

Listening beyond the Anthropocene: Poetry as an echological survival

Ouvir para além do Antropoceno: Poetry as an echological survival^a

JOÃO PEDRO AMORIM^b

Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Lisboa, Portugal

LUÍS TEIXEIRA^c

Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Lisboa, Portugal

ABSTRACT

From the analysis of *Poetry as an echological survival* by sound artist Nuno da Luz, we reflect upon forms of environmental and echological involvement. This exhibition proposes a sensorial alternative to the critical discussion around Anthropocene narratives, answering some of the critics of this concept. Sound art plays an important role given its material characteristics and the fact that it complements the Western world-view, which privileges vision. The way the work of Nuno da Luz creates a being-in-the-world in which visitors are penetrated by sound waves proposes a redefinition of our ecological condition, hence creating an “echological survival.”

Keywords: Anthropocene, sound art, ecology, contemporary art, cultural studies.

RESUMO

A partir de *Poetry as an echological survival* do artista Nuno da Luz, iremos refletir sobre formas de envolvimento ambiental e ecológica. Esta exposição nos permite propor uma alternativa sensorial à discussão crítica sobre as narrativas do Antropoceno, respondendo às críticas colocadas sobre este conceito. A arte sonora tem um papel fundamental na redefinição da nossa relação com o planeta dadas as características materiais do som e o fato de complementar a mundividência ocidental, que privilegia a visão. O trabalho do artista cria um estar-no-mundo em que o visitante é penetrado pelas ondas sonoras, o que causa a redefinição da sua condição ecológica: criando, assim, uma “sobrevivência ecológica.”

Palavras-chave: Antropoceno, arte sonora, ecologia, arte contemporânea, estudos culturais.

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^bJoão Pedro Amorim (1993, b. Arcos de Valdevez) is a visual artist and PhD candidate at CITAR, School of Arts at Universidade Católica Portuguesa. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0267-1276>. E-mail: jpmorim@ucp.pt

^cLuís Teixeira has a degree and PhD in Electrical and Computer Engineering from the University of Porto and has been a lecturer at the School of Arts of the Portuguese Catholic University since 1997. He has extensive research experience in digital humanities, with emphasis on immersive and interactive systems. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1206-4576>. E-mail: lteixeira@ucp.pt



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CHRONICLE OF A DISENCHANTED NATURE

IN THE LAST DECADE, the destruction of nature by human societies has become evident. While the emergence of youth ecologist movements is not new¹, current indications suggest that we are on the brink of an irrevocable turning point. Judging by the media predominance it has assumed, awareness of the planet's state appears to be higher than at any point in recent decades. However, the evidence of the problem, rooted in a prolific production of images depicting overexploitation and climatic disasters, is still insufficient to significantly influence the decision-making circles of human societies. The narrative of the Anthropocene, as a new geological era characterized by the significant impact of human activities on terrestrial ecosystems, seems to have transcended the specific realm of geography to penetrate the collective unconscious. This concept, which will be further discussed ahead in the text, underscores the necessity of implementing global measures to delay or reverse the problem.

If a more ecological policy and economy are necessary in themselves, we consider them to be insufficient. Such a strategy would be based on correcting the consequence, leaving untouched the cause of the current state. Contemporary capitalist societies practice and embrace a “disenchanted nature.” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2006, p. 4). The primary cause-consequence of this disenchantment is the opposition between nature-culture, one of the dichotomies that define Western reason². This structuring dualism of Western societies is based on a social production: the extraction of humans from the ecosystems to which they belong and the creation of the cultural sphere encompassing all that is human, hence becoming antipodal to everything considered natural. This ontological transformation defines the rupture that traverses the history of the relationship between Western societies of the Northern Hemisphere—and more recently, a vast majority of Eastern and

¹ 30 years before Greta Thunberg, another teenager, Severn Cullis-Suzuki, played a prominent role in the climatic struggle. Recovered from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOp5ATk_rIM.

² The undergoing process of globalization consists in the global expansion of domination of the Epistemologies of the North (to use a concept that has been widely used, namely by Boaventura de Sousa Santos) over other systems of knowledge around the globe.

Southern Hemisphere societies—and nature. The complexity of natural systems is ordered, classified, and reduced to numerical formulas with the sole purpose of learning “how to use it in order wholly to dominate it [nature] and other men.” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2006, p. 4). This action, often carried out by science and technology, consists of the “the reduction and malleability of men are worked for as ‘progress’” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/1967, p. 44), a progress measured also by the ability to dominate and exploit ‘natural resources.’ This positivist perspective views all species and elements of each ecosystem as something to be used and exploited without limits.

The rationale of domination is nowadays the rationale of capitalism itself. That which “we call ‘nature’ is *internal* to capitalism, not a wholly separate domain” (Castree, 2017, p. 58). Neil Smith (1984, pp. 49-91), drawing from the writings of Marx and Engels, developed the concept of the “production of nature,” which delineates the diverse processes through which humans, as an integral part of nature, produce the means to satisfy their needs through labour. As the economic stages progress—from general production, that is, production directed towards satisfying biological needs, to contemporary capitalist production, a stage in which the need for surplus production becomes naturalized to ensure the survival of the system—the “material substrate is more and more the product of social production, and the dominant axes of differentiation are increasingly societal in origin”³ (Smith, 1984, p. 50). Within this process, Smith elucidates the parallelism between the escalating alienation of workers and the growing social production of nature as the outcomes of the complexification of production processes within a capitalist system. Consequently, despite this human social system having some dominion over nature, human beings (at least those who do not control the means of production) do not live freely, and a revolt that “would bring with it the historically unique opportunity for human beings to become the willing social subjects [and] not the natural subjects of their own history” is imminent (Smith, 1984, p. 85).

³To the point that a ‘second nature’, referring to human societies and institutions, emerges: “Through human agency, a cleavage is created between nature and society, between a first nature and a second nature. The latter comprises exactly those societal institutions which facilitate and regulate the exchange of commodities, both directly and indirectly” (Smith, 1984, p. 65).

The disenchanted relationship with nature is inextricable from capitalist production practices and the Western model of reason. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018, p. 262) explains how Western reason, which is ‘as necessary as it is partial,’ actively produces the non-existence (disappearance, coercion) of other forms of knowledge and understanding of the world. At the core of Western reason, science is constituted as the sole way to interpret the world - or the one that gathers and connects all other forms - and the measure of the valuation of a particular knowledge corresponds to its use value, exchange value, and capital value.

Any lasting solution that allows overcoming the great impasse in the relationship of human societies with nature will not only involve reconfiguring the



current economic system but fundamentally promoting a greater diversity of forms of knowledge. Thus, it may be possible to reconsider the human element as part of nature and perceive it not as an external entity to be studied and exploited but as a complex system of which we are a part and whose harmony also defines our own.

ANTHROPOCENE – AN ANTHROPOCENTRIC CONCEPT?

The Anthropocene calls for action: without a radical change in the habits of modern societies, the survival of the human species is at risk. As a narrative, the most pessimistic version of the Anthropocene – the one in which we fail to alter our habits – is familiar to us. It reminds us of the punishment of Prometheus, who dared to steal fire from the gods, a pessimistic myth that describes the tension between civilization and nature. It suggests ideas of guilt and moralism that have a history of paternalistic oppression. On the other hand, it highlights the manifest human capacity to act critically on its actions, appealing to responsibility and the exercise of freedom. Despite being a useful concept, we cannot avoid discussing some of the limitations of the various narratives of the Anthropocene.

Françoise Vergès (2019) denounces the “Anthropos” that defines the concept, as it ignores the fact that not all humans have the same geological impact and treats humanity as a homogeneous category that does not reflect its historical conception as an entity “internally differentiated and constantly developing via internal contradictions” (Hartley, 2015). Thus, epistemological, racial, class, and gender dynamics appear amalgamated in a single concept that gains part of its relevance through an operation of culpability assignment. By ignoring other forms of exploitation and domination, the concept proves unable to recognize that the movement that generates the overexploitation of natural ecosystems is historically the same as that which defines the power relations and domination of capitalist societies.

This mythical figure of *Anthropos* lies at the core of the concept under analysis and, despite conveying a general sense of dissidence, it remains anthropocentric and ultimately feeble in countering its own essence – the myth metamorphoses into a catastrophic prophecy. The anthropocentrism of this concept derives from a certain fascination, as Simon (2020, p. 186) notes, “in the acknowledgement of the unprecedented powers of human beings,” akin to a “human supremacy complex” (Crist, 2013, p. 133) that “place[s] humans on a pedestal as the only species in the history of the planet” capable of reshaping the balance of the biosphere (Whitehouse, 2015, p. 54). Donna Haraway (2016) contends that this concept exemplifies human exceptionalism, disregarding all

other species that also shape the planet – particularly those she deems as the “most significant planetary transformers”: bacteria. Hence, any satisfactory model must not overlook the intricate relationships between “organic species and abiotic actors.” The narrative of the Anthropocene fails to encapsulate the complexity of planetary – and social – systems, let alone construct a narrative that aids us in envisioning an alternative future, given its inherent pessimism.

Crist (2013, p. 130) argues that despite the lack of such intention in many who employ it, even “compounding uses of the term are indirectly strengthening that discourse by boosting its legitimacy.” When referring to the discourse of the Anthropocene, Crist primarily refers to the naturalization of the “managerial mindset and active stewardship of Earth’s natural systems,” alongside the concepts of natural “resources,” “natural capital,” and “ecological services,” all in conjunction with the “human enterprise” (2013, p. 137). The “human enterprise” already considers the subordination of the natural – that which is external to it – to the status of a resource and capital, available for utilization. In this context, even the most serious ecological concerns are secondary to preserving the foundations of the economic model as it stands. Without “rejecting history’s trajectory of planetary conquest” (Crist, 2013, p. 136), they are powerless to “create (or even imagine) another way of life” (Crist, 2013, p. 138).

On the other hand, Bruno Latour (2014), from an anthropological perspective, contends that any narrative of the Anthropocene, no matter how limited to recounting a fact, also serves to denounce a grave situation, thereby appealing to the responsibility of human communities. Latour goes further, considering that it is precisely the anthropocentrism of the term that makes “Anthropos” an active entity – contrary to the passive role it assumed in earth sciences – thereby acquiring, as a species, an intrinsic moral and political dimension. Following this line of reasoning, we can pragmatically assume that all inconsistencies of the concept become immediately transparent. In this sense, Latour (2014) argues that “as soon as you give that pride of place to human agent, the exact nature of this assemblage” – disregarding epistemological, racial, class, geographical, and gender factors – “is immediately thrown into doubt.”

In addition to its dissemination and operability in inter/transdisciplinary confrontation and dialogue,⁴ the Anthropocene proves to be useful as a concept due to its

ambiguities, which emphasise the anxieties and possibilities that might be imagined in human-driven global systems, and in its power to signal both the interconnectedness of human and non-human lives and the potential for their destruction and silencing. (Whitehouse, 2015, p. 54)

⁴We should be careful with the apology to interdisciplinarity made here. The debate around the Anthropocene was launched by geographers – even if, as Latour ironically recalls, sponsored by the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, in a rare inversion of productive hierarchies – and it was (relatively) early adopted in scientific communities. It is important to remember that “[g]eoscientists thus side-bar questions of social power, social disagreement, and social conflict to focus only on what is considered ‘achievable’ in light of perceived opportunities and constraints in society.” (Castree, 2015, p. 61) That happens because “the aspirations to interdisciplinarity only favour collaborations between geoscientists and other scholars who share the ‘scientific’ norms of objectivity and rationality” (Castree, 2015, p. 60) of Western societies. In this way, they ignore how science – and by science we mean the scientific system – is “sustaining the current unjust and ecologically mindless political economy.” (Castree, 2015, p. 60).



Although we conceive of the Anthropocene as a phenomenon that brings about a rupture and instigates an “unprecedented change that rewrites disciplinary codes as we know them and demands new arrangements of knowledge we are yet to establish, (...) we still think about our radically new predicament in terms of our more familiar arrangements of knowledge,” namely, cause-and-effect narratives (Simon, 2020, p. 194). To adequately address the demands of this concept – along with its limitations – it becomes imperative to incite an epistemological rupture that challenges the Western model of reason, which inherently perpetuates a rationale of domination. As briefly demonstrated earlier, the relation between domination of nature and subjugation of fellow humans is inherently linked to a dominant, Western, or Eurocentric epistemology, where knowledge and power are equated. Knowledge is treated as a means of producing violence, while violence becomes a means of producing knowledge. The dilemma of the Anthropocene calls for novel representations and ecologies of knowledge, emancipated from the ideological structures to which it is subject. We claim that, to this end, the centrality of narrative must be repositioned, as it tends to favor cause-and-effect relationships, and instead, complemented by other forms of knowledge, such as the embodiment of knowledge and sensations.

A PHILOSOPHY OF EXPERIENCE AND SENSATION

Senses are our first contact with the world. Despite being based on physical and chemical processes, the body is perfectly articulated with consciousness, encompassing both mental and spiritual aspects. If the “world is [our] representation” (Schopenhauer, 1819/1991, p. 39), it is not merely composed of objective perceptions of the world, but above all, of subjective reading and interpretation of stimuli that reach us from the exterior. Our senses always possess an “ideological as well as cultural function” that exists even before we employ them, and thus, the “judgment and understanding achieved are inadvertently directed by that ideological functioning of the sense employed” (Voegelin, 2010, p. xi). To overcome the ideological and aesthetic predeterminations of the senses (Voegelin, 2010, p. 3), it is necessary to develop not a philosophy that explains the experience, but rather “a philosophy that experiences”⁵ (Voegelin, 2010, p. xiv). For this purpose, the task is to “suspend” conceptual notions such as artistic genre and historical context, and “achieve a hearing that is the material heard, [in the moment], contingently and individually” (Voegelin, 2010, p. 3).

Western reason⁶ prioritizes vision over the other senses. The visual and the conceptual are analogous, while “the sonorous (...) outweighs form” (Nancy, 2002/2007, p. 2), making its explanation through discourse more challenging.

⁵Salomé Voegelin is referring here to a philosophy of sound art – “the aim is not a philosophy of sound art that explains experience but a philosophy that experiences” –, but we believe it can also be applied to other senses, including vision.

⁶Western reason, as descended from the Enlightenment, is the dominating epistemological form in the great majority of contemporary societies and therefore it is the descendent of a history of production of knowledge that transmitted itself mainly through texts and images, perhaps also written music. In that sense, it is natural that semiotic and ideologic structures have developed more at the level of vision and writing, and less in senses that are more difficult to be recorded and transmitted.

The ideas developed in the conceptual sphere follow a “discursive logic (...) raised up on the basis of actual domination” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2006, p. 14). The position of vision is inherently distant from its object, receiving it “in its monumentality” (Voegelin, 2010, p. xi). It happens, therefore, in a “meta-position, away from the seen, however close,” which implies a “detachment and objectivity that presents itself as truth,” thus invoking the necessity of belief: “seeing is believing” (Voegelin, 2010, p. xii). This is also the stance of the scientific method that promotes a distance between the subject and the object, in pursuit of an objective scientific truth. “The ideology of a pragmatic visuality is the desire for the whole” (Voegelin, 2010, p. 4), the desire to comprehend the real through this objective distance in a manifest manner – one that can be visualized.

Against the clarity of vision, sound “is always ephemeral and doubtful” (Voegelin, 2010, p. 11). While vision is based on the reading of light rays reflected permanently by bodies, listening takes place simultaneously with the sonic event (Nancy, 2002/2007, p. 14). “The visual persists until its disappearance; the sonorous appears and fades away until its permanence” (Nancy, 2002/2007, p. 2). The ear creates a “resonant” experience, moving inward, whereas the eye, outward, creates an “evident” one (Nancy, 2002/2007, p. 3). Thus, sound also engages the subject in a distinct manner. “To listen is to enter that spatiality by which, at the same time, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as around me, and from me as well as toward me” (Nancy, 2002/2007, p. 14), already revealing the properties of sound waves’ space-time dimensions (Nancy, 2002/2007, p. 13). This way the real “can be experienced through the listening body as sound incorporates and mediates a connection between space and narrative” (Taylor & Fernström, 2007, p. 4). The sonic involvement places the subject at the center but emerges from a universe from which sound waves originate, pervading them – and bodies “are not constructed to interrupt at their leisure the sonorous arrival” (Nancy, 2002/2007, p. 14). The sonic space is a space of belonging, and “the subject of listening is always still yet to come, spaced, traversed, and called by itself, *sounded* by itself” (Nancy, 2002/2007, p. 21)

Listening demands a principle of “sharing time and space with the object or event under consideration” (Voegelin, 2010, p. xii). During the act of listening, the subject is simultaneous with what is being heard, devoid of a meta-position or distance, engaging in a “continual production that involves the listener as intersubjectively constituted in perception, while producing the very thing he perceives, and both, the subject and the work, thus generated concomitantly, are as transitory as each other.” (Voegelin, 2010, p. xii). The sonorous involvement challenges “the prevailing bias or dependence upon a predominantly ocular-centric focus of reading an environment through visual metaphors” (Taylor &

Fernström, 2007, p. 4). However, according to Voegelin (2010, p. xiii), a “sonic sensitivity would illuminate the unseen aspects of visibility, augmenting rather than opposing a visual philosophy.” Challenging “notions of objectivity and subjectivity,” listening does not distinguish the object or event from the rest of the sonic background, as audition is a process of discovery: “in listening I am in sound” (Voegelin, 2010, p. 5).

For these reasons, sound art constitutes an ecologically-oriented practice – that is, one that respects and integrates with the surrounding environment. Therefore, sound art provides a means to engage with reality that is largely detached from everyday experiences. Such an experience inherently challenges ocular-centrism and, above all, allows for a sensitive connection with the world, free from the inclination to interpret or engage in conceptual or narrative readings that typically accompany sonic events and their surroundings. This immersive experience engulfs and transforms us, rooted in the notion of “being-in-the-world” (Whitehouse, 2015, p. 62), complementing and expanding other language-based and culturally-infused experiences.

POETRY AS AN ECHOLOGICAL SURVIVAL BY NUNO DA LUZ

Poetry as an ecological survival by Nuno da Luz⁷ engenders a form of being-in-the-world that addresses a many of these challenges. Developed within the context of an artistic residency at the School of Arts, at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, in Porto, with the support of the *inresidenceporto*⁸ program, the research for this project was conducted between September and December 2018.

Figure 1

View of the exhibition ‘Poetry as an Ecological Survival’ © Carlos Lobo



Note. Photography by Carlos Lobo.

⁷ Nuno da Luz is an artist who works with sonic events, print media and installations. He lives and works in Lisbon and has presented his work in spaces such as Kunstraum Botschaft, (Berlin, 2017), Syntax (Lisbon, 2016), enblanco projektraum (Berlin, 2013) and Galeria Solar (Vila do Conde, 2013). He has participated in the artistic residencies Künstlerhaus Bethanien (2017), Cité internationale des arts (2015), Residency Unlimited (2014), and Sound Art Braunschweig Projects (2013).

⁸ The program is organized by Porto Municipality and aims at “connecting national and international artists to opportunities of developing residency projects in the city in multiple artistic disciplines.” Recovered from <http://inresidenceporto.pt/PT/>.

The project consisted of a context-specific research focused on the surroundings of the School of Arts – Foz, the mouth of Douro river. The artist's main objective was to “reassess certain acoustic phenomena, such as reverberation and resonance, as environmental and social processes”^{9,10}, employing a speculative approach.

In this regard, encompassing the “environment” of the School of Arts, the mouth of Douro river, and the Atlantic Ocean, the proposition identifies representative elements based on “observation and data collection.” This entails acquiring maritime and sub-aquatic data, such as “tides, waves, temperature, and others, gathered near the Foz and in the coastal area of Gaia, Porto, and Matosinhos” - collected by the Portuguese Navy's Hydrographic Institute (IH); sound and image captures.

The resulting exhibition¹¹ manifested as an immersive installation of sound and light, featuring the following components: modulation of incandescent lamps through simulated tidal height data, presented in real-time scale; two wind gongs vibrating in accordance with recorded maritime agitation data – one corresponding to the coastal buoy, and the other to the oceanic buoy of Leixões, throughout a year; recordings of waves breaking at the Douro bar, during the peak of both high and low tides: beach-sea playback through frontal speakers, and low tide through rear speakers; 16 mm film transferred to digital format.

The exhibition design reinforces the interconnectedness between the concepts of home, environment, and sound evoked by the notion of “echo”, functioning as a cohesive system through the integration of sound and light installations. Nuno da Luz's work comprises few visual elements, which, rather than urging interpretation and the recognition of specific figures, envelop us in the rhythm of sound – the light modulated by wave data and the atmospheric images captured on 16 mm film by the artist Ana Vaz. As expressed by the artist, the focus lies in “listening to what is happening in the air” (Escola das Artes – UCP, 2019a) and engaging with the material dimension of the very air itself. “For those who can listen, there is this idea of sound production and reception,” even in the absence of “direct visual referents” for the cause-effect relationship of “what causes what” (Escola das Artes – UCP, 2019a).

By working with data from the IH, Nuno da Luz pursued two paradoxical processes: the “spatio-temporal visualization” of sound and its “abstraction.” The artist acknowledges that ocean waves already “presuppose or appear as sound waves in profile” (Escola das Artes – UCP, 2019a).

⁹Nuno da Luz's residency proposal.

¹⁰All quotations translated in this article, were translated by the authors.

¹¹The exhibition opened on the 7th of March 2019 and it was preceded by a masterclass with the artist and the commander Pires Barroqueiro from IH. It was on until the 5th of April 2019. Ficou patente até 5 de abril de 2019. More images and information available here: <https://artes.porto.ucp.pt/pt-pt/art-center/exposicoes/poetry-ecological-survival>.

Figure 2

View of the Poetry as an echological survival exhibition © Carlos Lobo



Note. Photography by Carlos Lobo.

In Porto, the artist had the “opportunity to become acquainted with a new environment, considering the School’s surroundings as a field of work” (Escola das Artes - UCP, 2019a). The exhibition’s title (“Poetry as an Echological Survival”) derives from a quotation that Álvaro Lapa mentioned, possibly mistakenly, in the text “Nota solta sobre o possível ‘valor’ das obras de arte, para o futuro” in the book *Raso como o Chão* (1977). This quotation, in turn, originates from Gary Snyder’s essay “Notes on Poetry as an Ecological Survival Technique.” In this citation, Lapa added an “h” to “ecological,” transforming “eco-” (from the Greek “oikos” - house) into “eco-” (“ēchos” - sound). In Snyder’s essay, he suggests that poetry and the arts retain much of the thinking and culture of primitive societies, possessing a “knowledge of connection and responsibility” which amounts to a spiritual ascesis for the whole community” (Snyder, 1969, p. 157). For Snyder, this knowledge can serve as a form of salvation. Thus, Snyder aligns himself with the ideas of Adorno and Horkheimer, for whom art represents the last stronghold of a way of being-in-the-world that, in primitive societies, characterized ritual and magical practices, but which has been devalued and limited in contemporary societies by scientific discourse.

The artist formalizes the hypotheses raised by Snyder's text and explores the confusion introduced by Lapa with the "h", between "eco" (oikos), that is, home or environment, and "echo" (êchos), meaning sound. Nuno da Luz proposes the development of an "attention to certain echoes of space, and to the ecology of that space." This entails recognizing the diversity of elements coexisting within a given ecosystem, "within a liminal space of tension between what is possible as geological and environmental force, and what is anthropogenic force" (School of Arts - UCP, 2019a). Returning to Snyder and his assertion that "the universe is not a dead thing but a continual creation" (Snyder, 1967, p. 162), Nuno da Luz's work with its echoes reintroduces a primal connection to the environment. It reintroduces into our epistemological subconscious cyclic rhythms of creation, countering the era of grand linear narratives that marked the 20th century and left the post-Fukuyama trauma of the 21st century.

Nuno da Luz's proposal has been regarded with curiosity by the IH: "what new horizons can this bring to the work of the Institute as the national cartographic service" (Escola das Artes – UCP, 2019b). Commander Pires Barroqueiro of the IH finds the novelty of this perspective lies in the potential to "immerse into a much broader, boundless, and subtle environment" when compared to IH's products, which are primarily driven by a more "utilitarian" motivation focused on "navigation safety and marine use" (Escola das Artes – UCP, 2019b). The commander emphasizes that while the buoy readings are objective, the observation and interpretation of data provided by scientists remain a "subjective" process, as it necessitates human intervention. He remarks, "It is very intriguing to witness how a conversation can take place between these two domains of knowledge," bridging the scientific and artistic perspectives, both inherently subjective in nature (Escola das Artes – UCP, 2019b). Although one could question the accuracy of these statements, we refrain from doing so, as they serve here merely as a means to invoke artistic creation as a form of writing the possible. The scientists at IH became interested in the project because it generates an alternative representation, with different motivations when compared with scientific depictions.

Despite its capacity to comprehend, dissect, and, in some instances, even control nature, science does not aid us in understanding the chaotic array of forces that constitute it, nor does it mediate our connection with it. In a society where the monopoly over knowledge production lies within the realm of science, the connection between humans and nature becomes disenchanting – as the enchantment is contingent upon forms of knowledge that science cannot generate. This remains true despite the efforts of scientific systems to broaden their horizons, notably through the inclusion of artistic research and the humanities.

AN ECHOLOGICAL RUPTURE

Poetry must sing or speak from authentic experience. Of all the streams of civilized tradition with roots in the Paleolithic, poetry is one of the few that can realistically claim an unchanged function and a relevance which will outlast most of the activities that surround us today. Poets, as few others, must live close to the world that primitive men are in: the world, in its nakedness, which is fundamental for all of us – birth, love, death: the sheer fact of being alive. (Snyder, 1969, p. 152)

Figure 3

View of the exhibition Poetry as an ecological survival © Carlos Lobo



Note. Photography by Carlos Lobo.

Nuno da Luz proposes an experience of sound transformed into poetry, an immersive encounter that places us in a state of being-in-the-world, establishing an enchanting connection that skillfully articulates the fundamental paradox of human nature. On one hand, we are an integral part of the surrounding nature, and on the other hand, we coexist with our distinct social constructs, our very own ‘second nature.’¹² The deeply immersive relationship that the exhibition fosters ensures the preservation of a highly specific ecosystem over time. Thus, it becomes an experience of ‘ecological survival,’ embodying a significant mission that sound art practices can undertake in fostering a more ecological society.

In this sense, it emerges as a highly relevant practice, quite distinct, for instance, from the pioneering works of Bernie Krause - which are also fundamental for ecological practice - that “illustrate” the impact of human intervention on an

¹²See footnote number 6.

ecosystem by studying soundscapes and revealing the transformations undergone by the sounds of a given environment, particularly through the disruption of the harmony that characterizes natural settings (Whitehouse, 2015, p. 56). Sound possesses the inherent advantage of unveiling imperceptible alterations, ones that elude our senses, particularly our vision. Nevertheless, Nuno da Luz's approach is distinctive, for it delves into the material properties of sound and its reverberative capacities, surpassing our utilitarian and positivist biases of understanding. In "Poetry as an Ecological Survival," there exists nothing to be explicitly comprehended; rather, the sound permeates us while variations of light synchronize us with the ecosystemic rhythm of Foz do Douro. It not only imparts new knowledge but also represents a novel mode of understanding, or rather, an ancient form of knowledge that had been lost or, at the very least, alienated and confined to specific moments of enjoyment, fetishized as an experience - particularly within the context of the natural tourism economy that counterfeits this connection to the natural world.

In the Anthropocene, an epistemological rupture towards a more ecological direction is necessary – one that defines a new understanding of the economy as the management of our home, our planet. It is not enough to implement measures that aim to make the current economic system sustainable, as it is fundamentally rooted in a rationale of domination that fosters a disenchanting relationship with nature. What is required is a transformation in how we relate to the environment. Sound art possesses a unique, albeit not exclusive, potential to induce an epistemological rupture by elevating forms of knowledge that have been hitherto overlooked and reestablishing a connection with the planet. By invoking non-semiotic and non-interpretive forms of knowledge inherent in matter, art can once again mediate our relationship with the natural world. Despite being an activity exclusively developed for humans, art opens up the possibility of a change in perspective, a repositioning. Works such as those by Nuno da Luz prompt us to reflect not only critically but also corporeally on the central position we occupy and the unilateral impact we have on ecosystems. By making us feel part of nature once again, art may impel us to think beyond the Anthropocene: transforming our relationships with nature and enabling the creation of a new concept that does not mirror the anthropocentrism of our current condition, but instead expresses a becoming-ecological enveloping. ■

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