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RESEARCH

EXPERIMENTATION

REFLECTION

TEATRO DO FRIO

Rehearsing Science and Art to re-connect culture and nature

EDITORS ALISON NEILSON AND JOSÉ EDUARDO SILVA
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According to some “western” ways of thinking, culture originates and exists solely in humans. This understanding of culture involves continual attempts to escape the deterministic forces of nature and has led to increasing transformations of the world for primarily human benefit while the natural world is tasked with absolving careless and frequently abusive human actions. From the beginning of the industrial revolution, this kind of development has increasingly caused saturations and depletions, with repercussions in all areas of life. Over this same period, science in its drive to understand the world through converged meaning has dominated technology while art which embraces multiple divergence of meanings and is often effective in moving our emotional lives, has become devalued. Science and art were once great collaborators and are not dissected from one another in some practices and ways of thinking. Could greater associations between the arts and the sciences transform dominant western ways and lead to more viable models for the development of human culture without destroying nature?

Considering this question, Teatro do Frio in collaboration with the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto (FPCEUP), the Centre for Research and Intervention in Education of FPCEUP, the Centre for Humanistic Studies of The University of Minho and the Portuguese Directorate-General for the Arts initiated the 1st International Conference (2017) “Cultura Natura in the Anthropocene”. This gathering had the experimental purpose of exploring interfaces between the arts and the sciences for constructing sustainable cultures; a frequent inspiration driving Teatro do Frio’s work. Their artistic practices have been marked by diversity and interdisciplinarity, with a strong focus on the questions of the body as a place of nature from which art and culture can emerge. Over the past few years, the Teatro do Frio intentionally have created aesthetical objects to meet the ecology of the logics and homeostatic functioning processes of the affect-emotional body. In other words, the theatre has sought to increase awareness of the body within our natural, cultural or political “landscapes”.

It was thus with great joy that we departed towards experimentation, exposition and dialogue in this encounter. An eclectic set of national and international presentations from different areas of study and disciplines with intersections between artistic and scientific areas made an interesting gathering. The two days of the conference opened an experiential space where artists, scientists, publics and other knowledge producers from different languages and countries, could connect, share and expand experiences, projects and dialogues using stimuli as well from philosophical, environmental, and socioeconomical fields. This sharing of experience and knowledge surpassed the initial expectations about associating these areas of knowledge and the possibility of construing new knowledge based in these diverse experiences, languages, cultural and epistemological traditions. In fact, it may have been the intense and close conviviality between such a broad set of epistemologies
The contributions compiled in this book follow this line of thought; they are charged with humanity and openness to diversity, that allowed the authors in this book to respond to our call to continue creative dialogues outside the sphere of the conference and seek new collaborative grammars. This collection is an attempt - a rehearsal - of an original community of dialogue, practice, apprenticeship and mutual support between researchers and artists to surpass dichotomic, normative and hierarchical models, founded in ethnocentric and logocentric epistemological traditions.

As we put this collection together, our collective rehearsal of re-associating science and art, we wonder how close we are to performing a culture/nature where human actions nourish rather than destroy nature/culture integration. While translations always involve more than mere word for word replacement, the editing process dropped us back into the nature/culture split and the strong hierarchies privileged within the scientific academy where knowledge production is heralded as solely from the human domain. These pressures, which superficially appear to be about clarity of communication with its divergence into standardized languages and scholarly formats, struck us as evident of the failure of much academic practices of knowledge construction. What is lost when knowledge construction becomes a cultural element divorced from nature?

We are concerned with traditions that sustain the dominant model of contemporary societies – organized by capitalist, patriarchal and colonialisltic logics. Described by several authors as inscribing toxicity and self-destruction, and opposing ancient functioning of the cosmos, these traditions lead to an evidently progressive exhaustion of resources, persons and means. Given that nature, including its human element, is governed by rules and principles that humans cannot control, the attempt at control continuously inflicts injuries on nature, including the nature-human: one of the worst forms of self-destruction. Furthermore, this injury is inflicted by the people with the most power disproportionately onto those with the least power. If we embrace the concept of Anthropocene to point to an era of great human impact, we need to acknowledge the hierarchies and subjugations of the profit oriented social systems of the world within this era of the Anthropos. Nature does not belong to humankind, but rather is the humankind that belongs to nature. The human aspiration of an existence in a world freer of constraints where self-determination, creativity and possibilities of choice may multiply, is legitimate when it is within this belonging. This aspiration becomes indeed possible if we consider the symbolic dimension, where knowledge is construed in a logic of sharing and in attunement with all cosmical elements. From this relation with nature multiple options could indeed emerge in the form of complex alternative ways of feeling, thinking, doing, creating and inscribing new ways of existing in the world.

The result of a collaborative process, that sought openness and horizontal engagement. Following their rights and responsibilities as individual authors, the contributors to this edition have departed from boundaries between arts and sciences to transform and create new realities, creating examples and proposals that address the issues exposed above. The contributions are organized in two sections representing firstly, healing of existing parts of the world and secondly, creation of new worlds.

The first section “Transformation of the World” includes articles about experiments carried out in Brazil, Portugal and Papua New Guinea, which sprang from health, social intervention and education projects that use artistic interdisciplinary ways to achieve their transformative goals. The first project, “Delicate choreographies: A cartography of displacements between worlds” presented by Flávia Liberman, Marina Guzzo, Conrado Federici and Elizabeth Lima, describes artistic and corporal practices with a group of women from a vulnerable region in the city of Santos (São Paulo, Brazil), undertaken by professors and undergraduate students from health courses at the Federal University of São Paulo. The second project “Delicate empiricism and romance in education for sustainability”, carried out by Maria Ilhéu and Mariana Valente with teachers, researchers and students from around Évora, Portugal, started from the concepts of “delicate empiricism” by Goethe and “romance” by Whitehead, to test sensitive experiences of the natural world for developing knowledge and environmental consciousness. The authors of these first two projects accepted the invitation to engage more deeply with the work of one another via written dialogues which are included between their two articles. The third project “Workshop of the word: Literature, childhood and cultivation of attention”, by Luciana Caliman and the FRACTAL group of the Federal University of Espírito Santo (Vitória, Brazil), presents a two-year long literary workshop with children from the Center for Psychosocial Child and Adolescent Care (CAPSI). Through a participatory action research approach, children were involved in developing a space of expression, co-management and transformation, for the construction of other possibilities of relating with themselves and with the world. The final article of this first section takes place in Papua New Guinea in an indigenous community. Cláudio da Silva describes his project “Documenting the local traditional culture through an interdisciplinary educational project in Papua New Guinea”, where using artistic processes, alternative educational possibilities for the recovery of important aspects of the culture of the Nalik indigenous community were realized.

The second section of this book “Creation of Worlds” brings together a set of creative projects that departing from research in areas such as biology, natural and cultural landscape, and violence against women and young people, opened possibilities for artistic creations, such as the animated short film “Sendas” and the performative creation “ECO” (Sound Drama in the Landscape). The first article in this section “Sendas: Participatory art
and artistic practice in a research context", by Raquel Felgueiras shows the development of the short film "Sendas", based on the analysis of the visual narratives created by women and young victims of violence, in the framework of a participatory art experience of the transnational research project - Cultural Encounters in Intervention Against Violence - CEINAV. The second article, "The landscape under construction: Cartography of the multisensorial experience of the landscape", by Carla Cabral, follows the paths of creating an alternative experimental cartography based in sensorial experiences of participants interacting with the landscape of the Corgo Valley (Alto Douro, Portugal). The data collected through walking interviews, encompassed the most relevant intuitive, psychological and emotive aspects of their experiences, as well as physical, formal, topographical or geographic aspects. In the third article "The sound of non-human actors in a musicological perspective" Hugo Paquete explores critically fragmented and flexible forms of theory, through analysis of projects where conceptual models and nonhuman entities act in the construction of artistic methods and objects. The fourth article, "ECO", performed by Teatro do Frio, presents some of the premises, processes and methodological notes about the performative aesthetic object "Eco", a sound drama realized in the landscape of Vale S. Paio (Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal) on September 29 and 30, 2017, which aimed to establish resonant bridges with the diverse creation experiences and their languages. The book closes with images taken at Vale S. Paio during the sound drama to invite the reader to consider how these images contribute to the transformations and creations presented throughout the multiple contributions by all the authors.