in the Western archive. Secondly, by doing so through conversation (an important, often ignored trait of dance practice) it privileges contamination and refusal of the universal as modes of knowledge making. As Tsing (2015, p. 218) points, there is little attention paid to “messy process of translation as jarring juxtaposition

and miscommunication” in knowledge making. I would also add that there is little attention paid to the particularities of the choreographic when it comes to discourse about dance making. Its opaque transmissions, hospitable contaminations, mistranslations occurring through conversation, interrupted silences are frequently avoided, if not altogether rejected from the Western edifice of knowledge. Most focus on its productivity and operativity. As a shared training, the conversational table is grounded in a belief that it is only through contamination that transformative encounters are performed, and new directions may emerge.

Attending this event as a prolific constellation of practices inseparable in their multiplicity, inextricable from the opacity they emerge from, disturbs the habitual orderly patterns of attendance, and thereby opens space for redefining other modes of doing and seeing without necessarily finding a consensus. It shifts the ground, signaling ways into the opaque and sets terms into other ways of doing that include assemblage, embodied positionings, or verbally expressed impressions caused by degustation of an aromatic rhizome.

By refusing the use of a lectern, by intervening in an institutionalized space with conversation and a shared training, I am gesturing towards the conversational as performative. Doing so in contexts dominated by written knowledges and modernity’s performative formats often manifested in attending to ‘other’ as a singular presence under particular formats the ‘dance-performance’ solo in an auditorium or proscenium is also a de-monumentalizing task. Such a task, as Santos (2018, p. 187) affirms: “is a precondition for opening argumentative spaces where other ways of knowing may be able to show their possible contribution to a more diverse and profound understanding of the world”.

My choice for conversation, for orature is an intentional one, as Santos also warns, “scientific knowledge abhors oralization” (SANTOS, 2018, p. 186). It is also often the case with dance discourses, the disregarding of oral aspects, opaque messy processes that the choreographic goes through are rarely mentioned, performed, approached or altogether acknowledged as vital in knowledge making.



FIGURE 15 – Gomes, S. (2019) Table Upside Down Practices. Multi Use Room, Museum of Modern Art Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation [Photograph]

This is a preference for oralization over reading a written paper and in detriment to a performance with a univocal attendance to a singular presence. Moreover, instead of proposing a practice separated from non-methodical processes and contaminations the choice follows dance's inherently messy intricate dimension. Here, the interest is more in what choreographic performance does, what it performs in performing. It is an invitation to a performative choreographic encounter where the focus is on “what it does and how it does what it does” (SANTOS, 2018, p. 189). The conversational table does this by focusing on doing the work itself, performing it during the encounter. In other terms, at the table the emphasis is on how such knowledges are put to work during the encounter.

Following the subterranean rhizome can lead us to many of these entangled assemblages where human-non-human, capitalism, colonialism and erased performativities are intertwined. Moreover, as Tsing (2015, p. 220) notes, lively and productive spaces are opened in the “dialogue between the vernacular and the expert knowledge”. To perform it inside institutions marked by modernity has been my intention from the beginning. Such a move points to the significance of these particular training(s) and the distinct nature of such knowledges both in their non-methodical routes and in their inextricable links to the opaque.

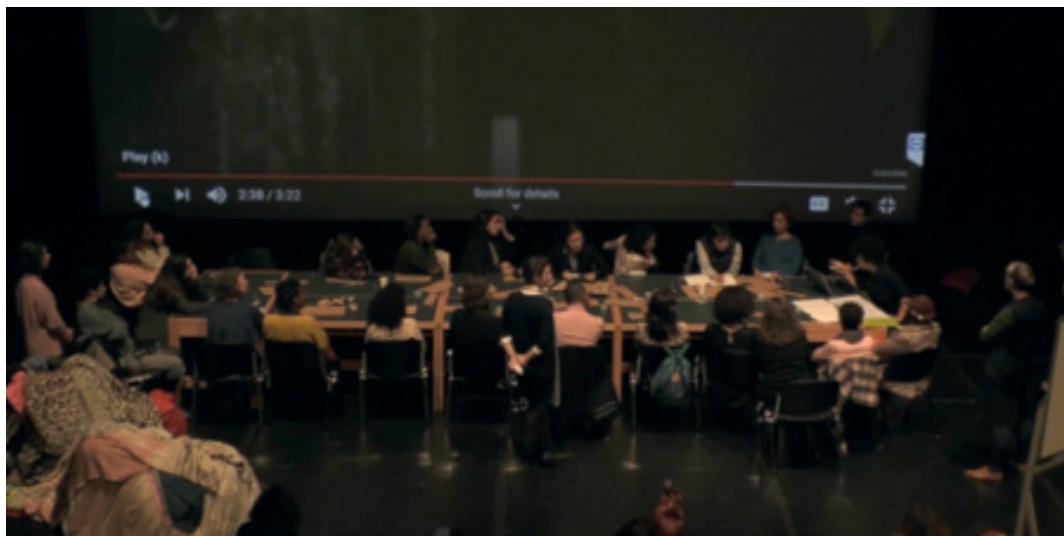


FIGURE 16 – Gomes, S. (2019) Table for Upside Down Practices. Multi Use Room, Museum of Modern Art Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation [Photograph]

Here, I stress that even within culture there is a pervasive pattern intimately linked to modernity where particular aspects of ‘culture’, culture that is around us, are ignored or not taken into consideration to be performed (as I mentioned in the beginning of this section). That these messed-up worlds are equally significant in the making of culture and open choreography to other performativities and possibilities is a significant aspect of this table. As Haraway points out, fabulation and storytelling i.e., “thinking with”, are essential for “tentacular thinking” (2016). In tracing the etymology of the word tentacular Haraway suggests that it is also ‘to feel’ and ‘to try’, implying the making of unexpected “attachments and detachments” (2016, p. 31), not only knots but also cuts. But at the heart of “tentacular thinking” (HARAWAY, 2016) is the idea of thought built collectively through storytelling, fact telling and confounded unknowns. What is suggested are ways of knowing that unfold from the unknowns that might have been told but are still to come. Haraway’s tentacularity suggests an – activated storytelling – a collective knowing and doing that entails invention, nurture and a multitude of practices of improvising together ways of “living and dying well with each other” (2016, p.29). This implies the rehearsing of a “response-ability” (2016, p. 34). As noted by Haraway, it is a mode of “thinking with a host of companions” (2016, p.31). With this, I want to suggest that the table advances through patternings drawn by the participants following trajectories, lines and networks shaped collectively.

The museum of Calouste Gulbenkian is the main and the oldest institution dealing with contemporary art in Portugal. This refusal to perform or ‘make the stage’ in a

particular way by using an encounter where conversation is central and by turning the performative space upside down runs against the expected performances in a contemporary museum. In assuming a 'non-performativity', a refusal of expected 'performances', it questions the alleged openness of the museum to other presences, alternative or divergent approaches into the performative.

As a result, this shared encounter performs conflicting positionings, silences, ignored practices found at the intersections between the vernacular and knowledge formation and human non-human entanglements. It is within this shared opaque sensibility that the political potential of other possible choreographies emerges.



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