

4Cs Handbook

# REFLECTIONS AND ACTIONS UPON MEDIATION PRACTICES



4Cs - From Conflict to Conviviality  
through Creativity and Culture

**4CS HANDBOOK COLOPHON  
REFLECTIONS AND ACTIONS  
UPON MEDIATION PRACTICES**

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An Oceanic Feeling  
*Jul. – Sep. 2017, Fundació Antoni Tàpies*

Cultivating Conviviality  
*Nov. 2017 – Feb. 2018, ENSAD*

The Baltic Sea: A Liquid Memorial  
*Sep. 2018, VAA and Nida Art Colony*

This Is No Longer That Place: A Public Discussion  
*Mar. 2019, Royal College of Art, The Showroom, and Tate Britain*

Dwelling on the Threshold  
*October 2019, VAA and Nida Art Colony*

Notes from Atopia  
*October 2020, Universidade Católica Portuguesa and Appleton Associação Cultural*

The Silent University, Language Café  
*Sept. 2017 – Sept. 2018, Tensta Konsthall*

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*Jan. – Apr. 2018, Fundació Antoni Tàpies;*

Celebrating crafts for social change  
*Oct. 2018 – May 2019, ENSAD;*

Portions of Share  
*March 2019, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, FOCO, Galeria Balcony, and Galeria Belo-Galsterer*

Da condição de pessoa livre - Vasco Araújo  
*Jun. – Jul. 2019, Universidade Católica Portuguesa and MAAT*

What’s on the news?  
*Sep. – Nov. 2019, Museet for Samtidskunst*

Talk Tower for Forough Farrokhzad, Ângela Ferreira  
*Oct. 2020, Universidade Católica Portuguesa and Appleton Associação Cultural*

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4Cs: From Conflict to Conviviality through Creativity and Culture is a European Cooperation Project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union. The 4Cs seeks to understand how training and education in art and culture can constitute powerful resources to address the issue of conflict as well as to envision creative ways in which to deal with conflictual phenomena, while contributing to audience development through active participation and co-production. The project aims at advancing the conceptual framework of intercultural dialogue and enhancing the role of public arts and cultural institutions in fostering togetherness through cultural diversity and intercultural encounters. Coordinated by the Faculdade de Ciências Humanas | Universidade Católica, 4Cs is grounded on the collaboration of 8 core partners (Tensta Konsthall; SAVVY Contemporary; Royal College of Art; Fundació Antoni Tàpies; Vilnius Academy of Arts; Museet for Samtidskunst; and ENSAD) and various local partners, such as Culture+Conflict, MAAT, Gulbenkian Foundation, Hangar, Appleton Associação Cultural, Gaivotas 6, OR Gallery, The Goethe-Institut, and Gasworks, among others.

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# Perspectiva Artificialis

The Role of Mediation  
to the Natural World  
in Tomás Saraceno's  
Artistic Practices

Federico  
Rudari

When addressing mediation as the both artistic and research practice of occupying a middle, intermediary position between other two (Williams 1985, 72), the role played by cultural transfer is crucial. Cultural transfer comes into play when the object of discussion experiences a shift moving from a context of perception to another. This action, according to Espagne, presupposes the implication of a constitutive hermeneutic research towards new interpretative meanings, which are able to shape this transposition in a form as legitimate as the original one (Espagne 2013, 1-2). Cultural transfer consists in the range of operations of variation and reinterpretation, grounded on the re-examination of the structures of memory that characterise the context of reception. In this frame, Espagne highlights the relevance of those dynamics that influence our perception leading contemplation to interpretation, and the author attributes an essential role to the relativization of the notion of centre (between the original object and the subject of perception), as well as questioning those radical perspectives that discredit the value of different contexts of access and sense-making to support a unique and widespread interpretation.

Moreover, Greenblatt advocates the idea that cultural transfer “has to take into account entanglements between the conceptual and the material and acknowledge that the anthropocentric notion of the human as the prime mover of objects [...] and creation of meaning is troubled by the agency of nonhuman life (animals, viruses, etc.), inorganic matter (particles, etc.), and the various idiosyncrasies of these objects themselves. On the other hand, the blurring of boundaries between the material and conceptual opens up space for a (serious) gaming with analogies, comparisons and – beyond the mere conceptual – *relations*: transplantation, infection, evolution, etc.” (Greenblatt 2014, 6). In fact, the author claims that objects, environments and people are characterised by an intrinsic fluidity that affects the way their relations of perception with the external world

is constructed, both in the manner in which they perceive and are perceived as subjects and objects. For this reason, a constant action of adaptation, translation, alteration and even selection is required to cross “borders” of analysis. The displacement of these mediated forms of experience is contextual, cultural, and linguistic, and it does not only concern different perceptions in human semantic domains, but also non-human fields of knowledge and expression. In other words, the role of mediation is also crucial when, through the specific tools of cultural discourse, we unfold and discuss objects of analysis which belong to the outer, natural world.

The constitution and implementation of operative schemes able to effectively represent and mediate natural realities is more and more common in artistic and research practices. In particular, facing the ecological and environmental challenges that characterise contemporary times, natural phenomena and their codes of expression and manifestation need to be tackled and understood as urgently as ever. In fact, bringing light to the current issues related to the changes our coexistence with the outside world has led has always been a science-based prerogative in terms of narrative and methodologies. However, the evolution of techniques of expression in art and art-based research in recent times has been allowing to push the boundaries of natural representation. Not only these forms of depiction consent to avoid the juxtaposition of science-based laws with their object of study, conceived according to the human comprehension of external processes and phenomena, but also, not aiming to justify specific causal relations pertaining to the portrayed objects of analysis, they are effective in interpreting the natural world making the aesthetic experience of it accessible to a broader audience.

In this frame, the work of the Argentinian artist and architect Tomás Saraceno and his studio is moving in this direction, developing original and innovative techniques to depict specific traits of the biosphere. His practice, bridging together art-based research with life science, biology and social sciences, suggests new ways of inhabiting the environment adopting a holistic perspective in which he positions the human element in dialogue with its surroundings. Central in his work, the idea of the Anthropocene, defined as the geological era during which the human influence on the ecological system of which we are part, the Earth, started being significantly impactful on the climatic and environmental balance of the planet, is tackled by Saraceno's work as a starting point upon which he constructs a mediated dialogue with the natural world as a response to human action.

In 2019, Saraceno presented at 58<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia, *May You Live In Interesting Times*, a contribution to his broader community project *Arachnophilia Society*, in the context of which the artist aims to engage with other species in order to develop a dialogue of coexistence. These interactive installations, inspired by organisational structures comparing spider colonies and gravitational forces and waves, bridge together a huge variety of disciplines (architecture, sociology, astrophysics, natural sciences, art and philosophy) to explore a conversation oriented to new practices of inhabiting the world in times of environmental upheaval. Other species and systems of group organisation are taken by Saraceno as inspiration to construct an alternative to a threatened conviviality. Curated by Ralph Rugoff, the *Spider/Web Pavilion* transcends the representation of the human dimension of experience delivering to its audience an unusually structured collaboration which takes the shape of entangling collectively built constellations. The pavilion presents itself as a mediated guide which “engages with different forms of knowledge and echoes spider divination methods practiced

in different parts of the world” (Studio Tomás Saraceno 2019), among which the capacity to forecast extraordinary meteorological events such as tsunamis through the interaction with gravitational waves. Saraceno addresses spiders on two levels of analysis. On the one hand, he deals with the ecological crisis we are currently facing, tackling the acceleration of arachnids disappearance due to global warming, soil exploitation and pesticides misuse, giving a human-based perspective on our relation with nature and the impact caused by the global capitalist economy. On the other hand, the work aims to balance the destructive action interacting with alternative forms of knowledge. The pavilion aspires to mediate between deeply interconnected worlds towards joint solutions. As a synanthropic species, namely those that have been forced to adapt to the specificities of human-dominated ecologies, spiders “blur the boundaries between inside and outside, between nature and culture and between what is alive and what is not” (Ibid.). Thus, “the *Spider/Web Pavilions* are an invitation to attune to our sympoietic futures, the interconnectedness of all things, both living and nonliving” (Ibid.). As suggested by the artist, the main idea behind this project is precisely to mediate the condition of ‘reciprocal blindness’ between humans and spiders. The embodied cognition experienced throughout the exhibition and its complex architectural constructions aim to amplify the impact of new perspectives on building coexistence which, grounded on alternative practices of non-verbal communication, enlarges the need for co-responding to currently faced issues. The space becomes the temporary home for reciprocal attention and dialogue, as a multiplicity of threads constructing a new participated conviviality in the Lagoon of Venice, “[a]s a sensitive interface constantly modified by different socialities, [...] as a space of care and attention, [...] a participatory storytelling against extraction and extinction” (Ibid.).

The dialogical experience continues in Florence, where in February 2020 the exhibition *Aria*, curated by Arturo Galansino, was inaugurated. This newly proposed universe is reconstructed throughout the rooms and external spaces of Palazzo Strozzi, emphasising the interconnection and dependence of our existence on Earth with subtle and often imperceptible elements, such as spiders, plants and dust particles. The sensorially immersive experience is metaphorically constructed around the dialogical idea of inhabiting the world, interacting with the historical beauty of the Renaissance features of the hosting venue causing “a shift from the idea of ‘man at the centre of the world’ to the concept of ‘man as part a universe’ in which a new harmony can be sought” (Palazzo Strozzi 2020). The artist guides the spectator into an immersive experience to understand a new model of coexistence that can be learned from the natural world: a different and revolutionary epoch is possible, an epoch which Saraceno addresses as Aerocene, erected on complementary sensitivities that lead to a new participated ecological practice. The practices of nets construction, as previously explored in the *Spider/Web Pavilion* are implemented as symbols of the relationship of interconnected ecology in a shared world. The space creates a suspended dimension of geometrical possibilities in which the dialogue between mediated behavioural systems which bridges coexistent elements into both solidly structured and volatile clouds. Here, “[i]rregular structures reminiscent of Weaire-Phelan arrangements of aggregating foam and soap bubbles whose remarkable shapes act as an invitation to engage from diverse bearings, as mirrored planes trace the sun’s rays in a play of light and shadow” (Studio Tomás Saraceno 2020).

The work of Tomás Saraceno presents the intent to develop and disseminate a new ecology of practise. However, despite employing science and engineering-based technique in the construction of this dialogue, he does not position the human element, with its discoveries and beliefs, as the central spindle to overcome the ongoing ecological crisis. The relation with nature and the understanding of reciprocity as opposed to individuality highlight the cruciality of sharing the environment instead of aiming to control it. The formation of a new equilibrium depends on the capacity of reading and following other forms of behaviour that are coded in the environment that surrounds us. Both *Aria* and *Spider/Web Pavilion* are the mediated experience of this possibility.

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