PERSONA

# ENTREVISTA COM CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR

*Interview with Christian Mio Loclair*

**FRANCISCO BARRETTO**

## RESUMO

Essa entrevista busca compreender as conexões estabelecidas pelo dançarino, coreógrafo e engenheiro de computação CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR entre essas áreas de conhecimento nas quais se especializou com distinção. Considerando duas características marcantes do entrevistado, a saber, ele é campeão de vários festivais de dança urbana e também um exímio programador, interessa saber como ele percebe esse entrelaçamento entre movimento e código no espaço da dança contemporânea, espaço ao qual encaminhou sua produção artística. A entrevista pretende compreender um pouco do processo criativo da artista, bem como suas próprias sensações como dançarino e programador. Diferente da grande maioria dos projetos nessa área, ele é autor e usuário do sistema interativo, ele cria o código computacional para interagir com seu próprio corpo buscando novas estéticas. Essa entrevista pretende falar desse corpo-híbrido da era digital.

## ABSTRACT:

*This interview seeks to understand the connections established by the dancer, choreographer and computer engineer CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR among those areas of knowledge in which he specializes with distinction. Considering two outstanding characteristics of the interviewer, namely, he is champion of several urban dance festivals and an excellent programmer, it is interesting to know how he perceives this entanglement between movement and code in the space of contemporary dance, space to which he directed his artistic production. The interview aims to understand a little of the creative process of the artist, as well as their own feelings as a dancer and programmer. Unlike most existing projects in this area, he is the author and the user of the interactive system, he creates the computational code to interact with his own body seeking new aesthetics. This interview intends to speak of this hybrid-body of the digital age.*

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR estudou Ciência da Computação na Universidade Potsdam e Instituto Hasso Plattner. É diretor criativo da Waltz Binaire, e atua como artista de mídia e coreógrafo de Berlim, Alemanha. Ele explora a fricção harmônica dos corpos humanos, do movimento e da natureza colidindo com a estética digital. Usando tecnologia de ponta em instalações interativas, experiências audiovisuais, narrativas visuais e performances de dança, ilumina continuamente a beleza e o drama da identidade humana. Mio foi escolhido para representar a Alemanha no "Bboy World Championships", Reino Unido, em 2007 e 2010. Foi campeão mundial de hiphop no "US Movie You Got Served 2", venceu a Batalha Internacional do Ano (Popping 2007), a Batalha de Ruhrpott (2007) e a Batalha de Wutal (2008 Pina Bausch Festival). Além disso, ele coreografou as peças de teatro Marionettes, Reflection, Volvere e co-coreografado 110 (Niels Storm Robitzky) e POW_2045 (Raphael Hillebrand).

http://princemio.net/

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: Mio, how would you like to present yourself? Who are you?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: I'm a computer scientist who expresses my artistic perspective towards human motion through digital processes. My particular interest is to investigate the contemporary collision of human poetry and mathematical aesthetics.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: Can you tell us about your personal background and artistic influences?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: I started dancing hiphop in 1992 as a hobby and at the same time I learned to code from my mother who is a computer scientist To me both worlds were always part of my culture and thinking. I became a professional dancer in 2001 and studied computer science. I was mainly active in the underground battle scene world-wide, till I decided to work more in contemporary environments and theaters around 2007. I finished my master thesis in human computer interaction, studying how machines approach humans and how humans approach machines. Today I am artistic director at my Studio Waltz Binaire[1]. We do independent and commissioned artworks and design, concentrating on human motion (Figure 1, Figure 2) in digital design.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: How and why did you start working as an artist?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: I think - I never wanted to work like an artist. To me it was an unconscious decisions I made, that decided my path. If I could dream I would prefer to be a professional boxer or still a battle dancer or something else. But somehow I ended up coding programs and watching artificial dance emerge. That is beautiful and I can't stop doing it – but I can't remember making this decision.

Figura 1: Pathfinder[2] is a generative approach for conceptual choreographic research of body movements.



Figura 2: Pow2045[3] - interactive dance theater

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: Would you mind to cite some artworks in the dance-technology field that have inspired you?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: I always liked Frieder Weiss and Klaus Obermaier. Their style to enhance moving bodies with projected light completely changed the way we perceive the body and its motion. I also like the very progressive and edgy works of Daito Manabe.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: How does your background as a computer scientist affect your artwork?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: A strong difference between computer science and art is that we allow a blue screen as an artwork. Art does not exist to be stable – the quality of a computer program is determined by its stability. If your email program software always crashes - its trash – if you put it in a museum – it might be a message. My biggest influence from my computer science education is that I would get nightmares - if some of my exhibition software ever crashes. That is hard to take for a computer scientist – for pure artists it might be a pleasure.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: How do you feel about this science-arts dialogue? How they support each other mutually?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: To be a scientist means to find knowledge contribution and writing papers that need to be accepted. To be a professional artist means to articulate inspiring perspectives and write applications that need to be accepted. I think both processes are very different and most successful people that I know from each field – live very much in their own world. However I think we can learn from each other if we respect that science is to find answers and art to raise question.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: At the time of the Leonardo da Vinci, many artists were also scientists and mastered many disciplines. As a computer scientist and choreographer, how do you see the importance of interdisciplinarity in computer artwork?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: In computer artwork it is very important. Most computer artists I know come from a musician, fine art or political background and express their ideas through software. That is simply because there is nothing in a computer you can investigate. However it can be a beautiful tool to portray natural processes and human behaviors through new lenses.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: Could you use one of your artworks to illustrate how the use of computer techniques allows new perspectives on human behavior and natural processes?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: I think the work Soap and Milk[4] (Figure 3) might be a good example. Our Desire was to capture real-time Twitter Data and transform it visually into a mixture of different fluids. We investigated how fluids move and turned each twitter post into a little bubble that pops up. Very soon we found many mathematical restrictions in recreating the natural behavior and had to come up with light, motion and behavior tricks to fake the observer into a surreal notion of fluidity. I do believe that since this time – I see the fluids and their complexity in motion from a completely different view.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: In such an interdisciplinary field, like computer art, how do you see the importance of an interdisciplinary team and environment? How does it influence the creative process?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: I think it is the most important influence. If you are a computer scientist working only on software but selling it as art – then you might become a badly paid computer
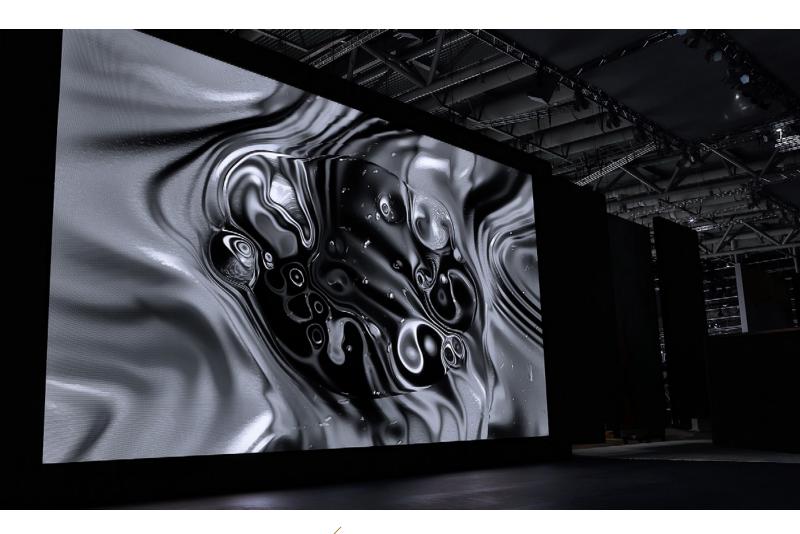
4 http://waltzbinaire. com/work/soap-and-milk/

**Figura 3:** Soap and Milk: interactive data visualization

scientist. I do believe we need to get in contact with other expertise and needs to research what matters to us to find a purpose in what we do. A software itself - does not have an artistic value to me.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: In this creative interdisciplinary process who do you see the articulation between academic/scientific and non-academic/scientific profiles of the team?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: I'm not sure if I can tell such a difference. I think each artist search for each patches. I have seen great

work from both academic and none academic backgrounds. However, in general I prefer a very productive and active research – as I believe in improvisation and the chances to find beautiful contributions through accidents and errors.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: In many of your artworks there is a physical interaction where the body becomes the main input. What do you think about the importance of exploring new body / physical interactions in a society that seems to want to communicate more and more in a virtual way?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: I think it enriches our perspective towards human identity and physical motion. To extend our body with digital light is a playful picture of our society. As a dancer I am thrilled by the possibilities - you can disappear, get 10 meter tall and be everywhere at the same time.  As a computer scientist I enjoy the aesthetics of a human centered design. To put a body with all its beauty and imperfections into digital light, reveals an interesting contrast and offers new forms of expression.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: How does this aspect of human-centered design appear in your art? Which of your works could be used to illustrate this aspect?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: I think the dance piece 2045 together with the choreograph Raphael Hillebrand is a good example. Its interactive projections and interactive sound reacts precisely to the motion of the dancers. Everything that happens is driven by the bodies, but articulated through the stage. It becomes a digital spread and echo through space – fed by tiny movements of the body.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: Still about this physical input, usually the outcome of an interactivity artwork is a virtual projection. How does dance collaborates in creating a real/virtual dialectics?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: To find a dialogue between computational and physical research is a challenging task, simply because the work flow is somehow inverted between iteration and refinement. The human body is incredible spontaneous and can instantly iterate through ideas, but needs very long to refine and master a specific routine. The machine is the opposite. It needs a mathematical articulation for every idea you want to try – but once it is defined– the machine has instantly mastered it. This difference means that within an artistic research one always waits for the other.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: Through the development and advances in science and technology we now have somehow integrated real and virtual environments. For example, we are always connected and aware of the cyberspace events through our mobile phones. How do you think that this affects the way people feel about computer art today?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: I don't believe that our continuous consumption of meaningless media and a storm of low quality information contributes to art in any way. However as artists and designer we have to question this issue and give to quality. I think it is our responsibility to weave new significant and poetic content in the existing environment.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: Even though the concept of immersion is not entirely new, since we had the CAVE environments in the 90's, we have far better devices like AR Glasses that allows us to develop much more immersive artworks. How do you think this immersive environment will impact on the way we produce artworks in a near future?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: I really don't know. The problem we are facing now is that artistic and poetic creativity can often not keep up with the speed of technical industry driven inventions. For instance storytelling in VR suffers from not being able to cut. We can see a jump between scenes in a movie – but we don't accept it in an immersive environment simply because it does not correlate to our real-life experience. We have to reconsider our ideas about every artistic process with every new media.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: Considering obsolescence of digital devices and technologies, how do you feel about conservation of your artworks for future generations and what is the importance to computer artists about considering this often-neglected concepts?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: The most important and maybe honest reason why I do my work is because I want to see it. I share it – and hope it inspires others. I do so for artistic work but also for commercial work. I enjoy both and feel good to be able to create. If my work is not conserved – it is because people selected other digital memories to be more important. Maybe it will be overwritten on hard drives by data from fitness models on Instagram. And if so – it would be a very honest and historically important portrait of our time. I still witnessed my work and that's fine for me. (laughing) To think that anything from our time – will stand the test of time – might be naïve.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: When composing a computer artwork, an artist may be confronted with lots of available devices and programming languages. How do you thinks this technical profusion should dialogue with an artistic poetics without overcoming it? Could this technical profusion also be seen as some kind of poetics?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: I think not knowing what you do and being lost has no artistic value in my humble opinion. To try to

understand  to work and master – is beautiful to me. How much we honestly try can be seen by others and has its very own poetic quality regardless of the resulting software.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: Back in the 50's, computer scientists thought they would be able to reproduce cognitive human behavior through the development of entirely new algorithms. It turns out that they were not able to carry out it, so what we see now is a tendency to mimic natural behavior and use algorithms such as Genetic Algorithms, Neural Networks, fluids and flock. How do you see this change of approach and how does these "nature" algorithms and natural behavior influence you?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: We will be able to simulate significant cognitive human behavior very soon. Algorithmic solutions to view and "understand" our environment and human behavior show great progress and the software to archive and connect those impressions accelerate even more. To see this artificial entity emerge will have great social impact and it is our responsibility to discuss its cultural implications. What is the value of ours selected thoughts, if an algorithm already knows it. Why do we discuss with friends, if a machine is able to judge who is right. Why do we pick a partner if an algorithm already knows that it wont work. I do believe that fundamental questions to our social interactions and self-knowledge will determine our future.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: Since Artificial Intelligence offers some interesting approaches to computer creativity, do you think it will play an important role in the development of computer artworks in the years to come? Why?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: Absolutely. You mentioned flocking  earlier. To observe and understand natural behavior such as a flock of birds, translate it into code and simulate the motion of millions

of birds flying in formation represents a "classic" tasks for a computational designer. I think this process of understanding and translating is ideal for artificial intelligence and therefore will play a huge role.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: Could you point your artworks that uses artificial intelligence techniques?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: We are developing one work right now and as far as I can tell from now – it will be also the last.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: There is a distance between basic interactive artworks (where the output depends only on the input given and for the same inputs we always get the same output) and more complex interactive setups where the machine is able to interpret, learn and decide how it will react. Do you think that the ability to demonstrate complex behavior enhances the experience of interacting with such artworks?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: Yes I think there is a value of algorithmic independence. However, the observer will decide the value of the degree. If its to abstract it looks meaningless – if the interaction is to direct it is trivial.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: Regarding the next 10 or 20 years, what do you think will be next technic and artistic challenges? How should we address to this new generation of artist-scientists that are already born in the digital era?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: Sorry I honestly don't know so far ahead. Everyone that says he knows – has not saw the technical and political evolution of the past 15 years. It's just to fast – and I am very sure that every estimate I make – will turn out to be nonsense.

FRANCISCO BARRETTO: Finally, I would like to quote your installation Talk to Me and ask you: What makes you happiest?

CHRISTIAN MIO LOCLAIR: To be allowed to create. It is a privilege to me that fills my thoughts and fills my day. I think that the many steps between imagining something and to see it becoming alive might be the thing that satisfies us the most– no madder if we are coders, scientists, designers, dancers or if we build a house.

**Francisco de Paula Barretto:** é Bacharel em Ciências da Computação (2009), Mestre (2011) e Doutor em Arte e Tecnologia pelo PPG-Arte (2016): Programa de Pós Graduação em Artes pela Universidade de Brasília. Atualmente é professor do Instituto de Humanidades, Artes e Ciências Prof. Milton Santos. Pesquisador/ artista do Midialab - Laboratório de Pesquisa em Arte Computacional. Tem experiência na área da Arte Computacional e da Inteligência Artificial, com ênfase no desenvolvimento de sistemas autopoiéticos capazes de gerar resultados emergentes.