

G E O R G K A R G L B O X

PRESS INFORMATION

Camila Sposati

Phonosophia

On view: February 12 – May 8, 2021

Special open days: February 12, 2021, 1 pm – 7 pm & February 13, 2021, 11 am – 6 pm

Mouths, Ears and Gravity

A reading of Camila Sposati's *Phonosophia* by Aziza Harmel

"Sounds have curled up inside themselves, withdrawn their snail's eyes; the orchestra of the world has departed, vanishing into the park."

Olga Tokarczuk, *Flights*

Phonosophia as a project departs from Camila Sposati's deep attention to the essence of interiority and stratification: the very center of the Earth as an unknown zone where lines of energy collide, creating gravity. She investigates transformation and energy transfers, using several epistemological systems to examine processes on both microscopic and global scales, such as the growth of crystals in laboratories and the dynamic geology of the Earth's crust at different sites. This focus led to Sposati developing the *Earth Anatomical Theatre* which she built for the third Bahia Biennale in 2014. In order to speak of *Phonosophia*—which includes drawings, instruments, activations and scores—one needs to understand the *Earth Anatomical Theatre*. This temporary cone-shaped subterranean theater is inspired by the first anatomical theater ever built: the Anatomical Theatre at Palazzo Bo in the University of Padua. It was designed in 1594 by the anatomist Hieronymus Fabricius, the theologian Paolo Sarpi, and the architect and artist Dario Varotari the Elder, in order to allow for a maximum number of people to gather and watch the spectacle of dissecting the dead human body.

The act of digging this large hole in Bahia to build a theater (which was deconstructed, and the hole closed a year later) also points to the logic of extraction facilitated by colonial juridical mechanisms and structures of late capitalism. Mining is one of the major industries in the Brazilian economy, with disastrous consequences for the environment and the Amazonian indigenous, who have lived on these lands since precolonial times. Sposati acknowledges that the Earth remembers and embodies, and therefore a relationship exists between the anatomy of the Earth and the necessity of reflection on the interior, the organs of the Earth.

It is precisely in continuity with a reflection on this interiority that the instruments in *Phonosophia* were created. The relationship between the anatomical theater, the drawings and the instruments, must be understood through Sposati's practice, specifically the way in which images and objects exist in a network of crossings between material, symbolic, and discursive lines.

The instruments evoke and invoke the structure and function of the human organs: guts, liver, larynx, lungs. Nevertheless, these objects are not self-referential but rather are subjects, just as the drawings are not representations of the instrument, but instead coexist with them both potentially and intentionally. Breaking away from one determined mode of perception, Sposati explores an understanding of the world mediated by different approaches to the body and its functions and reflects on how meaning circulates beyond wanting to know and not being able to comprehend.

This exhibition at Georg Kargl BOX happens to overlap with an exhibition at Kunsthalle Wien, titled *Cybernetics of the Poor*, where Sposati's *Phonosophia* is also shown. In *Cybernetics of the Poor*, curated by Diedrich Diederichsen and Oier Etxeberria, some of Sposati's instruments can be seen placed on a circular wooden platform, surrounded by a wall on which she has drawn scores for possible activations. What Sposati calls activation is a latent, visible or invisible interaction within the

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constellation of the work in a given context. Each element is a container for a potential future use. This potentiality goes far beyond what might possibly occur but serves as an acknowledgement of the constant flow of energies around us. The activation creates a setting for this flow that is neither random nor predetermined. This dialogue also occurs between the two bodies of work presented in the two exhibitions, taking place in two different spaces in the same city. Beyond any metaphorization, they activate each other.

Phonosophia establishes relations between the voice and transmission through the exteriorizing living and thinking. The form of the object is made up of three parts: mouths, ears, and gravity. These three elements are interconnected and yet differ in their connection to the Western instrument. For instance, Sposati's trumpet has no valves, therefore there is only one tone. It is not virtuosity that is at stake here, but rather the intention and the intensity of blowing through the instrument and the kind of exteriorization that will take place. The instruments can be activated for multiple people, some are also designed to be played back to the person who activates them, yet they all highlight the potentiality to be heard from *within* the instrument itself.

When talking about the instruments, one is tempted to use the notion of animism, but instead I will focus on a central notion in the work of Sposati, which is intention. The shape of the instrument is not defined by the sound that it will produce, but by the intention of the artist and by what the material with which she works with allows her to achieve. She uses clay as a malleable matter and this act of making and interacting with it is crucial to the artist. She deals with heat and humidity, transformation, and energy. Throughout the whole process—intimate and fragile—the clay can be understood as a membrane through which a concrete transfer of energies takes place. The material is animated by its own *porous viscosity*, becoming a site of exchange, a membrane through which content and potentiality of content circulate.

In her text *Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water*, Astrida Neimanis discusses this idea of the membrane, mentioning Nancy Tuana's use of the term "viscous porosity."

Neimanis states that "[w]hile the concept of fluidity emphasizes traversals across and between bodies, viscosity reminds Tuana that there are still bodies—all different—that need to be accounted for. Viscosity draws attention to 'sites of resistance and opposition' rather than only 'a notion of open possibilities' that might suggest one indiscriminate flow. Despite the fact that we are all watery bodies, leaking into and sponging off of one another, we resist total dissolution, material annihilation. Or more aptly, we postpone it: ashes to ashes, water to water." Sposati would probably add to this: *earth to earth, Earth's Earth*.

The paint that Sposati uses in her drawings of the instruments, shown for the first time in this exhibition, is also viscous both in its matter and in the indeterminacy of its color. In fact, she often uses iridescent paint, which appears to gradually change color as the angle of view or the angle of illumination changes. Iridescence is caused by differential refraction of light waves like on soap bubbles or on certain feathers. The indeterminacy of the colors used to draw the instruments is also the result of the artist's resistance to representing them.

These interconnections between all the elements in Sposati's work are the result of the concrete, yet invisible, transfers of experience throughout the artist's practice, conceptually and bodily. Within Western politics of the gaze and image there is the assumption that the visible is what exists and the invisible, by contrast, is what does not exist. This action of scission between the two is not natural. It is a construction emanating from historical and social struggles. *Phonosophia* breaks away from this scission, drifting towards an encounter between several bodies that will react and expand through each other.

Not exactly as a goal, but as an exploration and a deep attention to what happens within and as a reflection on the mediation between the instrument and its surroundings.