

Sensitive Territories: Performative research and artistic interventions

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The Arts in the Anthropocene Era

“To continue, today, means to discontinue”

(Bruno Latour, 2014)

To some researchers who dedicate themselves to the studies on the so-called *Anthropocene*² era or the era of Gaia, the Arts, with its ability to develop new tools and strategies, can destabilize conventional thoughts about our relations with and in nature (Kastner, 2012).

However, so that the Arts can contribute effectively to the destabilization of the hegemonic thinking capacity³ of Men’s relation with nature (Human and Urban Ecology) and, especially, to the implications of this relationship, the investigation of innovative methodologies, theories, and procedures of creation coming from transdisciplinary research relations between the arts, science and nature is believed to be important. As well as the expansion of those discussions to a wider audience by collaborating with the production of paradigmatic urgent changes in the contemporary world.

There are many projects⁴ being developed in this direction, it may be said that since the 60’s we follow researches and creations on the relationship between art and nature, art and science. However, the urgent nature of the facts that we are facing on a daily basis in our cities, and in our lives, makes us look to art as a field of research

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² Reference: Will Steffen, Jacques Grinevald, Paul Crutzen and John McNeill. **The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives**. In Philosophical transaction – The Royal Society, 2011.

³ Chantal Mouffe.(2008) Art and Democracy: Art as an agonistic intervention in public space. Open 2008/N.14 art as a public issue.

⁴ Among the projects and artists already searched, I bring as an example the American artist Natalie Jeremijenko and her Health Clinic (<http://www.nataliejeremijenko.com/>);

that can contribute to the development and expansion of these discussions. Saskia Sassen, in her book, "Expulsion" (2014), recognizes that as part of the biosphere, we must know it better and use its abilities to start changing our way of living and building.

An urgent change. In September 2009, the journal *Nature* published a special issue, with the participation of several scientists, identifying nine biophysical processes of the Earth system, and establishing limits for these processes, which, if exceeded, would pose unacceptable environmental changes for several species, including the human species. Already we have achieved almost all of these limits and we witness the consequences in our daily life.

Thinkers from diverse areas of knowledge, with different approaches and opinions, have been discussing the possibilities, on the one hand, of containment of these changes, and on the other, of adaptation of species, especially human, to these changes and their impacts.

For Bruno Latour, one of thinkers who has been devoting to this field of study:

“We must create instruments that help us and lead us to think, something I call the "science statistics" and ways of awareness to what they indicate. There is not a lot of people working for us to become more sensitive to what occurs with Gaia. We must rebuild our sensitivity. We must dramatize, consider the end of the world, and then defuse, to analyze critically the issue. In art, we can do both, dramatize and defuse. If we only analyze, not sensitizes, if we just yell "fire", all run away. It takes yelling fire, but getting people to stay in the room and think. (Latour, 2014)

In addition, the author points to the need for this awareness so that we can interrupt the continuity of things because "Continuing, today, has a deep relationship with discontinuing, stop what we have done, what is habit. Continuity, today, means discontinue and rebuild entirely.” (Idem)

For the artist and researcher Ricardo Dal Farra (Hexagraml Concordia University):

“Art can play an important role in helping the global society to understand the magnitude of the crisis that we are facing, and in promoting awareness around environmental issues (...) it may also be a good vehicle to disseminate proposals that produce changes in our behavior and decisions for the future (...) Artists can promote inter and transdisciplinary actions focusing on the global environmental crisis and our responsibility in relation to the point of change for the future of our life on Earth.”⁵ (Dal Farra, 2014)

However, it is extremely important to understand the place of art in this context,

⁵ Text available at: http://www.balance-unbalance2015.org/?page_id=228 .

because, as says Chantal Mouffe: "it is necessary to enlarge the field of artistic intervention, to interfere directly in the multiplicity of social spaces and capitalism". (Mouffe, 2012)

Sensitive Territories: a performative investigation in art, science and nature

“The art sharpens our fitness first to create, to penetrate and explore imaginary worlds, as if they had the same thickness of the real worlds, to formulate hypotheses about the direction of the worlds, anticipate their future, enroll in their own temporality and play with the shapes of time...”.
Edmond Couchot (2012)

To place a research/creation in the context Anthropocene discussion, it is extremely important to take into consideration the different views on the issues that underlie these discussions. However, in this text, we are not going to deepen in these discussions for not being the main focus, but I would like to clarify that we look at the overwhelming changes we are living from the propositions of the Chilean scientists Maturana and Varela (1980). For them, the survival of an organism depends on the continuous recreation of modes of life. Thus, when we consider the human evolution, comprising organism and environment together, we can see that any biological change in course is completely dominated by environmental and cultural transformations. Yet, according to the propositions of the Japanese philosopher Tetsuro Watsuji (2006), environment and climate, geography and history, spatiality and temporality are inseparable.

Thus, to situate this research, presented here in Brazil, it is important to take into account the territorial dimensions, large and diverse natural and cultural present in the country, which implies the need for localized studies. We have in Brazil a natural and cultural diversity that gleams in the eyes, but that in our daily life is not respected in its specificities.

The question of how to deal with these issues and the "place" of art as a research field, facing the crisis we have been through; has emerged as a matter of research from a mapping of the coastline of the State of Ceará, from Jericoacoara to Icapuí, including the city of Fortaleza (State's capital), that spurred the creation of the *Sensitive Territories* project and, later, of the research laboratory <BRISA LAB>.

(<http://dgp.cnpq.br/dgp/espelhogrupo/0069945726805917>), composed of researchers and students from undergraduate and graduate courses from the Federal University of Ceará.

Meeting and experiencing the cities from the coast of Ceará in their daily lives approached us to their political, social, economic, geographical and natural issues that permeate their everyday routine. From this experience emerged the first concerns that awakened us to the possibilities that an artistic "intervention" could result in these cities and towns, and contribute to this field of study and vice versa. What is the power of performative actions in these areas? What could be unfolded from a performative research?

Methodologically, according to Brad Haseman (2006), performative researches propose a practice that leads to research issues, and these are intrinsically experiential. The experiences, emotional and cognitive operations, lead us to new artistic forms both for the creation as for the display.

Adding to this thought, Sensitive Territories proposes actions based on the relations between body and environment, performance and perception, sensorial and creative impulses. It is believed that from performing experiences, politic, poetic, aesthetic and cognitive issues can emerge as the field of creative possibilities, to build a critical thinking contributing, on the one hand, to research methodologies in art, and on the other, to new mechanisms of creation.

The proposals of the present study aim at the reflection on the methodology itself, turning it into a device for experience and creation. Because, on the context and field of action to which it is related, we believe that investigation procedures that insert both artists and public in actions and experiential creations are essential.

This thought is based in understanding the body as a dynamic and auto-organized system, permeated incessantly by the flow of information that takes place in the relationship between body-environment-time. Thus, it is believed that from performative acts, namely the insertion of the body in a performative process of experience/creation, the body acts directing to action possibilities, discovering pathways, pointing solutions based on experiences of the sensorial and the cognitive

fields. This brings us closer to three fields of study: the performance, the embodiment and cognitive science.

However, the aim of this performative methodology is the potentiation of a poetic resurface leading to creative impulses, assessing issues emerging of the investigated territories.

Brief history of the development of the research experiments

After a mapping of the coast of the State of Ceará, held in 2014, we initiated the research actions in Icapuí, east coast of the State.

With approximately 20 thousand inhabitants, Icapuí has as its main economic activity the small-scale fishing of lobster and is composed of 13 beaches with natural landscapes.

On the beach of Requenguela, the tidal phenomenon has jumped to the eye and to the body. With up to 6 miles of retreat, the tidal phenomenon enabled us to an immersion into the environment Sea and the time Tide. The shallow tide phenomenon provided a sensorial body experience that implies in a spacetime relation, confronting us all the time with the paradox between the microscopic life and the immensity of the sea, with the infinite and the finite, with the full and empty, dry and wet. The fisherman time to fish and to cross this space.



Requenguela beach|Icapuí

From this experience, we produced an immersible|performative installation “Tides|Sweeping”. The aim of this immersible|performative installation is to create a sensible place, where the visitors can experiment with their bodies the space, time and sensory stimuli originated from the coastal Bio Rhizome of Ceará.

The project also includes workshops, to be held in the space itself, with the local community.

After this first experience, it was held, in February 2015, the laboratory called LandscapelEmergency, which resulted in the development of a second research center, at the Mucuripe Beach, located at the center of Fortaleza.



Mucuripe beach|Fortaleza

Postcard of the city, the Mucuripe Beach was the place where the American filmmaker Orson Welles directed one of the episodes of the film "It's All True", titled "Four Men on the Raft" (1942). In the movie it is staged the true story of the crossing in which four fishermen took a raft towards Rio de Janeiro to plead with the President of Brazil best labor conditions for fishing in Ceará.

Today, however, this small strip of sand carries, as described by researcher Lis Paim in her text "Sketches for the Crossing of a Specific Place"⁶, a fishing community hidden in town by a siege of trees, but also of invisibility that is established in these locations on the sidelines.

“There is a clear rift between beach and asphalt. (...) You do not have to spend a lot of time there to understand the difference between that strip of sand and the rest of the entire beach is precisely the anachronistic survival of that fishing community. (...) A community that is also witness to the transformations of the city and the unbridled real estate speculation, as well as the fishery activity and that sea.”(Paim, 2015)

From this performative experience that lasted 3 months, and in the light of the issues we bring to this research, a group of 7 researchers (formed by artists, architects and a biologist) is developing a project that involves performing actions in loco, with fishermen and residents of the place.

Inconclusions|Questionings

To conclude this brief presentation, I have two other important points for the development of our research at <BRISA LAB>: the notion of visibility and of art in the public sphere.

The American critic and curator Rosalyn Deutsche (2011), by quoting the thought of philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, says that the public space would be a place of complex visibilities, exposed to otherness, in heterogeneous forms of relationship with each other and with others, and especially with the unknown of both.

Deutsche draws attention to some currents of contemporary art that analyzed the vision as the sense that relates to the other and asks: what is public insight? Can that vision overcome apathy? How art can be public, not only by being out of the museums and galleries, but also as a space of otherness and visibility of each other?

These questions echo every action that we develop in the territories selected and marked for this research. Each approach, every link established with residents of these sensible territories, after every experience, we went back to our lab, discussed and proposed new actions and interventions in search of possible paths. However, as

⁶ Text developed after landscap|Emergency Laboratory. (unpublished)

Edgar Morin says “The difficulty is that complex thought must confront the confusion (the endless game of inter-retrospection), the solidarity of the phenomena among them, the mist, the uncertainty, the contradiction” (Morin: 1991 p. 19).

And so, we go sure that, to continue today, we must discontinue, reflect, propose new directions and, above all, act.

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