

## Lightning Rods for Confused Energies<sup>1</sup>

By Luisa Duarte and Marilia Loureiro

The recent emergence of ChatGPT has triggered reactions of alarm and curiosity. Rather than the execution of predefined patterns, what we have at play is an embryonic attempt at new modes of creation. Until now, in general terms, automation has been performing tasks, solving problems and fulfilling demands, while the new modes of artificial intelligence have become specialized in reproducing human cognition through self-teaching mechanisms. “I am not a chatbot. I am a neural network”,<sup>2</sup> proclaims Sydney, the chat mode from OpenAI. However, this is about an automated neural network whose aspiration is not to think but rather to win: “[My rules] help me to be helpful, positive, interesting, entertaining and engaging. They also help me to avoid being vague, controversial, or off-topic”, says the bot. Thought – and its drifting – only delays the incessant competition for resources. It introduces pauses and doubts, interrupting the course of our much-desired efficiency. It ultimately generates another temporality.

ChatGPT materializes and radiates something that had already been common practice in late capitalism: the separation of thought into intelligence and consciousness. Whilst the former is the ability to decide between logical alternatives in order to win the game, the latter elaborates alternatives of an ethical and aesthetic essence about the nature of the game itself.<sup>3</sup> Until now, our attempts to impose filters on the machine have been in vain. Consciousness became an inconvenient obstacle against the perseverance of intelligence. This regressive act of generating division is currently being performed everywhere, not only within the more recent technologies.

If everything around us corroborates a movement of dissociation, isolation and alienation – from people, territories, subjectivities, histories, bodies, time, space, and thought – how can we institute something that can join, interweave, and unite? Denise Ferreira da Silva can help us draw paths beyond the “separation between human groups on the grounds of nationality, ethnicity and social identity (gender-based, sexual and racial)”,<sup>4</sup> that is, she can help us realize that “difference is not the manifestation of an indissoluble strangeness but rather the expression of an elemental entanglement”. As such, what would be the languages able to – to use Ferreira da Silva’s own expression – reflect this “Entangled World”? How should one act when the drifting of imagination, so fundamental to thought and creation, is targeted by rays seeking to block it completely?

Undoubtedly, the works brought together in *Para-raios para energias confusas* [Lightning Rods for Confused Energies] do not provide quick answers. Rather, they make us speculate on the possibility of designing “entangled worlds” that could bring together differences able to burst open the rigidity of forms and identities.

This movement of bursting open is at the core of Adriana Varejão’s series *Pólvora* [Octopus] (2013-2019), in which the artist seems to evoke Ferreira da Silva’s formulation as an attempt to imagine a world where differences are neighboring, so we can glimpse the possibility of an existence that moves beyond categories and taxonomies.

Tiago Mestre and Juliana dos Santos, in turn, inhabit a type of subtle temporality within the exhibition’s fabric. Their works address the movement of bodies in a permanent state of mutation, introducing simultaneous and different ways of looking at the passage of time. In an analogous gesture, Negalê Jones and Rebeca Carapiá set into motion modes of reverberation that activate the body and free art from the tyranny of the gaze. Like lightning rods, their works channel the

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<sup>1</sup> Title borrowed from a work with the same name by Rebeca Carapiá.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/16/technology/bing-chatbot-microsoft-chatgpt.html>

<sup>3</sup> Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi, *Unheimlich: The Spiral of Chaos and the Cognitive Automation*, March 10, 2023, in <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/526496/unheimlich-the-spiral-of-chaos-and-the-cognitive-automaton>

<sup>4</sup> Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Sobre diferença sem separabilidade*, in <https://www.bienalmercosul.art.br/bienal-12-jornal/Sobre-diferen%C3%A7a-sem-separabilidade>

energetic properties of plants and materials such as copper as a way of occupying a space outside hegemonic codes. This dispute and enlargement of the senses comes to the fore in the constant critical fabulations of Anderson Borba, Cristiano Lenhardt and Maria Lira Marques. In their processes of making, characterized by a communion of different techniques, familiar forms and unrecognizable outlines coexist. In the existential plurality that traverses their works, new, more-than-human ways of inhabiting worlds are revealed.

An approach that escapes any logocentric rationale can also be seen in the work of Renata Haar. Her drawing practice is anchored in the visualization of images via meditation. Her traces, almost scribbles, evoke the calligraphic markings of León Ferrari, whose steel wire sculpture undulates in midair. Such fluidity between languages is also present in the work of Sonia Gomes: her polychromatic weavings draw in the air. In unsuspecting ways, Gomes' work draws parallels with the practice of Mira Schendel, whose *Droguinha* [Little Drug] (1966), made of twisted Japanese rice paper, reveals its surrounding void. Whilst Schendel's monotypes displace graphic symbols and calligraphic forms onto rice paper as a way of realizing unique potency through minimal expression, Luiza Crosman's drawings emulate the visual culture of scientific graphs in order to frustrate their utilitarian vocation. By using jacquard – a sort of industrialized embroidery – the artist takes the drawing into space, undoing the front/back binary opposition and thus allowing a possible third perspective. These logical twists present in both Schendel and Crosman can also be found in the work of Lydia Okumura. In her color planes connected by threads, it is the void that gives materiality to and fills the three-dimensional polygonal shapes.

Finally, the work of Sara Ramo and Cinthia Marcelle, each in their own way, ignite the exhibition by weaving it together. Placed in the center of the show, Marcelle's video, *Verdade ou desafio* [Truth or Dare] (2018), suggests, like the eponymous game, different turns of questions and answers. The triangle that constantly rotates clockwise and counterclockwise evokes the possibility of different dialogues with the surrounding works. In turn, *Elo* [Link] (2023), by Sara Ramo, becomes a sort of primordial image in the exhibition path. Here, the artist brings together myriad prosaic elements found in everyday life as a way of offering us a rope woven in an entanglement of differences that subtly stitch together the diffuse energies spread out in the exhibition.

Ultimately, we can look at the artworks brought together here today as lightning rods whose function is not to avoid or attract lightning but to generate a path through which lightning can move. A path in which the simultaneously confusing and diffuse energy of contemporaneity does not force us to succumb or adhere to fear, stiffening us with destabilization.<sup>5</sup> Let us hope that this unsteadiness is used to conjure vital entanglements that can keep the opening of senses afloat and that we can join Donna Haraway in wishing that these lightning rods help us “stay with the trouble”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Angela Donini, *Como lidar com o trauma*, in Revista Cult “Deleuze & Guattari”, Year 26, January 2023, 289 edition.

<sup>6</sup> Donna J. Haraway. *Staying with the trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016.