

# From art to the expressive aesthetic dimension in a scenario of (un)sustainability

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**Abstract:** The change in production conditions and the consequent change in the exchange systems for goods and values, led contemporary societies to a highly complex process of political, social, economic and cultural organization. The conceived ecosystems, given their interdependence and sophistication, prevent any possibility of a compartmentalized and fragmented analysis about the implications for the subjective constructions of humans who over different times and spaces, undertook physical, critical and creative efforts to carry out such an intent. Although, the results of such an undertaking, affected societies at different stages and in different ways. Therefore, the need for a review of the founding paradigms is clear, once it the accumulation and the consequent equal sharing of the results of the efforts undertaken, were operated by means of looting, slavery, exploitation and exclusion in a continuous and *ad infinitum* movement that makes inequalities the mainstay of the Anthropocene. Towards that backdrop, this text proposes to problematize the forms of appropriation of subjectivities within the scope of art, considering the link of this field with the dominant values and the constant updates and links, with a view to supporting and feeding a power structure based on paradigm of production, circulation and consumption. The discussion, while indicating the limits and signs of exhaustion of the model in question, identifies subjective constructions that, despite operating in contemporary time space, seem to resist the expropriation of creative force, operating in a movement that opposes temporality and linear productivity, at the same time that questions the dominant paradigms, stressing the current model with expressive, insurgent and disruptive characteristics. It is a construction that moves towards humans, weaving community projects that take up the expressive aesthetic dimension as a possibility for change.

**Keywords:** Expressive aesthetic - Art - Design - Subjectivities - Images - Imaginaries - Sustainability

[Abstracts in spanish and portuguese at pages 75-76]

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## Introduction

The change in production conditions and the consequent shift in the exchange systems for goods and values have led contemporary societies to a highly complex political, social, economic and cultural organization process. The gestated ecosystems, given their interdependence and sophistication, prevent any possibility of a compartmentalized and fragmented analysis about the implications for the subjective constructions of humans who, over different times and spaces, undertook physical, critical and creative efforts to carry out such a goal.

Nevertheless, the results of such an undertaking affected societies at different stages and in multiple ways, highlighting the need for a review of the founding paradigms, since the accumulation and the consequent equal sharing of the results of the efforts undertaken were operated through looting, slavery, exploitation and exclusion, in a continuous movement that was intended *ad infinitum*, which turned inequalities into the mainstay of the Anthropocene.

It is important to mention that the influence of humans on the planet's architecture has been denounced, together with the need for changes in the consumption processes of natural resources, which today are seen as limited. The continuity of the exploration model will tend to catastrophic situations, which is a scenario that is intended to be avoided. However, conforming to an exploration model based on instrumental rationality prevents any possibility of understanding land as a common home.

On the other hand, the exploitation of natural resources has long been left to organize itself according to the need for subsistence. The principle of accumulation from the exploitation of labor power and possession of production goods compromised the communal spirit and, among other problems, led to individualism, so dear to consumer societies, generating as a consequence, the concentration of income and the creation of large pockets of misery and poverty around the globe, especially in Latin America. The concentration of income, as a cog in the different systems of exploitation that underlie it, contribute to a notion of individuality that concerns the maintenance of power, whose foundations are easily put under suspicion in the face of the evocation of the communal spirit.

It is also known that certain groups, supported by the economic political power they managed to accumulate, combined with the ability to produce and circulate knowledge, norms and values, managed to impose their habits, customs, ways of life and worldview. This action enabled this group to attribute to this set of practices a status of universality and superiority. In his relationship with ways of understanding the world, different from his own, he adopted a prejudiced view, taking for himself the right to dominate them and impose his values. Mainly in relation to the excluded who, for some condition, have cultural characteristics that differ from that which was self-promoted universal and therefore hegemonic.

Faced with such a scenario, this text proposes to problematize the forms of appropriation of subjectivities within the scope of art, considering the link between this field and the dominant values and the constant updates aimed at their maintenance. The discussion, while indicating the limits and signs of exhaustion of the model in question, identifies subjective constructions that, despite operating in contemporary time space, seem to re-

sist the expropriation of creative force, operating in a movement that opposes temporality and linear productivity.

This movement, while operating according to the paradigms underlying the system (production in a compressed time/space, maximization of exposure aiming at circulation, orientation towards profit through consumption, among others), questions the dominant paradigms, putting tension the current model, with expressive, insurgent and disruptive characteristics, guided by localized production and based on peripheral themes, conscious use of communication and information technologies, inaugurating alternative forms of circulation, oriented towards consumption aimed at accessible niches, and that they are able to interpret the signs that emanate from the expressive aesthetic manifestations in movement.

It is considering these complex structures and seeking to problematize them that this reflection is divided into three topics. In the first, we will deal with identifying signs that relate art with the processes of hegemonic domination and the difficulties for this field, as it is configured, to serve sustainable purposes and, therefore, against hegemonic ones.

## 1. Can art be sustainable?

Western narratives with regard to the idea of art, resort to ancient civilizations seeking to satisfy the image of tradition and precedence. The paintings and inscriptions on the walls of caves, especially in Altamira and Lascaux in France, mentioned in most art history textbooks, seek references from time immemorial to date the human propensity for pictorial representations, while seeking meanings for ideas from the production of artifacts, to the idea of work or even to the moment of the first sound emission, at the same time that, in a way, justify the processes of insertion and modification of space through the increasing intervention of humans in nature.

It is important to note, based on inferences from Classical Antiquity, the relationship established between the ability to produce things and the knowledge needed to do it, present in platonic reflections (Tatarkiewicz, 2002), or even in such an imagined capacity in a form rational (Beardsley, 1990), not to mention the reflection on the procedures, materials and techniques that are being developed to achieve this purpose.

Such conceptions cross the medieval era without much change. However, it is during the so-called renaissance moments, given the processes of market specialization in development, combined with the need for an autonomy of the artist and his social status, that the distinction between art as an intellectual activity, in contrast to the idea of artisan and artisan reifying. On the other hand, and thinking from the tradition of Greco-Roman civilizations, the duality between manual work and intellectual work existing there, the latter, intellectual work, assumed as a source of pleasure and entertainment for a mercantile bourgeois class in formation, required a different connotation for their activities and that should distance themselves from the images derived from the servile work performed by slaves.

The rules of beauty, the clashes between mimesis and poetics, art serving the mediation of the divine-human relationship in a process of escaping reality, objective in reference to a

symbolic reading of reality with a view to achieving a religious purpose, are indicative of a dual perspective of beauty/goodness and ugliness/evilness that will guide the Christian West in its eagerness to separate the wheat from the chaff, uprooting the evil and refounding paradise on earth from human work as long as it is a noble work that cultivates things of the spirit as opposed to those of the flesh.

Even more interdisciplinary critics who incorporated political, social and cultural aspects in their analysis as a way of demystifying the idea of art through art<sup>1</sup>, giving it an expanded and relational character, capitulated when they were unable to establish a critique of the limitations imposed on this field through academic and rationalist bias, who came to preside and guide this narrative that intends to explain the phenomena that involve this place of subjectivity attributed to humans.

The emphasis on beauty and its relationship with goodness and goodnes intentionally provokes a departure from thinking about expressive aesthetic manifestations based on the material constructions of men and women, servants and free people, adults and children. Such constructions make productions devoid of any possibility of contradiction. It establishes measures and fashion for the excluding parameters of societies that embraced such concepts, turns expressiveness into an eccentricity, a luxury, a sign of distinction and, therefore, a place of exclusion. Such conceptualizations will be constituted from localisms that found the ideal conditions to be admitted as globalized, starting to be used as indicative references and, in a way, original for the formation of taste patterns, as we know it today.

In another collective and public instance, art would be transformed into merchandise with a view to its commercialization, whose base is in possession and consumption, reified by the “spell of the master’s name”, which highlights a small portion of consecrated “artists” by a series of public instances responsible for giving credibility to some while discrediting the majority. This art-commodity, subject to the segmentation dynamics of capital, is based both on the differentiation of consumer products and on the increase in choices and competition, thus reducing art to just another product among the many available.

The list of problems that permeate art in its relation to the production and maintenance of an unsustainable system of inequalities is in the process of investigation in the field of art and, in a more fruitful way, outside it<sup>2</sup>. This identification of problems aims to understand how this field, as a space and place for the circulation of signs (visual, tactile, sound, spatial, bodily, odorous and gustatory), while demonstrating vitality in questioning imposed hegemonic patterns, seems to combine to these determinations as if this were the only alternative.

In this sense, the link between art and the paradigm of capitalist productivity, considering the relationship that the field maintains with this logic and its *modus operandi*, is a good question to think about. Since, the logic of the division of labor develops in one of the emblematic moments for art, culminating with the emergence of a worker specialized in the domain of techniques and processes for product design, alongside a denial of activities arising in the field of art as work activities and stratified as leisure or leisure.

This leads to questioning the field’s commitments to the logic of infinite economic growth and the primacy of production and accumulation, as defended by global capitalism. Such problematization aims to recognize the existence of other approaches in the sphere of

productivity, work and technique that exceed the current logic of productivity as the only possible path, including for art. However, this project calls into question art as a narrative goal, as well as the difficulty of this field in dealing with projects of an alternative order, given its partnership with the structure that gives it credibility and legitimacy. Therefore, it is necessary to think about the possibilities and impossibility that art, as we know it, can provide disruptive responses that take us from a (un)sustainable route to another road. The perspective of a sustainable paradigm presents itself as an alternative narrative to the current narrative goals, however, we are suspecting the idea that art, as it stands, can guide us along this path.

## 2. About art and ways of appropriating subjectivities

It is important to point out that there is a contemporary observation about the limits of what the scientific paradigm coined as rationality, in opposition to the non-quantifiable forms that were impossible to obtain the status of science and, therefore, reduced to the condition of residual, mystical and subjective. The art, despite the efforts for its conformation, given its unfinished and open characteristics, could not effectively meet the paradigms that would guarantee its participation in the concert of sciences and, for this reason, it had been reduced to the condition of an accessory.

It is important that we do not think of the inadequacy of art to the hegemonic paradigm as a demerit, but as an attitude of resistance. Despite the attempts to frame this field to scientific determinations, either through the institution of art academies or through guiding compendiums of the ways of being and doing from the visual arts to music, passing through the arts of the body (dance and theater), he observes it is believed that this forced exile allowed this field to tread obscure, marshy, subliminal, mystical and underground paths, as places that guarantee the creative power necessary for its survival.

There are some factors that purport to explain the occurrence of these resistance processes. One of these approaches explains that the forms of rationality established by modernity, namely: practical moral rationality and expressive aesthetic rationality, the latter as a place where dynamics related to art develop, have been invaded and colonized by cognitive, instrumental and performative rationalities utilitarian science. This is because the expressive aesthetic rationality, due to its porous, changeable and procedural nature, was inadequate when efforts were made to divide and fragment it, in light of the assumptions of modern science (Santos, 2002).

The process of metamorphosis suffered by expressive aesthetic objects over time, even those imprisoned in museums, far exceeds the meanings attributed to them when placed in contact with the spectator. The transformations of mechanisms and means of sound propagation, driven by new technologies, freeing and, in some way, popularizing the listening.

The emergence of an adult generation crossed by digital devices in particular, a generation formed by gamers who, built relationships based on playfulness, claims, from the modern paradigm of individuality, the gamification of life, relationships and economy, putting in

I suspect the opposition between work and leisure, so dear to the structures that underlie practical moral and instrumental cognitive rationalities.

Perhaps this association of playfulness with hobby is still the result of a compartmentalized understanding of humans and society. Fractured and fragmented, modern humans and their science matter to the so-called serious things. While the things of the body, experiences, pleasure and therefore, subjectivity, for not being part of the concert of respectable objects and for not having been, until a certain moment, appropriated in their entirety by the current forms of rationality (economics, law, work, reflection) are understood as adornment, adornment and entertainment, constituting a challenge to be overcome.

The perception of the links between art, consumption and capitalism and the need to break the boundaries of art, has favored the emergence of increasingly performative movements that bring together expressive manifestations and that bring together dissident themes and narratives, constituting examples of this porosity and characteristic malleability of expressive aesthetic manifestations and the germ of its inadaptability to the demands of instrumental rationality.

From this perspective, there is no way to exclude art from the processes of changing the paradigm of knowledge. Art emerges allowing an opening to subjectivity in its creative dimension of generating representations of the world, believing that art is capable of creating clashes with the roles of knowledge builders already established in society, renewing manifestations, expressions and perceptions of what is to know, as it rebels and emancipates itself with and in common sense.

Despite the resistance character identified in the forms of subjectivity inherent to expressive aesthetic manifestations, we have to consider that these propositions are still embryonic. This is because they have been organized through experimental processes led, eminently, by artists removed from the established circuits of art diffusion, this being the root of their power. Considering that art proposes incessant clashes in already established roles, it renews expressions and perceptions, promoting affections that infiltrate into other fields, it presents possibilities for reassessing the creative dimensions that permeate everyone in the space-time identification process with a view to the ethical-political implications that can influence and reorient our vision and world.

Thus, in light of the exhaustion of the project of modernity, anchored in the forms of rationality mentioned here, there is a need to think creatively, new forms of action. Expressive aesthetic manifestations, despite their relationship of subservience to the dominant ideas of rationality, have managed to appropriate gaps, fissures and inaccessible places to coercive forms of rationality, constituting the space of possibility for new connections with the real through what constitutes art's matter and reason for being, its ability to imagine new worlds.

### **3. Expressive aesthetic manifestations: about images and imaginaries**

The emergence of the technical image and its proliferation, despite constituting a phenomenon that greatly impacted the manifestations linked to visibility, is a harbinger of

what would happen to other expressions in the not-too-distant future. Technologies in their different forms have changed the way humans relate to the arts and these changes, if on the one hand contributed to the emergence of mass processes of what was reserved for a select and educated public for their appreciation, on the other hand created opportunities for invisible productions to be appreciated, heard and felt by an audience beyond those for whom it was intended.

Among the instances that had their *modus operandi* amended, we take the image as a case to be analyzed, given its capillarity and implications for the different fields of expressive aesthetic manifestations. We live in a moment when the image, before being a simulacrum of the real, constitutes one of the orders that need to be considered when we are busy thinking about realities, near or far. The improvement of the processes of production, circulation and consumption of images constitutes a growing phenomenon throughout history and its effects, even if they are the order of the day, in different instances of reality, still constitute a challenge to our understanding.

Notwithstanding the suspicion that images could constitute a credible path for obtaining knowledge, it is certain that it imposes itself on it as a privileged form of perception, understanding and apprehension of social reality. However, we are facing image production processes that, driven both by instrumental rationality and practical moral rationality, seem to be at its service. The scientific knowledge that supported the establishment of the image, while creating complex and expanded forms of interpretation of reality, seem to have reduced the capacity for interpreting the narratives.

However, when dealing with issues related to image, there are a series of obstacles, both from a theoretical point of view and in terms of methodological dimensions and structures. From a theoretical point of view, distrust regarding the image, the result of the Platonic heritage adopted by the West, is still a challenge to be overcome. With regard to methodological structures, the notion of linear time and the difficulties in aggregating uncertainty, unpredictability and other logics of temporality, in addition to the western trajectory of infinite time, constitutes an abyss that needs to be relativized in order to absorb other logics of rationality that provide opportunities for a qualitative leap, intending to respond to the challenges of the present and the near future, in the process of democratizing access to the dissemination of meanings through image.

On the other hand, the consequences related to the development, dissemination and impact of the new communication and information devices, impose new global and local governance problems with regard to the experiences and readings of reality through images. It is observed that communication processes are shown as determinants, influencing not only behaviors in an increasingly individualized society. We live in a moment where the apparent absence of limits between the individual and the community has generated, through the manipulation of algorithms, phenomena that still need to be deepened in terms of understanding and resonances.

If we imagine that, throughout recent history, the exchanges of meaning have oscillated between different forms of image, both those thought and those written on different supports, or even images materialized in words, followed by mobile images occupying different supports, we are facing a complex problem and for which answers, like images, are under construction. In this sense, it is important to affirm the place of the image in the

production of knowledge about the real, as well as the decisive role they play in the construction/deconstruction/reconstruction of the structures of thought and action present in societies that are structured with it as a support of the production processes of reality. On the flip side, at a time when it is no longer possible to speak of stable matrices supporting the notions of knowledge as a balanced, unified unit that tends towards stability. The exploration and reproduction of symbolic meanings, through the image, generate processes of uncritical dissemination of different sinic structures and has contributed to the emergence of increasingly fragmented and porous interpretations, built for a particular purpose and which dissolve as soon as they fulfill their function, such as effervescent tablets.

Thus, to think about the production of knowledge as the production of images, it is necessary to redefine the notion of knowledge beyond formal and systematized production in the fashion of techno-instrumental rationality. If the goal is to reach a scenario of greater sustainability (environmental, social, cultural, economic), it is necessary to take a few steps back towards the *locus* of knowledge production, to the places where creative processes occur to understand the processes of creation, while ontological places of knowledge production and the result of the exercise of the act of imagining, that is, of imagination. This direction requires an awareness of the image beyond its utilitarian function, or even the iconoclastic vision that, perpetuated among us by the Western Judeo-Christian tradition, leads to a distrust of the image and, therefore, of the imagination.

This type of knowledge produced by the ways of imagination considers the bio, psycho, socio, anthropological instances of humans when they venture through the intricacies of thinking, feeling and operating the transit between instances that we conventionally call the real and the imaginary. The latter, discredited due to the dual perspective that gives credibility to the operation to the detriment of the actor who, seen under the stigma of distrust, requires an effort to say that any movement towards knowledge is short-sighted if not accompanied by imagination. Therefore, it is necessary to decolonize knowledge in order to bring out a way of knowing that takes the imagination and the processes arising from it as a possible project.

Thus, it is understandable and desirable that such an episteme is built from the background structures of culture and especially from the structures of the imaginary, fable, myths and images censored and denied by surface culture. However, thinking about expressive aesthetic manifestations for a sustainable scenario needs to start from a methodological investigation that takes the images and imaginaries produced from the margins, contact zones and borders of culture as the propitious places for the occurrence of emancipatory processes.

It is an action that needs to be carried out on the walk, along the way, listening, perceiving, looking, feeling, moving, guided by a phenomenological will to apprehend essences in the midst of appearances. From the expressive aesthetic manifestations beyond art, it is expected that it takes as its starting point the sociocultural reality of the substrates, the non-legitimized and unauthorized signs, the peripheral productions and the damned, poorly trained and dilettantes translators as a starting point for the achievement of a life project that proposes to be sustainable.



## Notes

1. (Hauser, 2000; Janson, 1989)
2. See Quemin, 2021; Durand, 1989; Becker, 2010.

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**Resumen:** El cambio en las condiciones de producción y el consecuente cambio en los sistemas de intercambio de bienes y valores, llevaron a las sociedades contemporáneas a un proceso de organización política, social, económica y cultural altamente complejo. Los ecosistemas concebidos, dada su interdependencia y sofisticación, impiden toda posibilidad de un análisis compartimentado y fragmentado acerca de las implicaciones para las construcciones subjetivas de los humanos que, en diferentes tiempos y espacios, emprendieron esfuerzos físicos, críticos y creativos para llevar a cabo tal intento. Aunque, los resultados de tal empresa, afectaron a las sociedades en diferentes etapas y de diferentes maneras, es clara la necesidad de una revisión de los paradigmas fundacionales, una vez que la acumulación y la consecuente distribución igualitaria de los resultados del esfuerzo emprendido, fueron operados mediante el saqueo, la esclavitud, la explotación y la exclusión en un movimiento continuo y *ad infinitum* que hace de las desigualdades el pilar del Antropoceno. En ese contexto, este texto se propone problematizar las formas de apropiación de las subjetividades en el ámbito del arte, considerando la vinculación de este campo con los valores dominantes y las constantes actualizaciones y vínculos, con miras a sustentar y alimentar una estructura de poder basada en paradigma de producción, circu-

lación y consumo. La discusión, al señalar los límites y signos de agotamiento del modelo en cuestión, identifica construcciones subjetivas que, a pesar de operar en el espacio-tiempo contemporáneo, parecen resistir la expropiación de la fuerza creativa, operando en un movimiento que opone la temporalidad y la productividad lineal, al mismo tiempo que cuestiona los paradigmas dominantes, acentuando el modelo vigente con características expresivas, insurgentes y disruptivas. Es una construcción que se mueve hacia lo humano, tejiendo proyectos comunitarios que retoman la dimensión estética expresiva como posibilidad de cambio.

**Palabras clave:** Estética expresiva - Arte - Diseño - Subjetividades - Imágenes - Imaginarios - Sostenibilidad

**Resumo:** A mudança nas condições de produção e a consequente mudança nos sistemas de troca de bens e valores, levaram as sociedades contemporâneas a um processo de organização política, social, econômica e cultural altamente complexo. Os ecossistemas concebidos, dada a sua interdependência e sofisticação, impedem qualquer possibilidade de uma análise compartimentada e fragmentada sobre as implicações para as construções subjetivas dos humanos que, em tempos e espaços distintos, empreenderam esforços físicos, críticos e criativos para realizar tais tentativas. Embora os resultados de tal empreitada tenham afetado as sociedades em diferentes estágios e de diferentes formas, é clara a necessidade de uma revisão dos paradigmas fundacionais, uma vez que a acumulação e consequente distribuição equitativa dos resultados do esforço empreendido foi operada por meio de saques, escravidão, exploração e exclusão em um movimento contínuo e *ad infinitum* que faz das desigualdades o pilar do Antropoceno. Nesse contexto, este texto pretende problematizar as formas de apropriação das subjetividades no campo da arte, considerando o vínculo desse campo com os valores dominantes e as constantes atualizações e vínculos, com vistas a sustentar e alimentar uma estrutura de poder baseado no paradigma da produção, circulação e consumo. A discussão, apontando os limites e sinais de esgotamento do modelo em questão, identifica construções subjetivas que, apesar de operarem no espaço-tempo contemporâneo, parecem resistir à expropriação da força criativa, operando em um movimento que opõe temporalidade e produtividade linear, ao mesmo tempo em que questiona os paradigmas dominantes, enfatizando o modelo atual com características expressivas, insurgentes e disruptivas. É uma construção que caminha para o humano, tecendo projetos comunitários que assumem a dimensão estética expressiva como possibilidade de mudança.

**Palavras-chave:** Estética expressiva - Arte - Design - Subjetividades - Imagens - Imaginário - Sustentabilidade

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