

EXPLORATIONS ON SOUND AND NEW MEDIA ART

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ABSTRACT

This special issue of the *Journal of Science and Technology of the Arts* is inspired by the first >>> *Explorations on Sound and New Media Art Conference*, held at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, School of Arts in Porto, Portugal. Like the conference, this issue seeks to celebrate the convergence of sound, new media, and artistic expression by exploring a wide range of innovative practices, theories, and approaches. It aims to foster meaningful discussions that critically examine traditional notions of art while pushing the boundaries of creativity. Following the conference, we invited various authors to develop and submit their research, with the hope that their contributions will shed further light on how we perceive and construct the world through sonic and new media art practices.

Keywords: New media art; Sound art; Post-digital art; Digital creativity.

New media art expands the possibilities of artistic expression by harnessing the power of technology, intertwining sound, visuals, and interactivity into a seamless experience. It challenges our perceptions, blurs the boundaries between mediums, and invites us to explore the ever-evolving landscape of digital creativity. New media art is not a homogeneous set of practices but rather a complex field that converges around a broad array of works created with or shaped by emerging technologies. It continuously challenges not only the boundaries of artistic mediums but also the way we perceive art itself.

Having hosted expressions ranging from technical virtuosity to the construction of speculative worlds of identity and social reconstruction, new media artists address several themes, including computer art, collaboration, identity, appropriation, open sourcing, telepresence, surveillance, corporate parody, intervention, and hacktivism (Tribe & Jana, 2007). These practices often engage in a self-referential relationship with new technologies, reflecting the epoch-making transformation driven by technological development (Bolognini, 2008).

In the 21st century, new media art has evolved alongside rapid technological advancements, such as machine learning, virtual/augmented reality (VR/AR), and artificial intelligence (AI). These technologies have expanded the possibilities for artistic expression even further, allowing for more immersive, interactive, and dynamic artworks with access to an immeasurable amount of data and information. Simultaneously, artists and society witness the rise of the internet as a mass cultural and socio-political medium, while also responding to urgent economic and political events, from financial crises to ongoing military conflicts. The expansions are not only technological; new media art explores digitality, circulation, privacy, and globalization. It also addresses how feminism and gender binaries have been reshaped by new mediations of identity, and how the art-world infrastructure has reacted to the internet's promises of democratization (Gronlund, 2016).

The growing saturation of digital technologies in contemporary life pushes new media art outcomes toward a post-digital perspective, where the blending of digital and physical experiences is acknowledged, and often there is no distinction between the two (Paul, 2015). Instead of focusing on the novelty of digital tools, artists now use these technologies as seamlessly integrated components of their practice. Glitches, bugs, and noise become artistic elements that nurture works reflecting the messy, hybrid reality of a world where digital and analog coexist and blend into one (Cascone, 2000). This integration of digital technology prompts critical discussions about the role of the artist, the impact of technological advancement on culture, and the evolving role of humans and non-humans in art creation. In this context, we believe that new media art practices are in a privileged position to construct spaces and dimensions of artistic creation stemming from artificial minds that experience the world differently from humans, despite having privileged access to our culture (Penha & Carvalhais, 2018).

In our perspective Sound Art and New Media Art share several common challenges, particularly in their reliance on technology and its intrinsic nature to discover new ways to engage audiences. Both fields require specialized equipment and technical knowledge, creating hurdles for artists in terms of access to tools, software, and skills. Both forms also face issues of reception, as audiences may find them difficult to engage with due to the abstract, non-traditional nature of these media. As theorist Christoph Cox notes, sound art demands “a different kind of listening”, one that is attentive to the materiality of sound itself (Cox, 2011). Similarly, media theorist Lev Manovich discusses how New Media Art often requires users to adopt new modes of interaction (Manovich, 2001). It is based on the shared identities and principles between Sound Art and New Media Art, that the first >>I *Explorations on Sound and New Media Art Conference* took place at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, School of Arts in Porto, Portugal. Gathering artists, musicians, performers, scholars, and technologists, the event invited participants to embark on a thought-provoking journey, pushing the boundaries of sonic expression and multimedia experimentation. In this inaugural edition, we celebrated the convergence of sound, new media, and artistic expression, exploring a diverse range of innovative practices, theories, and approaches, while fostering meaningful discussions that critically examine traditional notions of art and challenge the boundaries of creativity and the way that we perceive the world.

All the articles in this special issue contribute to this debate. Rui Filipe Antunes, Cecília de Lima and Silvia Pinto Coelho explore the notions of the body in relation to virtual reality's volatile and insubstantial nature—massless, weightless, and fluid bodies. They seek to observe and reflect on changes in dancers' body perceptions when interacting with inherently ghostly virtual bodies. Through a practice-based approach, their experience underscores the complex interplay between sensory perceptions, virtual realities, and the human desire to produce bodily resonance in tangible, grounded connections within immersive spaces.

Nuno da Luz reflects on the significance of more-than-human vibrations and sounds as transformative zones of contact in our increasingly dense and layered urban biomes. He analyzes human-animal relations, suggesting an expansion of vibrational attention to social-environmental contexts, where listening is reassessed as an eco-sensible methodology that understands humans, non-humans, and technology as part of integrated ecologies.

João Polido Gomes brings us the relationship between contemporary technology and the political dimensions of culture and memory. He examines how the revolutionary ethnomusicology archive collected by Michel Giacometti, in conjunction with source separation technology, affects perception and promotes an active mode of listening to an archive.

Firat Erdim, Dr. Paula Matthusen, and Olivia Valentine share the processes and reflections behind their exhibition *LOOM • ROOM • HARP*, which explored space and architectural interiority as a means of allowing

ideas of the past and present to commingle, with inside and outside merging into one another. They present no solutions to reconcile space and time but offer new ways to resist to conventional approaches, using sound processing, streaming, and spatialization techniques to forge intersecting layers and trajectories of audio throughout the room.

This publication concludes with a beautiful essay by Salomé Voegelin, which reperforms as text a curatorial performance given at the conference in Porto. She takes us on a journey through poems, music, and sounds in an elegantly choreographed performance that invites us, through an embodied experience, to critically consider how sound performs weather in a time of climate change—an idea where we perceive the world actively, not only through aesthetic effects but also through political and social lenses.

While this issue may not provide definitive conclusions on how we build and perceive the world through sonic and new media art practices, we hope it will contribute to illuminating the path ahead—not to find answers but to find ways to resist and rethink our artistic and scientific engagement.

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