



Maica Gugolati

A con-versation¹ between Alice Yard and Beta-Local

This article is about a discussion between two art communities in the Caribbean region: Alice Yard, in Trinidad and Tobago, and Beta-Local, in Puerto Rico. The focus of this contribution is to recover a past conversation between the two entities that was interrupted due to the first wave of COVID-19 in the USA in 2020. At that time the directors of Alice Yard were invited by Beta-Local to start a trans-Caribbean exchange. Thanks to this publication, I aimed to digitally restart that interrupted discussion: what if the pandemic had never happened? However, this question is formulated in a past conditional; the two art centers had to face Covid related restrictions that maybe pushed them toward different approaches to their communitarian ways of collaborating locally and trans-nationally. Therefore, I opted to change the main question accompanying the exchange to: how can this Conversation continue and be enriched nowadays?

The Zoom meeting was with the artist Christopher Cozier, one of the three co-directors of Alice Yard, the artist Sofía Gallisá Muriente, who finished the direction of Beta-Local during the pandemic, and the artist Pablo Guardiola, one of the current co-directors of Beta-Local.

¹In the course of the article, will be explained the usage of the word and concept of conversation, or “Con-Versation”, will be explained, as a type of sociality that provides creation while sharing actions and critical discourse together in specific ways.

The online exchange took a philosophical turn into a shared brainstorming on the concepts and practices of what it means to have or create a “conversation” between them. I decided therefore to preserve this dialogue format in the text, trying to analyze the main axes of the oral sharing while maintaining some of the jargon and expressions used.

The two art centers, Alice Yard and Beta-Local came into contact in 2015 when the artists Sofía Gallisá Muriente and Christopher Cozier met at TEOR/ética art center in Costa Rica. After this encounter Sofía was invited to participate in the Alice Yard art residency in Trinidad and Tobago, and following that experience, all the team was invited to Puerto Rico in 2020 for an institutional residency, which the first one launched by Beta-Local. During the online conversation the artist Christopher Cozier evoked a secular practice of pan-Caribbean exchanges among art practitioners; he recalled a random archival black and white photo from the 1950s he came across, of dancers and visual artists at the Piarco airport in Trinidad who were heading to Puerto Rico. Like this piece of historical archive, this online chat functioned as a swift connection in time and space, in an almost surreal global post-pandemic online journey, where we met in front of four screens based in Trinidad, Puerto Rico, New York, and London.

The two entities

Alice Yard in Trinidad is a contemporary art space and no-profit organization based at the end of January 2020 at Granderson Lab, in Belmont, Trinidad. It is administered by architect Sean Leonard, artist Christopher Cozier, writer and editor Nicholas Laughlin, and designer Kriston Chen. It is an independent institution that fiercely avoids any permanent funding arrangements. The space is conceived as a platform for experimentation and as an incubator for younger artists.

Trinidad and Tobago is a Caribbean country that gained independence from the formal colonizer the UK in 1962. Its coasts are a few miles from those of Venezuela, across the Gulf of Paria. The twin island republic’s economy, unlike that of most Caribbean nations and territories which rely on tourism, is primarily industrial, with an emphasis on reserves of oil and natural gas.

Beta-Local, based in San Juan, Puerto Rico, is an art no profit organization and a working group, with a system of rotating co-directors, hybrid in its composition and organization. It is a space for critical discussion, with a study and production program, an experimental education project. Beta-Local is today codirected by artists Nibia Pastrana Santiago, Pablo Guardiola and Michael Linares.

Historically the Caribbean Island of Puerto Rico links back to the USA from the Spanish American War in 1898 when the island was contended by its former ruler, Spain, to the USA. In 1952 Puerto Rico became an Estado Libre Asociado, Free Associated State, which defines it as a territory belonging to the USA but not part of the USA. Puerto Ricans therefore are US citizens lacking voting rights in US elections or any votes in Congress.

The Con-Versation

Pablo Guardiola:

Beta-Local has a big interest in building dialogue with the Caribbean, which is really difficult and, [*sound of exasperation*] complicated. I think also part of the complexity of that, is that in the Caribbean among its many fragmentations, there's also the fragmentation of language.

The artist Pablo Guardiola introduces one of the issues they face when wishing to have a conversation among different parts of the Caribbean region: its polyglossia. Due to the fragmentation of the region among historical imperialist colonial pasts and trades, the art director shares a conflicted feeling about linguistic limitations that illustrates a tendency toward endogamous relationships even in artistic exchanges.

Pablo:

We want to keep having the same structure of how we relate to other people, in particular with the rest of the Caribbean. It's kind of like an interest that goes from reading more literature and theories from the Caribbean, but then also having direct dialogues and conversations. But something that it's kind of like... [*Pablo takes a pause of reflection*] it takes time... But when Sofía was in Costa Rica and met Chris, they suddenly had a direct bond. After that also other people from Trinidad associated to Alice Yard had visited Puerto Rico through these different programs related to Beta-Local and it's almost a spirit of wanting to have direct interaction with our fellows in the region. [...] When we [*Beta-Local directors*] talk about art institutions, we're interested in [the] full spectrum

of them. We're highly critical of what is behind an artist organization, an artist's own space and art institutions in general.

Pablo Guardiola introduces a common issue in the Caribbean region, and Caribbean studies, that can limit the idea of a united pan-Caribbean sharing. Even critical essays on Caribbean culture, anthropological and sociological writings, depend on a system of official translation that can limit accessibility due to the diverse polyglossia of the region. According to my expertise in the field as well, many of the academic contributions become inaccessible due to their language publications and editorial networking and distribution. The Caribbean is a complex region made up of postindustrial plural societies that for the Cuban writer Benitez-Rojo are polyrhythmic (2001). With this term he describes each Caribbean country as having a central rhythm displaced by other rhythms in such a way as to merge into a state of flux. The archipelagos express a pluriversality of varied cosmogonies that are interconnected.

Pablo introduced a detail that points out a peculiar way of connecting among colleagues; he described the link between the artists Sofia and Christopher as a "direct bond" that allowed a long-term conversation to take place.

The term "conversation", etymologically from Latin: cum-versare, links the act of turning (versare), with, together (cum). More generally, it evokes the act of dwelling in company with, where human beings find themselves when together. Inspired by its etymology, I argue that Alice Yard and Beta-Local started a "Con-Versation" as an artistic and communitarian practice.

The Con-Versation, rather than being trapped in an incomprehensible crisscrossing of multiple languages, finds a peaceful mediated space in its shared creole registers.

Christopher Cozier:

One of the things that Sofia said to me [*when she was in Trinidad at Alice Yard*], was about being in an English-speaking space that was not hierarchical and hegemonic because the relationship for Puerto Rico to English is usually through the United States. So, to find herself in a fellow colonized location where English is the dominant language, but not formal English, but Creole English. There were certain evocative resonances in terms of the kind of Creole Spanish that you all speak and the kind of Creole English that we speak, and you're finding these weird affinities [...]. There's of way where curatorial

practices and institutional interfaces that we face, may miss this longstanding connections it's always in the present tense, it's always at that moment of exchange.

The artist Christopher Cozier emphasizes the fact that Con-Versation had the power to displace the historical established relations of imperialism and hierarchies, thanks to the act of exchanging and working in a plural region with shared experience of a system of exploitation and systematic dominance. The artist Sofía Gallisá Muriente was interested in the fact of working in an environment where English is spoken in a creolized way that does not relate to the neocolonial language, American English, that the Spanish of Puerto Rico normally relates to.

Language is not the only factor that allows the Con-Versation to take place. Even though many islands have a different predominant language that provides a sense of separation and isolation, all those places are historically and contemporarily ports that symbolize a path of communication, exchange, compromise, and trades between them. Along with this image of the island as a place for exchange, in Con-Versation are found shared vernacular expressions, common behaviors, and performative ways of storytelling, that include physical and nonverbal communication and colloquial mannerisms.

The Con-Versation in the Caribbean archipelago, therefore, can allow people to create shareable "situated knowledge" that can defy the sense of dominant hierarchy in the name of a relatable sociality. I use the term "situated knowledge" following the feminist philosopher of science Donna Haraway (1988), who defined it as a means of understanding that all knowledge comes from positional perspectives. This knowledge, while in Con-Versation, shares a kind of rhetorical mode of Caribbean discourse (Browne 2013): for example, code switching of oral and textual deployment of multiple linguistic registers, wordplay, such as innuendos and exclamatory idiophones, and nonverbal and visual semantics.

Christopher

We share an evocative language because actually in the zone of the visual, there is sometimes, a possible common language. Because I think, critically, if we tried to kind of create a historiography of "we-have-it-here-too" in relation to say, the Euro-American traditional art narrative, where we kind of insert or include our practices, we end up in a weird zone. And it comes back to this

problem of the juncture of exchange, you know? But there's something in all our respective practices. Whether we do understand the language or the symbols or not- these are the affinities I was thinking about.

This common nonlinguistic language Christopher Cozier mentioned is created and discovered through the act of sharing actions and time that go beyond the art projects themselves. It is found through the sharing of an intimate communication of ordinary localized actions, such as sharing recipes or spending regular time together for example, which allow the People of the Sea, as Benítez-Rojo calls the pan-Caribbean population (2001:295) to establish relations among themselves (Glissant 2009).

Christopher

... we really just have to have these conversations [*like the one we were having*], I don't mean in a kind of exotic, kind of folkloric way, you know, it's not about nostalgia. It's about sharing and seeing what we know compared to or as opposed to all we know. I think that's a question that keeps coming up. And between ourselves, not for cultural display, nor as exotic performativity.

Sofía

Absolutely. It's also about just spending time with each other, spending time in these places until they become a little less foreign... [*Sofía talks about the Walking Seminars were made and their methodologies*] Let's just walk and spend time, you know, slowly let's do it. Let's do this thing of just, covering a certain part of the island but let's do it slowly, so we can observe. So that we can just spend time talking to each other. I think that the small moments that are about kind of like finding cultural connection or resonances can be really simple and certainly sound a little tropical.

What Sofía is introducing is the preciousness of the perception and ways of occupying and sharing time together. The time sharing defies the productive capitalistic tryptic of time-money-production. This capitalistic way of considering time and production is what Christopher later calls “the engine,” referring to the genesis of the modern Caribbean societies and their link with the Plantationocene² and neocapitalism. The concept of modernity is linked to that of nationhood and the sublimity of the new (Kapur 1993) with a notional idea of peoples' national “authentic” culture. In the Caribbean, it holds a tragic inheritance determined by two historical moments (Scott 2004): of extermination, and of the capitalist plantation economy and the formation of

² The term Plantationocene, unlike the term Anthropocene, puts colonialism, plantation capitalism, and its correlated historical racial and coloristic hierarchies at the center of the human impact on the earth.

plantation societies (Best 2001); all the while economically “bridging” the “New World” with the “Old” one.

Shared gestures, a creolized vernacular modus operandi discovered while sharing, provides an ongoing innovation and inspiration that I would, inspired by Glissant (2009) define as an aesthetic of *Archipelagic sociality*.

Christopher

[this way of occupying time] it's not seen as work because it's not work that serves the engine. [...] If you think just in terms of the Caribbean at large, it was part of a machine that's broken down. When people talk about the Anthropocene or the Plantatiocene, it began long before we came into existence as states, but we're in the engine. [However, there are] kind of moments of idling and these behaviors that happened in spaces between plantations or between the engines, the injured in the crevices or the spaces between the engine, whether it is moving fast or slow, are celebratory spaces that we need to, acknowledge, and place a value [on] because they're keeping us sane as opposed to jumping in, back into the engine and because when we jump into the engine, we tend to lose. And then we feel like we're being proactive, and I mean I'm not coming up with some romances, [but] I feel that's the zone where we meet-an out here or there off plant. [...] I mean a kind of reconstruction of ourselves because that's what's at stake in the region. To invent a new self. Because the things we withdraw to, they fragment us regionally, but they fragment us within and we're not able to find all the possible ways that we are. From complexion to ethnicity to sexuality, so the work or the business of the artist in the crevices between the engine, it's a fascinating zone... it's kinda scary actually but good; good scary, messy and good.

This “engine” has, however, a double-edged power. In the case of Beta-Local, after Hurricane Maria in 2017 the island gained visibility and received numerous of national supports that created possibilities for further investment, like being able to invite the entire team of Alice Yard to Beta-Local.

Sofía

Being able to afford to idle and work slowly which, I think, goes to the point of also to the contrast between an organization like Beta-Local and an organization like Alice Yard. ... [Paradoxically] the hurricane Maria gave visibility to Puerto Rico, and that's something that Beta-Local has had to contend with in all sorts of ways ... that visibility has become an issue, right? But it's also become an opportunity in terms of funding for an arts organization. Suddenly, you know, the organization grew in all sorts of ways because there was this kind of philanthropic bubble, brought on by disaster. [...] We suddenly were able to afford, for example, to bring the four directors of Alice Yard, which in our past economic reality would not have been an option. So, that visibility and

resources that came with it have also provoked a lot of thinking about how we can use this to create the kind of spaces that we need and, in part afford in some ways to be slow with certain projects like the employee handbook for example, which is a publication that has been in the works for years or, just spend time with people and not necessarily force the production of something.

Art spaces are always at risk of becoming an alibi for a neo-liberal cultural policy which precisely favors privatization and export-orientation. With the lack of strong cultural institutions and independent art centers in their respective countries, the independent institutions become repositories of knowledge and connections for the region. They paradoxically end up by embodying a chimeric space of anti-establishment and establishment (Hadchity 2019) simultaneously, attracting attention and recognition globally while maintaining a local sense of ambiguity.

Christopher

It has been one of the accusations against Alice Yard in the sense that even though we lack ambition, in terms of running down state funding or international grant funding, and we have tried to do what we can with what we have, there's also a rumor that, oh well, we can afford to do this, that this because of some mysterious hidden hand, in our lives. [...] And then at the other hand, there's some people that see us as conduits for neo-liberal enterprises abroad that are trying to insert themselves into the narrative. [...] I mean this is a funny week for us, you know, with the kind of documenta³ conversation because [...] it's deeply ironic because we haven't had state nor private sector funding and we can barely respond to the question that's been asked of us by an institution of that scale, you know, on a global level.

Sofía

Yeah. That's the economy we're operating in too. Not only the economy of foundation grants.

At this stage of the Con-Versation the question of the complications caused by Covid started to come into the exchange. Covid restrictions were applied differently in the two countries: Trinidad and Tobago was in a long period of lockdown and curfew, closing the borders to foreigners, while Puerto Rico had a local lockdown but was still open to tourists from the US.

Pablo

It took us forever to start doing some things and we started to do really slow. We kind of like slow down and didn't jump to these digital worlds, like everyone was doing. We wanted to be sensible with that content but also, we

³ documenta is an exhibition of contemporary art that takes place in Kassel, Germany, every five years. The art center Alice Yard is part of documenta-fifteen, 2022.

wanted to pay the people that we were supposed to be working with. Like all the workshops, seminars. So, we shifted that to commissioning pieces, writing pieces, art pieces that live on our social media, but in a really slow pace. We even did a seminar, a drawing seminar that Tony was gonna give that changed and it was all made in email exchanges. [...] And for us it was important to, like Sofía said to kind of take time, to kind of go back to the shadows. But keep some of the things working because we didn't want to leave people behind.

The Covid “survival modalities” did not fully destabilize the modus operandi of the two art centers. During the Con-Versation a sense of tropicality became apparent, where delays, last-minute changes, sketched plans and precarity toward external environmental phenomena have always offered a learning process of changing programs and plans. The discussion revealed the sense of mutual affection between the macro and micro world, between the biological environment of the Caribbean and the people and their modus operandi.

The artist Sofía Gallisá Muriente states in *Celaje (fragment)* (Vimeo link 0:57 min): “El Trópico devora la idea de progreso”: The tropic eats up the idea of progress. Biologically speaking, in the tropics, the effects of higher temperatures cause faster rates of evolution, and faster ways of decomposition (Brown 2014). Species in the region, while sharing resources are in a never-ending struggle for a position among one another. This can be called a “tropicality” of excess that does not allow any state of permanence, but on the contrary, forces a constant state of change. Following Sofía's statement, the powerful biological constant changeability of the tropics provides an environmental and ideological resistance to the sense of linearity of “progress”. Slowness, unpredictability, a sense of sensorial overwhelm and the impossibility of planning rigidly in the long term are some of the common conditions between the biology of tropical places and the manner of survival of their human beings. Summarizing the Con-Versation, the phenomena of Covid-19 did not shake the basis of life in those territories. On the contrary, the forced “worldwide slow motion” Covid is interpreted as a kind of worldwide tropical status quo.

Christopher

We are accustomed of living precarious lives. I remember going back to visit Beta-Local; when I was getting out of the bus at the airport I cracked my phone screen. And just replacing a phone screen, a cheap phone screen, is a big adventure that takes days and negotiation. But that's the kind of the normal of the lives that we live in, so even though Covid slows us down, inconveniences

us and creates all kinds of chaos, but out here on the rest of the planet, there are a sequence of expectations are not part of our daily reality [...] So, the Covid thing really, just like the slow-motion idea of the engine, as horrible as it is, it's actually a kind of normal that we know. In our sort of general lives. But crystalized. That's why I said the engine speeds up or slows down in different locations. I think this is a really weird moment but, in some ways, people might look to our societies too, because I don't see anybody here anxious to return to normal. What's the normal? Where's this normal that we have to return to? It's more about learning from how we've always survived with yet another new challenge.

The slow motion that Covid imposed is in reality a methodology or relationship and professional tool that can be used in order to create and share. It allows a kind of sociality that in Trinidad can be defined as a "liming". Liming is a social collective performance (Hylland Eriksen 1990) of spontaneity and unorganized; a kind of "Communitas" (Turner 1969) action that functions as a liminal revolt against the sense of hierarchy, order, authority of the society. It provides a space of assembly, that evokes the principles of the art centers.

Sofía

You're building space within the work to build relationships. You build relationships with peers and people that you want to build intimacy with, you know, like between Beta-Local and Alice Yard, right. You're not inviting people to come only to work but to build relationships, to build intimacy, to build connections.

The classical Homo Faber and Homo Sacer collude in this relational space made within the Con-Versation, together with the Homo Ludens (Callois 1958), where the mundane and leisure become a kind of embodied "life extempo" of everyday life. The ludic human defeats the neoliberal sense of the "engine", as productive time ready for consumption, removing the escapism sense of leisure as entertainment, returning to it the sense of liberation (Lefebvre 2002).

Both the art centers are willing through Con-Versation to create a space of possibilities; what Lloyd Best called the space of the carnivalesque (1999), where creativity and exchange don't simulate power (Butler 1992) but re-fabulate it.

This Con-Versational space therefore is collective and allows the human beings to create a sociogeny that shapes the individual ontogeny (Wynter 1989).

Art centers as Con-Versation. A Space or a Place?

Christopher

I think what Alice Yard has had to come to terms with is we started as a location, and then we weren't just a location, but we were a conversation. And so, when the first place that we were in, Woodbrook, when it became untenable for us to remain there because it's a shared family-owned space, we just walked across to this other space which we were using all along but, but that wasn't like our front room, that wasn't a living room. That space was more private, things were happening quietly there, more process related things. But every time you move, you learn something new. The space in Woodbrook where we worked for the majority of our existence, was a community that was under siege. It was, it was dying in terms of it being a domestic area and it was turning into offices, and you know, and clubs and bars and you know, things like that. So, the last set of residents living in that community felt besieged, and there was that kind of tension developing between us and them because they were worried that we were another mechanism. Even though they were entertained by some of the events, the artistic practices that were taking shape there, they were always worried and looking and concerned that these things would disturb them or disturb the life that they're losing.

For Christopher Cozier, Alice Yard started to evolve from a physical place, into a more conceptual space and more of a *modus operandi*. According to De Certeau (1984), a place is an instantaneous configuration of positions that implies an indication of stability. On the contrary, a space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. In relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, in actualization and situated as the act of the present. While moving to another neighborhood, Alice Yard kept its identity as a process of Con-Versation.

The Con-Versation allows the formation of a transcultural constructive space made of intersubjective contacts, mutual change, and collective creativity. It is an affective space where intimacies and affection are shared in the ordinary way proper to the places where the art entities are located. The Con-Versation creates a space of mutual care and engagement in constant transformation.

Christopher continues

When we moved to Belmont it was very weird. The Belmont community doesn't feel as much under siege in the same way and, and what happened is every time, even though we haven't done a lot of activity there because COVID has come, but every time we did something, all the families on the street, people would put chairs outside their houses, put coolers, bring out their grandmothers and children, and literally look at us with their arms folded and say: "ok, well what you gonna do? Tell us what you worth." It's a completely different

relationship. They want us to account for ourselves with activities that intrigue, or entertain them, and that's been kind of scary because if it gets too arty, they're gonna say, "oh what the ass is that?". So we've really gone through some big adjustments in terms of community interface. One of the best things that came out of COVID is our understanding of ourselves as a conversation that, in a sense, can be transplanted, that does exist already outside of a physical location. And combined with the sense of time that we're talking about, and the ability, a kind of beaming to other locations. We're kind of always present and not present at the same time. We have more concept now. Concept and a conversation rather than a place. I call it a space rather than a place. The site of the conversation.

Sofía

We too, went from a family home to a place that was more connected to a community, like one of the last pockets of neighborhood in Old San Juan.

Additionally, the Con-Versation provides the capacity to fight against the disappearance of memories. In the Zoom exchange the two art centers discussed the local possibility of disaggregation of memory, as if the local archives were porous and can disintegrate, following the path of the biological corrosive climate of the tropics themselves. Memories, like the old damp walls of tropical buildings, can crumble due to the context. According to all the speakers, disappearance is always on the horizon. There is a kind of architectonic sense of impermanence due to natural disasters typical of the region, such as earthquakes, hurricanes and volcanic eruptions among others, that maintain this sense of the precarity of life and of the maintenance of memory.

Christopher

There's a school of thinking that scares me, like an older generation that say: "well send the work out because that's the only way it's going to still be here in the future". So, they have this belief that you must get your work into foreign collections. You must get the work into international shows, because if you don't do that it will just disappear.

Pablo emphasizes right after

Disappear.

During the Con-Versation the work was evoked of Catherine Matos Olivo, a Puerto Rican artist who passed away prematurely, and almost disappeared from mainstream artistic visibility.

Christopher

I've been thinking a lot about what that means in terms of the conversations we're having, because I think it's absolutely wonderful that in this conversation, in this space between the engine, we start talking about Cathy [Catherine Matos Olivo]. Maybe we need more time and more of that kind of orality, that kind of part of the story of our experience.

The Con-Versation allows time shared to gain a sense of timeless uninterrupted memory. Through the act of taking time, and sharing orally, it keeps open a space that keeps memories and recognition alive and in creative motion.

Pablo

... keeping the conversation, it's oral, it means keeping actions, affections, there, together ... it's not big gestures, but always kind of like keeping that conversation. Like, Cathy still; her work, it's in a way like it exists because of these conversations. I mean in a way, if we keep doing this, we can build a different network of memory. It's almost getting invisible but it's still there, like it's the way of keeping it here.

Christopher

And it's also another narrative, because what we're really talking about, I mean, what attracted me to Cathy's work wasn't a commodity concern. It was a critical concern that I found some affinities at that time. So, it's really about the construction of a kind of criticality that creates commonality, between and in the region.

The Con-Versation re-shapes the question of memory and archives. It allows us to dismantle, in its literal meaning of to remove the mantle, the caducity of the tropical characteristic of the tropics, as explained above. Thanks to the Con-Versation, the forgetting, the disappearance, will never be effective.

The Con-versation is moving toward a critical language that is shared and open. By language we don't mean a linguistic formula, but a process of discussion that leads to the creation and affirmation of a common shared and creative space of poetic and poetic knowledge.

Christopher

In this conversation, I feel there's something floating about, building a kinda critical language. Not language, a process... of how memory... memory's not the right word cos I'm not thinking about nostalgia but about what affects how we see, that carries us back and forth back and forward at the same time and it changes the shape or the configuration of things around us at the same time. It's floating in this conversation from the crevices.

Through the Con-versation there is the possibility of maintaining archives in a liminal position. The archives mutate, as happens in memory; they shape themselves, they disintegrate and re-integrate thanks to lapsus, evocative language, synesthesia and metaphors. The process of Con-Versation holds the capacity of moving the affects, taking this term in its etymology as affectus: to touch the spirit. Through the Con-Versation the spirits are touched and dance metaphorically together in a collective creative and memorial experience through sharing.

The vernacular according to Christopher Cozier keeps the language in the process of commemoration of memories and on archives. It erases the pejorative sense of the “brokenness” of spoken creole languages, maintaining their fluidity and their floatability. These archives produce a sense of awareness without becoming a form of authoritative texts. The fragmented, “broken” realities of the Caribbean, in their geo-linguistic and imperialist historical structures and neoliberal contemporary relations, create a kind of corpus, a body of works, through the act of conversing.

Moreover, the Con-Versation leads to collective creative making, that subverts the sense of nationality, sustaining plural simultaneous connections with more than one place in a kind of supranational and outernational⁴ communication.

The Con-Versation maintains its performativity. It indicates the utterance of the words and non-verbal communication exchanged through orality and experience sharing. The act of con-versing creates a synergy of performative statements (Austin 1975) that performs a collective knowledge, all within the process of sharing together.

Pablo

I was talking to a good colleague yesterday and, he mentioned the fact that sometimes we need to accept that we lost, you know. That we have really powerful enemies, and we need to accept that. For the first wave of Covid for example, in the context where Beta-Local operates, we were fine. The community was fine. People were caring for each other, but then once tourism opened up, that was a wave that we couldn't control. That was one of the

⁴ The term Outernational refers to a place positioned outside of history; as a shapeless world that has been developing at the periphery of the international sphere. It is usually used for contemporary, non-mainstream music for reasons that are usually linked with ethnicity. The Outernational bodies of music occupy a space outside of history, sometimes considered an echo of the international core but mostly unknown <http://v1.the-attic.net/outernational/about>; <https://theatticmag.com/features/1245/the-outernational-condition.html>

reasons why we kept our space closed because Beta-Local is in a highly tourist area, and suddenly you have just waves of people coming from the States, from the places that are like the worst in terms of Covid. So, it was like you cannot do anything. You get angry, and you need to find a way to keep your composure.

Christopher:

I still have a slight... one of the most traumatic memories in terms of what you're saying, was one of the sense, space-memories that I have of San Juan in the last few days before we left was the noise of cabin suitcases on the cobblestones, and the shouting of Americans, sort of spring breakers. And I felt it echoes between the buildings. And I remember one occasion in the middle of the night, even though the curfew was on, coming and looking out onto the balcony and seeing a horde of Americans, tumbling with roller thingies, and saying like "urghhhhh" you know. And I thought of it in terms of the dangers that you're talking about. And it's a scary memory. And I don't know why that came up, but as you started Pablo, it really hit me. Cos, I remember those last couple of days when the game turned on us...

In this sharing the artists are talking about silence with two opposing values. Following Christopher's memory, the local lockdown provoked a physical lack of human sound in the city that was maximized by the echo-effect of the uproar of careless tourists who were not affected by local rules. Here the imposed silence of the local population in San Juan, due to the local lockdown and the dominance of US-based tourism that exists in Puerto Rico, go hand in hand with the sense of powerlessness Pablo was sharing. However, during our Con-Versation, I felt that silence could also become an agentive maneuver, when he said that they chose to close the art center. Silence in this case was not a subjugated imposition, but a decision. Silence, as the photographer Susan Sontag (1969) explains, becomes decisive, eloquent, and relational; it leads to an unselfconscious attention to the world.

Christopher answered empathetically with a common Trinidadian expression that is also the title of one of his works:

Yeah! When yuh miss me, I gone. Right? [laughs]

I conclude this text by thanking this conversation, since it is because of it that I was able to learn more about the power of Con-Versation. The two art centers, Alice Yard and Beta-Local, despite their different geographical locations in the Caribbean region, their different languages and institutional arrangements, have in common a process of artistic research, socio-aesthetic critique and way of relating within their communities and transnationally that can be summarized as Con-Versation. This displays as an

experience of making and being together, allowing the subversive powerful action of intimacy to counter the dialectical cosmology of eternal repetition of political normativity of domination, and (neo)colonization.

References

- Austin, John L. 1975. *How To Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Benítez-Rojo, Antonio. 2001. *The repeating Islands. The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Duke University Press
- Best Lloyd, 1999. "Making Mas with Possibility: Five Hunder years later." In *Enterprises of the Indies*, edited by George Lamming, 294-297. POS: Trinidad and Tobago, Institute of the West Indies.
- Brown, James H. 2014. "Why are there so many species in the tropics?", *Journal of Biogeography*, Vol 41, 8–22
- Browne Kevin Adonis, 2013. *Tropic tendencies. Rhetoric, Popular Culture and the anglophone Caribbean*. University of Pittsburg Press
- Butler Judith. 1992. "Mbembe's Extravagant Power." *Public Culture* 5 (1): 67-74.
- Callois Robert, 1958. *Les hommes et les jeux*, Gallimard : Paris.
- De Certeau, Michel 1984: "Spaces and places" in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press, Berkeley. p.124
- Glissant Édouard, 2009 *Philosophie de la relation*. Gallimard: Paris
- Hadchity Therese "Both Centre and Margin: Both Centre and Margin", *Wasafiri*, 34:1, 18-28
- Haraway Donna, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3. (Autumn, 1988), pp. 575-599.
- Hylland Eriksen Thomas, 1990. *Liming In Trinidad The Art Of Doing Nothing*, FOLK reprint Vol 32.
- Kapur Geeta. "When was modernism in Indian art?" *South Atlantic Quaterly*, Vol.92 N 3, Summer 1993 pp.295-324
- Lefebvre Henri, 1958. "Work and leisure in everyday life", edited by Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life*, Routledge, London: pp. 225-236
- Scott David, "Modernity that Predated the Modern: Sidney Mintz's Caribbean", *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 58, Issue 1, AUTUMN 2004, Pages 191–210
- Sontag Susan, 1969, "The aesthetics of silence" in *Styles of Radical Will*, New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux
- Turner Victor, [1969] 1996, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London: Routledge
- Wynter Sylvia, 1989. "Beyond the Word of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles", *World Literature Today*, Autumn, 1989, Vol. 63, No. 4, Edouard Glissant Issue, pp. 637-648

Artworks mentioned:

Sofía Gallisá Muriente. *Celaje (fragment)*, 2021, <https://vimeo.com/533245300#>

Christopher Cozier, *When you miss me, I gone*, 3rd Industrial Art Biennial, Pula, Croatia 2020