



Radio Espacio Estacion broadcast Fordlândia: an ecocritical approach through site-oriented practices, sound, and imagination

Gabriela Paiva de Toledo

Como citar:

TOLEDO, G. P. de. Radio Espacio Estacion broadcast Fordlândia: an ecocritical approach through site-oriented practices, sound, and imagination. **MODOS: Revista de História da Arte**, Campinas, SP, v. 7, n. 1, p. 312-342, jan.2023. DOI: 10.20396/modos.v7i1.8670514. Disponível em: <https://periodicos.sbu.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/mod/article/view/8670514>.

Image [modified]: Romy Pocztaruk, *A última aventura XI*, 2011-2014. Courtesy of the artist.

Radio Espacio Estacion broadcast Fordlândia: an ecocritical approach through site-oriented practices, sound, and imagination

Radio Espacio Estacion transmite Fordlândia: uma abordagem ecocrítica através de práticas site-oriented, som e imaginação

Gabriela Paiva de Toledo*

ABSTRACT

On September 16th and 17th, 2017, the nomadic online radio station *radioee* broadcast from Fordlândia, today a district of the city of Aveiro, state of Pará, in the Brazilian Amazonia. Produced by artist Augustina Woodgate along with cultural producers Stephanie Sherman and Hernan Woodgate and several other partners in every new location, *Radio Espacio Estacion/radioee* was conceived as a multilingual, mobile, online radio station set up around 24-hour/36-hour long events broadcast from different parts of the world to discuss issues of migration, mobility, transportation, environment, and climate change. In *Transmissão Fordlândia*, *radioee* revisited the legendary history of the site's foundation by the Ford Motor Company in 1927. The broadcast questions the official narrative of desertion after Ford's enterprise failed, which implies ideas of underdevelopment associated with a colonial modern economy of representation of Latin America. Adopting live and online radio communication, based on immediacy, synchronicity, and accessibility, *Transmissão Fordlândia* combined research, interviews, and first-hand descriptions of the site in a continual multilingual conversation, producing a non-linear narrative enriched with a bustling soundscape of people, birds, water, motorcycles, boats, and everyday activities, transmitted to a global audience. This paper investigates how *Transmissão Fordlândia* articulates an ecocritical approach to space through site-oriented practices and sonic-spatial imagination, challenging colonial modern representations of tropical landscapes based on spatial rationalization and the duality of culture-nature. This paper also explores the sonic-spatial effects of live radio transmission as an aesthetic device for imagining place.

KEYWORDS

Amazon. Ecocriticism. Fordlândia. Site-specific. Sound art.

RESUMO

Em 16 e 17 de setembro de 2017, a *radioee*, uma estação de rádio online e nômade, transmitiu de Fordlândia, hoje distrito da cidade de Aveiro, estado do Pará, na Amazônia brasileira. Produzida pela artista Augustina Woodgate, juntamente com os produtores culturais Stephanie Sherman e Hernan Woodgate e vários outros parceiros em cada novo local, a *Radio Espacio Estacion/radioee* foi concebida como uma estação de rádio online, multilíngue e móvel, baseada em eventos de 24/36 horas de duração transmitidos de diferentes partes do mundo, discutindo questões de migração, mobilidade, transporte, meio ambiente e mudanças climáticas. Em *Transmissão Fordlândia*, a *radioee* revisitou a lendária história da fundação do local pela Ford Motor Company em 1927. O episódio questiona a narrativa oficial de deserção após o fracasso do empreendimento da Ford, o que implica ideias de subdesenvolvimento associadas a uma economia colonial moderna de representação da América Latina. Adotando a comunicação de rádio ao vivo e online, baseada no imediatismo, sincronicidade e acessibilidade, *Transmissão Fordlândia* combinou pesquisa, entrevistas e descrições em primeira mão do lugar em uma conversação multilíngue contínua, produzindo uma narrativa não linear, enriquecida por uma paisagem sonora movimentada por pessoas, pássaros, água, motocicletas, barcos e atividades cotidianas, transmitida para uma audiência global. Este artigo investiga como *Transmissão Fordlândia* articula uma abordagem ecocrítica do espaço por meio de práticas site-oriented e imaginação sônico-espacial, desafiando as representações coloniais modernas de paisagens tropicais baseadas na racionalização espacial e na dualidade cultura-natureza. Este artigo também explora os efeitos sônico-espaciais da transmissão de rádio ao vivo como um dispositivo estético para imaginar o lugar.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Amazônia. Ecocrítica. Fordlândia. Site-specific. Arte sonora.

On September 16th and 17th, 2017, the nomadic online radio station *radioee* broadcast from Fordlândia, today a district of the city of Aveiro, state of Pará, in the Brazilian Amazonia. Produced by artist Augustina Woodgate along with cultural producers Stephanie Sherman and Hernan Woodgate and several other partners in every new location, *Radio Espacio Estacion/radioee* was conceived as a multilingual, mobile, online radio station set up around 24-hour/36-hour long events broadcast from different parts of the world to discuss issues of migration, mobility, transportation, environment, and climate change. In *Transmissão Fordlândia*, *radioee* revisited the legendary history of the site's foundation by the Ford Motor Company in 1927. The broadcast questions the official narrative of desertion after Ford's enterprise failed, which implies ideas of underdevelopment associated with a colonial modern (to borrow from Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo who emphasize the interdependency between coloniality and modernity) economy of representation of Latin America. Adopting live and online radio communication, based on immediacy, synchronicity, and accessibility, *Transmissão Fordlândia* combined research, interviews, and first-hand descriptions of the site in a continual multilingual conversation (English, Portuguese, Spanish), producing a non-linear narrative enriched with a bustling soundscape of people, birds, water, motorcycles, boats, and everyday activities, transmitted to a global audience. This paper investigates how *Transmissão Fordlândia* articulates an ecocritical approach to space through site-oriented practices and sonic-spatial imagination, challenging colonial modern representations of tropical landscapes based on spatial rationalization and the duality of culture-nature. This paper also explores the sonic-spatial effects of live radio transmission as an aesthetic device for imagining place.

Throughout the 20th century, Amazonia entered debates in Brazil about territorial integration and development. In the second half of the 19th century, the rubber economy flourished, thereby incorporating the region into the worldwide industrial system. It continued to expand until the 1910s

but then declined at the time of the rise of the British rubber plantations in Malaysia that developed after the transplantation of Amazonian seedlings to Southeastern Asia (Grandin, 2009: 314). The exploitation of rubber not only caused a demographic impact, drawing intense waves of migrants from other regions of Brazil to become the labor force for rubber corporations, but also attracted international attention to Amazonia (Leal, 2010; Santos, 1980).

Henry Ford's Amazonian project began in 1927, when the Brazilian government granted the concession of a large piece of land adjacent to the Tapajós River, one of the largest tributaries of the Amazon River (Grandin, 2009). The Ford Motor Company began shipping machinery and supplies to the Amazon the following year. The land concession was announced in the Brazilian press on February 10th, 1931¹. The idea was to set up a rubber tree plantation in the Amazon rainforest to guarantee the company's autonomy in automobile and airplane production, breaking away from the European monopoly on Asian rubber. The rubber trees should be lined in rows, set out on an area cleanly deforested, in a way that replicated the production-line system to maximize productivity, according to the same rationalistic logic of Ford's industrial complex in Dearborn, Michigan. The location also favored the rubber production outlet as, through the Tapajós River, ships could sail towards the Atlantic Ocean (*Ibidem*).

In 1928, Henry Ford's son Edsel Ford announced the land acquisition in an official press release during the touring Ford Industries exhibition. The project would include a town, sanitary campaigns "against the dangers of the jungle," and the development of boat and airplane transportation channels (*Ibidem*: 4). The news spread across Europe, advertised as "a new and titanic fight between nature and modern man" by the European press. A similar discourse celebrating the conquering of the wilderness spread through the Brazilian press (*Ibidem*). On February 26, 1931, one of the most important media vehicle in Brazil, *Jornal do Brasil*, published an

article detailing the arrival of Henry Ford's representatives in Amazonia, describing Fordlândia as "a modern city in Amazonia's inland"².

However, Ford's enterprise faced challenges from the beginning. First, the high death rates from malaria and yellow fever. Then, the ever more frequent conflicts between local workers and American overseers due to disagreements about pay and methods for rubber cultivation, revealing, in the eyes of locals, the foreigners' unfamiliarity with the particularities of the Amazonian ecosystem and climate (*Ibidem*: 11-18). The building materials brought from Dearborn were inappropriate for the humid and hot environment of the equatorial river basin; bags of cement would often turn to stone and metal and wooden materials would frequently rust and rot. Additionally, the urban design based on the Cape Cod-style shingled houses would soon be modified by the reality of the cyclic migration flows to the region, mixed in the landscape with the crates and canvas tarp houses built by migrants.

Nonetheless, the main factor in the Ford Motor Company's unsuccessful rubber plantation project was the very inconsistency of an ideology of spatial rationalization and simplification transplanted to an ecosystem characterized by systemic complexity. *Hevea*, or rubber, is native to the equatorial forests in the Americas where they grow in the wild, far removed from each other and surrounded by other species of plants (*Ibidem*: 294-304). This avoids the propagation of its natural predator, South American leaf blight. The application of a cultivation technique based on well-ordered rows close to one another, imported from Southeast Asia where *Hevea*'s native predators are non-existent, transformed Fordlândia into an incubator of fungi. Therefore, ideas of efficiency through the simplification of processes and economy of time-space were inappropriate for cultivating a species that had been adapted to a complex environment throughout its evolutionary history. Moreover, Ford Company's practice of deforesting large areas was inadequate for a fluctuating rainfall zone with alternating long periods of dry and wet seasons. It resulted in erosion due

to the lack of the soil protection offered by the forest's dense and diverse root systems and foliage during wet seasons which also helps to regulate the distribution of water during dry ones (*Ibidem*: 208). Between 1934 and 1936, operations were moved seventy miles down-river, from Fordlândia to Belterra, due to its flat topography and better soil, and Fordlândia's rubber groves became a research station for mycologist James Weir and a budwood nursery for the new plantation. However, although blight was kept under control in Belterra's plantation, the concentration of *Hevea* accelerated the reproduction of insects that fed off rubber, leading to waves of infestations (*Ibidem*: 300).

With the outbreak of World War II, Asian rubber production fell under the control of Japan and the United States turned to South America for a rubber supplier. In 1942, the Brazilian government signed an agreement with the American government, known as the Washington Accords, which consolidated Brazilian support to the allies, including actions that led to the second rubber boom in Amazonia. Fordlândia and Belterra became US government's experimentation stations for research in rubber trees and topgrafting and cross-fertilization techniques, and health and nutritional conditions of the Amazon (*Ibidem*: 320-321). By 1945, Belterra had about two million rubber trees that were crown grafted and thus resistant to leaf blight, a Ford Company's huge success. However, with Japan's defeat in the war, low-cost latex from Malaysian, Indonesian, and Vietnamese plantations flooded the world market, affecting the Amazonian rubber market. Additionally, the American auto industry began to replace natural latex with synthetic rubber, now affordable due to Roosevelt's 1945 deal with Saudi Arabia, trading military protection for the cheap oil that was fundamental to the US postwar economic expansion.

On November 5th, 1945, after more than a decade of efforts to make the project profitable, Henry Ford II turned Fordlândia and Belterra over to the Brazilian government. The Brazilian press covered the news with a pessimistic tone about the city's future and, more broadly, Amazonia,

casting doubt about its future role in the world's economy³. The Instituto Agrônômico do Norte (Northern Brazil Agronomy Institute), headed by Felisberto Camargo, took over both cities' economic development plans. In Fordlândia, the rubber trees were replaced by other crops, such as jute and cacao. About Fordlândia, Camargo stated in an official report to the United Nations that "it was an 'utter failure' due to 'blank ignorance' and the refusal to 'test its theories by experiment'" (*Ibidem*: 325).

Coloniality and Latin American nature

Gabriela Nouzeilles (2002) analyzed how the capitalist imaginary has turned Latin American nature into an object of desire and consumerist fantasies that serve hegemonic interests. The author investigated Latin America's centrality in the iconographic proliferation of nature in the face of the prognostics about the imminent and indisputable ecological collapse. The increasing perception of the "death of nature," the flip side of the "tale of progress", where nature appears as having been corrupted by modernity and technologically domesticated to meet the demands of Capitalism, has stimulated a cultural industry that explores the contemporary longing for authentic nature (Nouzeilles, 2002: 12-14).

Among the most common fictions produced by the capitalist imaginary is that Latin America is the world's last natural retreat. Nouzeilles also observed that representations of Latin American nature vary within a set of ambiguous escapist fantasies of seduction and aversion. The Amazon rainforest is at the core of this phenomenon, reproduced in mass media in the form of a contradictory set of representations (*Ibidem*: 14-15) – its green vastness is the symbol of pure nature and primordial ecological balance (at risk of being lost entirely); at the same time, images of deforestation and violence are taken as a sign of underdevelopment (the proof of tropical

societies' incapability to self-manage), justifying interventionist discourses.

This ambiguous portrayal not only points to the persistent colonial dynamics involving Amazonia within the neoliberal order, driven by economic interests in its resources, but also to Amazonia's spatial heterogeneity, its condition of heterotopia, as argued by Raul Antelo (2002). In Antelo's view, Amazonia amounts to the other space that comments on the utopias of modernity, symbolically manifested in the visual and linguistic excess of travelers, scientists, and artists (Antelo, 2002: 117): mysterious nature, the mythical place of El Dorado in colonial literature, the threatening realm of the Icamiba warriors; a dangerous place of epidemics, disease, and violence (as described in the press coverage of Fordlândia); a place of exile inhabited by deviant others, heritage and a natural reservoir, discontinuous sovereignty. This iconographic superabundance can be perceived in Sebastião Salgado's photographic series *Amazônia* where the overwhelming vastness of the forest, rivers, and clouds dominate the whole photographic framing, conveying ideas of distance and mystery, couched in a desire for exploration⁴. *Transmissão Fordlândia* comments on and undermines these dominant ideas about Latin American nature produced and reproduced through colonization, which still underlie the symbolic economy about the region, and specifically engages with Amazonia's heterotopic status, uncovering the modern myths surrounding Ford's city and its fall.

Nouzeilles (2002) discussed colonization in relation to the problem of representation of Latin American nature, depicted in homogeneous fashion around general ideas of exoticism that disregard cultural, environmental, and political differences, and the issue of representation itself, part of a Western mode of knowledge anchored in the idea of an absolute and true reality separated from culture. Representation entails a process of depuration, selection, and hierarchization of a presupposed reality, and, for this reason, cannot be thought of as divorced from colonization.

Aníbal Quijano (1992) analyzed the correlation between coloniality

and modernity/rationality and how the colonial power structure was consolidated through the process of hierarchization of the world, where every difference was perceived as natural and part of nature, and, therefore, inferior to the rational European culture/individual. As defined by Walter Mignolo, “coloniality names the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today of which historical colonialisms have been a constitutive, although downplayed, dimension” (Mignolo, 2011: 2).

The construction of the colonial subject was based on differences inscribed on the body which were codified in terms of race, sex, and species, and transformed into universal categories validated as scientific truths (Quijano, 1992; Mignolo, 2012). The colonial power structure operated through these intersubjective constructions to justify the domination of rational subjects over the racialized, sexualized, and dehumanized others. At the same time, non-European knowledge and symbolic systems were ideologically and politically repressed, promoting a colonization of the imagination (Quijano, 1992). Colonization was a process of domination over the spatialized nature and corporal otherness that ensured economical and symbolic power to the Modern, European subject.

Modern rationality was founded on the philosophical contributions of Descartes, Galileo, and Newton, whose works postulated a radical separation of matter from spirit within a mechanistic conception of the world where all of nature was reduced to inert, homogenous, and quantified matter, submitted to universal laws (Capra; Luisi, 2014: 43-59). Within this paradigm, knowledge production resulted from a subject-object relationship which assumed the existence of an isolated rational individual (European, white, male, human) ontologically separated from the external world. The colonization of othered nature also encompassed a new aesthetic mode. Pierre Hadot (2006) argued that the Cartesian duality culture/nature stimulated two different attitudes towards nature: a scientific one, based

on investigation (exemplified by the works of Darwin, Carl von Linné, and Humboldt); and an aesthetic one founded on contemplation (seen in the works of Rousseau, Thoreau, and Goethe).

In the mid-18th century, at the onset of the industrial revolution, this aesthetic sensibility towards nature acquired a moral connotation in the face of the increasing perception of the death of nature underlying the grand narrative of progress (Bourg; Fragnière, 2014: 13-17). In this context, the picturesque, a new way of seeing and representing nature, emerged, where the distance between the viewer's perspective and the external world were not only accentuated but also placed in a hierarchical relationship. Ian McLaren (1988) argued that the picturesque has a fundamental relationship with colonization as it reveals an aesthetic mode where the percipient European individual assumes a position of superiority in relation to nature as other. Additionally, the picturesque offered a domesticated view of the colonized environment and societies, reassuring the colonizer of the ongoing civilization process (Thompson, 2006). Therefore, as stressed by Nouzeilles (2002), the modern colonial enterprise cannot be thought of as divorced from the act of narrating or visually representing as landscape the history of the Western transformation of savagery into civilization, which entails a process of description, domination, and classification.

In the Ford Archives, one can examine the photographs documenting Fordlândia's construction, visually narrating a history of the modernization of Amazonia through spatial rationalization. The collection evidences the process of rationalization of a landscape which once corresponded to the jungle. An aerial view of Fordlândia taken in 1934 [Fig. 1] shows the entire rational ordering of the space, divided into three major areas connected by wide roads: the dock and warehouse area, the employee housing area, and the industrial zone. The terrain is free from vegetation, providing a clear view from every point of the industrial town. This spatial configuration can also be seen in Ford's industrial district in Dearborn [Fig. 2].



FIG. 1. Aerial View of Fordlândia, Brazil, 1934, black-and-white gelatin silver on linen and paper, (h) 8 x (w)11 inches (20.32 x 27.94 cm). Collections of The Henry Ford.



FIG.2. Aerial View of Ford Airport and Dearborn Inn, Dearborn, Michigan, November 1931, black-and-white gelatin silver on paper, (h) 8 x (w)10 inches (20.32 x 25.4 cm). Collections of The Henry Ford.

Another photograph [Fig. 3] documents workers cleaning the land, which would probably have become a plantation area, terracing the terrain to fight erosion. In the last image [Fig. 4], one can see the radio transmission tower centered in the composition, rising until it touches the photograph's upper edge, as if reaching the sky, becoming the axis around which the rest of the elements (clouds and vegetation) are organized.



FIG.3. Terracing, Fordlândia, Brazil, 1931, black-and-white gelatin silver on linen and paper, (h) 8 x (w)11 inches (20.32 x 27.94 cm). Collections of The Henry Ford.

In a more recent photographic series named *A Última Aventura* (or “last adventure”) produced by Romy Pocztaruk in 2011, Fordlândia emerges as the symbol of the failure of Ford’s enterprise, and, more broadly, modernity.

In this series, the photographer focused on emptied architectural spaces along the Transamazônica, a 4-thousand-kilometer highway cutting across the rainforest, connecting the northeastern Brazilian coast to the Peruvian borders, opened in 1972 during general Emílio Garrastazu Médici's government and left unfinished. The Transamazônica highway was part of the military government's agenda of "pharaonic" projects to boost the country's modernization, implemented after the 1964 political coup.



FIG.4. Radio Transmitter House, Fordlândia, Brazil, 1926-46, black-and-white gelatin silver on paper, (h) 4.375 x (w) 3 inches (11.1 x 7.62 cm). Collections of The Henry Ford.

As argued by Rafael Gaspar (2021), the deserted architectural spaces in Pocztaruk's photographs are the symbol of modernity's failure. The sheer absence of human beings and scenes of debris undermine the modern myth of progress, presenting to the viewer the ruins of modernity and its failed, or never-to-be-fulfilled promises on the peripheries. Among the photographs analyzed by Gaspar, there are two showing Fordlândia's iconic industrial shed where, in the 1930s, the rubber industrial output was weighed and then shipped off along the Tapajós River [Fig. 5-6]. In the image of the façade, one can hardly see the name "Ford," while the photograph of the interior space shows an empty industrial warehouse covered with dirt and dust.



FIG.5. Romy Pocztaruk, *A última aventura XI*, 2011-2014, inkjet printing on Baryta paper, 43.3 × 65 inches (110 × 165 cm). Courtesy of the artist.



FIG. 6. Romy Pocztaruk, *A última aventura III*, 2011-2014, inkjet printing on Baryta paper, 43.3 × 65 inches (110 × 165 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

The author explains that these are images of the ruins of modernity which contrast with romantic ruins as they do not symbolize a glorious past but the collapse or failure of modernization. While the Ford Archive's photographic collection operates through images of a domesticated tropical landscape animated by Modern utopia couched in development and industrialization, Pocztaruk's photographs show the post-industrial stage and the failure of that project. Either way, the linear grand narrative of modernity remains unshaken.

Site-specificity, sound, and imagination

Site-specific practices developed in the mid-1960s animating new concepts of space and audience interaction. Art historian Nick Kaye (2000) connected Minimalism's dissolution of the visual integrity of the sculptural work in favor of its site, which challenged the conventional distinction between the limits of the work and its architectural frame, with the emergence of site-specific practices where the attention shifts from the art object to the viewer's performative role "in real space and real time" (Kaye, 2000: 30). In *Specific Objects* (1965), artist Donald Judd announced the end of the traditional mediums of painting and sculpture and the emergence of new three-dimensional works that offered a direct experience of the object as a unit in the real space of the gallery through the encounter between spectator and art object.

Building on Michel de Certeau's pedestrian practices of place (*The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984), Kaye discussed the relations between site and work in site-specific proposals, pointing to the centrality of the work's local position to the definition of the artwork and its meanings, where site and location are not stabilities, but rather stem from the production, definition, and performance of place. Site-specific works offer a set of spatial practices that articulates place, understood, in De Certeau's terms, as an ordering system "which enunciation or practice at once realizes and depends upon" (Kaye, 2000: 4), while spatial practices correspond to the ordering activities such as walking, reading, listening, or viewing, which "may realize the various possibilities of a single place" (*Ibidem*: 5). In this way, site-specific works continually reiterate the distance, or relations, between real space and practiced place (the one of the artwork).

In turn, spatial sound practices, emerging at the same time, can be associated with experiments in composition combining electroacoustic music and architecture in the 1950s. These focused on the movement of sound across space and drew attention to the listener's position in the

auditorium as the condition of acoustic experience, emphasizing the contingent situation of listening (Ouzounian, 2020: 106-110). According to Gascia Ouzounian, the term “sound installation” was coined by the American percussionist Max Neuhaus in 1967 to describe his work *Drive-in Music*, an experiment with radio transistors installed on a road in Buffalo, New York. The work explored the effects of weather conditions, the time of day, and other environmental factors on the amplitude, frequency, and duration of sine tones and, therefore, on people’s experience of them (*Ibidem*: 115). Thus, space, or spatial conditions, was decisive to the work.

Sound artists also explored descriptive narration to investigate how words could be sonic signs and signifiers within linguistic structures. For example, in *Tours, Visual Sound Zones* series (1967-1979), Nancy Holt describes places while being in those same places, stressing her position or situation and experimenting with listeners’ spatial imagination. Holt also investigated radio technology in the 1970s in *U.S. 80 SOLO*, expanding the possibilities of sound practices to become public art. Other artists like Laurie Anderson, Bruce Nauman, and Bernhard Leitner emphasized direct participation, requiring active bodily engagement from listeners in their works. In this way, from the 1970s onwards, sound artists have repositioned listeners as participants in the work.

Engaging with Henri Lefebvre’s materialist spatial theory (*The Production of Space*, 1974), Gascia Ouzounian argues that spatial sound practices can emerge as both poetics and politics when the work can articulate space as socially and politically constituted, eschewing abstract notions of space, “inviting audiences and participants to consider the Lefebvrian idea that space is socially produced and not an absolute or hegemonic quantity that exists outside of lived experience” (Ouzounian, 2020: 118).

Radioee.net incorporates site-oriented practices and experiments with sound and imagination. First, the work is structured around ephemeral

events made up of a set of situated actions that articulates the spatial configuration of the site and sparks discussions of mobility-related topics (migration, environmental change, transculturation, technological advances). For example, in *Autopiloto* (2018), the topic of autonomy and automatic movement is approached from a semi-autonomous vehicle looping the Bay Area. *Argo* (2020) addresses issues of slanguage and translingual learning while the presenters walk through the streets of Istanbul collecting and mixing language expressions. *Aguas Altas* (2017) was broadcast from a boat while navigating the Miami River and South Florida canals to discuss sea-level rise and climate change. In this sense, spatial performance, conveyed to listeners through narration and sound, is crucial to the work's meanings.

Augustina Woodgate described *radioee* as a project centered on sound and imagination rather than on visual experience, privileging storytelling⁵. In *Transmissão Fordlândia*, residents randomly join the transmission asking questions and sharing their views and stories of the place and their dreams about the future: they were trying to elevate Fordlândia to the status of district at the time of the broadcast ⁶. Going beyond discourse, the work is also activated through echoes, voices, and other environmental sounds which make the place take form in the imagination. It is possible to hear a lively soundscape of water, animals, birds, insects, people, boats, bodies moving across the space and breathing. Instead of ruins of deindustrialization, a lively place takes form in the mind. In this way, the official narrative of desertion does not correspond to the experiences in situ conveyed through sound.

Listeners' reception happens through online live radio communication and listeners can interact live via online chat, while the public passing by the broadcast event can speak if they want to. This mixing of local and foreign participation through multiple interactive channels complicates ideas of local and global, turning the project into an intersection point

between these different spatial experiences. In addition to expanding the audience reach to a global scale, broadcasting live and online reiterates the simultaneity between situated actions and discourse across space, giving the work structural coherence, intersecting temporal and spatial experience, focused on the present. Therefore, *radioee.net* allows considerations about the shared, global contemporary experience of migration, environmental change, transculturation, technology, and so on, which are, nonetheless, differently lived in each particular place (as they depend upon the heterogeneous situated activities, geographical factors, and politics). Space, in this way, is not merely an abstraction, nor seen as an absolute, but rather is a lived contemporary experience, connected to late-capitalist spatial politics shaped by technology and interconnectedness, and forced and voluntary displacement of humans and non-humans that results from war, conflicts, and the exploitation of resources and labor.

Miwon Kwon (2002) addressed a critique to the concept of site-specificity as spatio-politically problematic, re-assessing the rhetoric of vanguardism and political progressivism in site-specificity by pointing to the spatial-political implications of the site of art. Genealogically connected to the phenomenological or experiential understandings of space in the 1960s (e.g., Minimalism, Land Art) and institutional critique practices of conceptual art that goes back to Duchamp, site-specific artworks incorporated the physical conditions of a particular location which were thought to be integral to the production, presentation, and reception of art (Kwon, 2002: 1). This boosted public art projects and discussions about the participation of the audience in the basic determinations for public art (location, form, nature of the artwork, sense of identity), resulting in a shift in the general conception of space that starts to be identified with the “community” in the 1980s. An important work that fostered discussion about the audience’s participation in site-specific public art was Richard Serra’s *Tilted Arc* (1981 to 1989) at the Federal Plaza, Manhattan, that ended

up being removed in the late 1980s after intense public debate. From this moment, artists began to be concerned about the collective uses of space.

Kwon noticed an increase in site-oriented practices in Contemporary art along with an itinerant operative mode. First, it became common for institutions to request artists to travel and mobilize a set of questions about certain configurations of a site (often the institutional space); and, later, in the 1990s, a new type of public urban art emerged that focused on the active participation of residents in the creation of the artworks. A case in point is the project *Culture in Action*, a temporary exhibition program that took place in Chicago throughout the summer of 1993, where the “community” was the authority figure, “privileging its role in the collaborative artistic partnerships forged by the program” (*Ibidem*: 104). However, the author discusses the problems in the concept of “community”, a unity of homogeneous identity and the possibilities of identification and representation of a group by some signifiers within a network of institutional determinations and power relations (*Ibidem*: 154), calling attention to the power dynamics between artists, the so-called “communities”, and art institutions that promote the art projects.

Kwon connected the increasing concern with space in art and the proliferation of site-specific practices with a broader political context of deterritorialization caused by the advance of global capitalism. In this sense, site-specific works emerged in the dialectics of the increasing abstraction of space in the neoliberal order and the production of particularities of place. Therefore, space in site-specific practices has oscillated between a sedentary model and a nomadic one: the former corresponds to community-oriented methods, where the local is deemed pure and authentic, masking power relations between artists, the “communities” (idealistically assumed as a homogenous group) and art institutions; the latter is seen in the figure of the itinerant artist working in temporary exhibitions, moving from one institution to the other, indicating art’s new commodity status

within the global art market. To produce work critical to the neoliberal conceptualization of space and globalization, site-oriented practices should demarcate relational specificity, holding these two poles of spatial experience in dialectical tension.

In the case of *Transmissão Fordlândia*, what is interrogated is the capitalist spatial ordering within the context of globalization and the way the situated activities respond, defy, reconfigure, and modify it. The hosts discuss Fordlândia's "unknown" multiple past and present stories, which differ from Ford's one, also calling attention to the ones which are still being created in the present, some of which with *radioee's* participation. Broadcast from the iconic industrial shed, *Transmissão Fordlândia* calls attention to the dynamic events occurring in situ that point to a full working town in the present, where buildings constructed in the past have been repurposed to serve other activities, while others still function in the same way, such as the school, and others, such as the convent, have been completely deactivated. This is evidence of an active human presence continuously (re) configuring the place in material, symbolic, social, and affective senses. In this way, "local culture" is not merely a manifestation of global conditions in a placeless world (Escobar, 2006:121).

It is essential to highlight the industrial shed's central role as the site for the radio broadcast. The building has been the main point of insertion of Fordlândia into a global network since its construction in the 1920s, and, at the same time, has acquired different social functions and meanings for different groups (and species) at various moments. Adjacent to it, the Tapajós river features as the central axis, the backbone connecting all locations. Through the river, people come and go waiting for boats. In this way, the work challenges easy spatial configurations such as local and global, demarcating "relational specificity", turning Fordlândia into one of the nerve centers that generate random, synchronic, and unexpected connections across local and worldwide networks.

Transmissão Fordlândia: an ecocritical approach

Krista A. Thompson (2006) studied the picturesque touristic representations of Jamaica and the Bahamas in the early 20th century and their spatial-political implications, exploring how colonial representations became interwoven within the texture of colonial societies. These were depicted as orderly displayed exotic, strange, or grandiose forms of tropical nature and disciplined colonial subjects. In this way, Thompson shifted the focus from Western ideologies to the material production of the colonized spaces within the colonial society. Her attention to the dialectical relationship between spatial representation and spatial production, in dialogue with Henri Lefebvre, is important in understanding the planning and construction of Fordlândia, “the modern city at the heart of the Amazon rainforest”, a joint attempt by the Ford Motor Company and the Brazilian government to revive the rubber economy in the region.

This focus on spatial production-representation also allows us to reflect on *Transmissão Fordlândia*'s site-oriented practices and how its attention to the site comments on and undermines modern colonial representations of tropical landscapes. In *Transmissão Fordlândia*, spatial relations evoke systemic complexity, conflicting with the previous rational spatial ordering of which the industrial architecture is the remnants. The channeling of spatial sounds and voices through the radio broadcast reveals an ongoing production of space, contradicting stable representations of primitivism, futurity, or decay that fix Fordlândia in the past or in a utopic future. While the actions occur within the spatial coordinates pre-established in Ford's period, they also reconfigure those coordinates in random ways and point to multiple agents who produce the space in a web of associations.

While present in the site, producer Mateus Guzzo notices that “life encompasses everything”. Augustina Woodgate observes the dense vegetation growing everywhere, outside as much as inside the buildings,

noticing the absence of glass in the window frames which make the residential houses structurally open to the outside⁷. Woodgate states that “nature here is part of the inner spaces and the inner spaces are part of nature⁸”; “the outside is open to the inside and the inside is open to the outside”; in this way, the relationship with nature is different⁹. The presence of birds inhabiting the buildings is remarked by Hernan Woodgate and reinforced by their singing while conversation happens¹⁰. Augustina Woodgate describes the various colors and combinations of their feathers¹¹.

The presence of vegetation and animals in the architectural interiors is a common symbol of ruins. However, as Mateus Guzzo asserts during the broadcast, this idea is undermined by the dynamism of life in and surrounding the site, adjacent to the port where people wait for boats, coming and going, next to a car that provides internet service. The site offers a mix of things simultaneously happening which requires a way of comprehending spatial orderings other than the nature versus culture one¹². Like Donna Haraway’s cyborg world, Fordlândia is ambiguously natural and crafted. Not only birds, but other animals, people, metallic sounds, engine noises, sirens, water sounds, and so on, can be heard throughout the transmission. Through descriptions and sounds, one can imagine an alternative nature–culture relationship and other notions of interiority and exteriority, based on a world where vegetation, animals, humans, technology, architecture, and navigation all happen in simultaneous associations.

Ecocritical approaches within posthumanist studies have offered interpretations of more-than-human relations, resulting in an ecological critique against the Cartesian philosophical tradition based on the duality between nature and culture and clearly defined individual identities differing from an external, positive world. In this sense, ecocritical studies allow us to rethink the human, challenging anthropocentric disembodied epistemological modes that produce apparent neutral knowledge, and the

related narratives of Human exceptionalism (Gaard; Estok; Oppermann, 2013).

According to Bruno Latour (2005), “we have to reshuffle our conceptions of what was associated together because the previous definitions has been made somewhat irrelevant” as “we are no longer sure about what ‘we’ means;” the sense of belonging entered a crisis (Latour, 2005: 5-7). In this way, “another notion of social has to be devised,” much wider than what is usually known by that name, “yet strictly limited to the tracing of new associations and to the designing of their assemblages” (*Ibidem*: 7).

Donna Haraway has focused on transits and multispecies associations in more spatialized and temporal terms. In *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), Haraway advocates for new ways of storytelling based on multispecies associations, centered on human and non-human collaboration and coproduced realities in time and space. The author questions any given clearly defined identity or naturalized frontier (such as nature) and self-defined spatial-temporal boundaries. According to Haraway, the multispecies approach is necessary to produce an effective interpretation and response to present-day socioenvironmental problems and to propose a new ethics that includes the rights of other species. There is no true ecological thinking without re-thinking the human as a co-producer of worlds within a web of associations with other species.

In this way, Haraway privileges multispecies art projects “for mundane worlds in need of – and capable of – recuperation across consequential differences”, where we can chart the transits between what we classify as culture and nature (Haraway, 2016: 21). A case in point is artist-researcher Beatriz da Costa’s *Pigeon-Blog*, where properly equipped racing pigeons gather continuous real-time air pollution data while moving through the air at key heights not accessible to the official instruments. This not only reveals a present-day example of collaboration between human beings and pigeons

but sparks reflections about a long history of human-pigeon associations.

In this way, we can also think about the extent to which *Transmissão Fordlândia* operates in those same terms by means of storytelling and sonic-spatial imagination, making the place emerge through ecological relations between multispecies agents (birds, people, domestic animals, vegetation, machines, waterways). This goes hand in hand with Donna Haraway's attention to storytelling, or speculative fabulation, as a practice of tracing multispecies associations and rejecting anthropocentric knowledge-making. The consistent revisiting of the Ford Motor Company's unsuccessful rubber plantation project also uncovers another story, one about *Hevea's* associative constitution along its evolutionary history, irreconcilable with the colonial modern project of spatial rationalization and individualization. This offers us other ways of thinking about rubber and rubber trees and their agency in refusing colonization that, despite not completely stopped, produced tension – capable of triggering what Isabelle Stengers (2005) defined as the “idiotic murmuring”, casting doubts, making one to pause, slowing down generalizing, all-encompassing proposals. In a similar way, ecocritical artist Ursula Biemann reflected on the key role of storytelling in affecting how humans relate to, exploit, and alter the environment within the global economy, requiring new forms of telling stories that allow us to connect things with things in different ways and produce new narratives:

The process of extracting resources from the ground and transferring them to the global market, making them exchangeable, also extracts them from social and natural histories of where they come from and of which they are part, like labor, migration, and consumed environments. The extraction from local ecologies is closely linked to the problem of how we tell stories of commodities and where they come from. (*Nature of Rights: Earth Law, Forensics, Geo-Symptoms*, series of talks at Nottingham University, Jan 24, 2015)¹³.

Finally, *Transmissão Fordlândia* re-frames the capitalist spatial-political dynamics as political-ecological ones, pointing to the links between the

exploitation of nature and political, economic, and cultural inequalities. Ford Company's Amazonian enterprise entailed a colonial logic of territorial occupation to exploit local labor force and the environment that not only relates to the economic struggle to access and control natural resources but also to specific cultural conceptions and practices of nature. One of the people interviewed by *radioee's* presenters was indigenous lawyer and activist for indigenous rights Almires Martins Machado, who connects the rights of nature and indigenous land rights based on indigenous cosmopolitics¹⁴, entailing another way to conceive and relate with the environment that is not understood in a commodified way as natural resource¹⁵. Thus, one can think of *Transmissão Fordlândia* in light of what Arturo Escobar has called "political ecology of difference", where ecological processes cannot be reduced to merely economic terms and commodified but must be thought from a cultural perspective that takes into consideration epistemological differences towards the natural world (Descola, 2013; Escobar, 2006: 123).

Conclusion

"We arrived to this location, and we broadcast the place", says Augustina Woodgate, defining the fundamental aspects of *Transmissão Fordlândia*: movement and actions in time and space conveyed through sound and shaping how we imagine place. The "broadcasting of the place" is based on the simultaneity of spatial performance and live radio communication, privileging the present-lived spatio-temporal experience. Sound travels through space differently from other bodies and shapes our spatial conceptions. Even if one cannot see the site where the radio hosts are situated, it is possible to imagine it through their voices and the sounds of the surroundings projecting into the space and channeled to the listeners through radio technology and the internet. Thus, this paper explored the

sonic-spatial effects of live radio transmission as an aesthetic device for imagining and experiencing place.

This paper also expanded questions about the politics of space that stem from the relationship between the work and its site, as discussed by Miwon Kwon (2000), reconsidering spatial-political issues as political-ecological ones in the analysis of *Transmissão Fordlândia*. From the work's attention to spatial relations emerges a perception of associations between multiple actors, human and non-human, that continuously coproduce the space, calling into question the spatial ordering designed and reproduced through colonization/modernization premised on the duality culture–nature, and center–periphery. Thus, *Transmissão Fordlândia* allows us to think of different, non-Cartesian ways to conceive spatial relations, while the various ways of storytelling make multiple actors and other ways of conceiving and practicing nature emerge.

In this way, this paper analyzed *Transmissão Fordlândia* through an ecocritical approach to space and offered a decolonial perspective, understanding the history of spatialization of Amazonia in tandem with the colonial modern project and underscoring how local histories (histories of modernity/coloniality) intervene in global designs (the hegemonic project for managing the planet) (Mignolo, 2012). Exploring the implications of Fordlândia's legendary foundation history in a modernizing project in the tropics that suggests ideas of underdevelopment and relates to coloniality, means to question in the first place the nature–culture duality spatially operated in the process of colonization and still at play in late-capitalist spatial politics.

Investigating the intersection of contemporary art, environmental activism, and political ecology, T.J. Demos (2016) has argued that “environmentally engaged arts bear the potential to both rethink politics and politicize art's relation to ecology,” calling attention to the social impacts of the way we think and act towards nature. *Transmissão Fordlândia*

and *radioee.net* spark reflections on the ecological implications of capitalist socioeconomic dynamics and grand narrative of modernity and its spatial expression, considering ecological formations and conflicts in their local-global dimensions. Going beyond the critique of predatory capitalist logic that underlies the international framework of economic exploitation of the environment, *Transmissão Fordlândia's* site-oriented practices offer a perception of spatial relations that decolonize our very conceptualization of nature, and of Amazonia, which, as argued by T.J. Demos (2016) and others, like Arturo Escobar (2006) and Enrique Leff (2003), has proven to be fundamental to promoting an ecocritical ethical-political praxis where the rights of nature and other non-hegemonic subjects' rights can be articulated.

References

- ANTELO, R. La aporia amazónica. In: NOUZEILLES, G. *La naturaleza en disputa: retóricas del cuerpo y el paisaje en América Latina*. Buenos Aires/Barcelona/México: Paidós, 2002.
- BOURG, D.; FRAGNIÈRE, A. (orgs.). *La pensée écologique. Une anthologie*. Paris: PUF, 2014.
- CAPRA, F.; LUISI, P. L. *A visão sistêmica da vida: uma visão unificada e suas implicações filosóficas, políticas, sociais e econômicas*; Translate by Maya Teruya Eichenberg, Newton Roberval Eichenberg. São Paulo: Cutrix, 2014.
- DEMOS, T. J. *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016.
- DESCOLA, P. *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- ESCOBAR, A. An Ecology of Difference. *Focaal*, 47, 120-137, 2006.
- GAARD, G. C.; ESTOK, S. C.; OPPERMAN, Serpil. *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- GASPAR, R. F. "A última aventura" de Romy Pocztaruk: uma viagem entre as utopias e ruínas na Região Amazônica. *Revista Poiésis*, 22 (38), 64-81, 2021.
- GRANDIN, G. *Fordlândia: the Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City*. 1st ed. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009.

- GOMES, C. V. A. Ciclos econômicos do extrativismo na Amazônia na visão dos viajantes naturalistas. *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas*, v. 13, n. 1, p. 129-146, jan.-abr. 2018.
- HADOT, P. *The Veil of Isis: an Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.
- HARAWAY, D. J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- KAYE, N. *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- KWON, M. *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002.
- LATOUR, B. *Reassembling the Social an Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- LEAL, A. L. Uma sinopse histórica da Amazônia (uma visão política). In: TRINDADE, J. R. B.; MARQUES, G. (orgs.). *Revista de Estudos Paraenses* (edição especial). Belém: IDESP, 2010.
- LEFF, E. La ecología política en América Latina: un campo en construcción. *Sociedade e Estado*, 18 (01), p. 17-40. 2003.
- MACLAREN, I. S. The Imprint of the Picturesque on Nineteenth-Century British Fiction by Alexander M. Ross (review). *English Studies in Canada*, 14, n. 1, 108-12, 1988.
- MIGNOLO, W. D. *The darker side of the Renaissance: literacy, territoriality and colonization*. Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1995.
- _____. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.
- _____. *Local Histories/global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Nature of Rights: Eart Law, Forensics, Geo-Symptoms*, series of talks at Nottingham University, Jan. 24, 2015.
- NOUZEILLES, G. (org.). *La naturaleza en disputa: retóricas del cuerpo y el paisaje en América Latina*. Buenos Aires/Barcelona/México: Paidós, 2002.
- OUZOUNIAN, G. *Stereophonica: Sound and Space in Science, Technology, and the Arts*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2020.
- QUIJANO, A. Colonialidad y modernidad-racionalidad. In: BONILLA, H. (Org.). *Los conquistados: 1942 y la población indígena de las Américas*. Ecuador: Libri Mundi, 1992. p. 437-447.
- SANTOS, R. *História Econômica da Amazônia (1800-1920)*. São Paulo: Queirós, 1980.
- STENGERS, I. The Cosmopolitical Proposal. In: LATOUR, B.; WEIBEL, P. (eds.), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005. pp. 994-1003.
- THOMPSON, K. A. *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Notes

- * Ph.D. Candidate in Art History, Southern Methodist University, Dallas. E-mail: gpaivadetoledo[@]smu.edu. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2000-8459>.
- 1 "Os empreendimentos de Ford no Pará". *Jornal do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, p. 8, Tuesday February 10th, 1931. On-line: http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/docreader.aspx?bib=030015_05&pasta=ano%20193&pesq=Fordlandia&pagfis=10824.
 - 2 "A Fordlândia". *Jornal do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, p. 5, Thursday February 26th, 1931. On-line: http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/docreader.aspx?bib=030015_05&pasta=ano%20193&pesq=Fordlandia&pagfis=11214
 - 3 "O Fim de Fordlândia". *Jornal do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, p. 5, Friday November 30th, 1945. http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/docreader.aspx?bib=030015_06&pasta=ano%20194&pesq=Fordlandia&pagfis=36975
 - 4 This exhibition was on view from February to July 2022, at Sesc Pompeia, São Paulo.
 - 5 <https://freshartinternational.com/2015/05/01/fresh-talk-agustina-woodgate/>. Accessed May 20th, 2022.
 - 6 *Transmissão Fordlândia*, 40:09, <https://radioee.net/event/fordlandia/>
 - 7 *Transmissão Fordlândia*, 28:40-29:00, <https://radioee.net/event/fordlandia/>
 - 8 *Transmissão Fordlândia*, 28:52, <https://radioee.net/event/fordlandia/>
 - 9 *Transmissão Fordlândia*, 29:09-29:13, <https://radioee.net/event/fordlandia/>
 - 10 *Transmissão Fordlândia*, 14:38-14:55, <https://radioee.net/event/fordlandia/>
 - 11 *Transmissão Fordlândia*, 28:09, <https://radioee.net/event/fordlandia/>
 - 12 *Transmissão Fordlândia*, 29:10-30:14, <https://radioee.net/event/fordlandia/>
 - 13 <https://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/record/nature-of-rights-earth-law-forensics-geo-symptoms/> Accessed July 5th, 2022.
 - 14 The concept of "cosmopolitics" was developed by Isabelle Stengers (2005) and has become widespread in the field of political ecology to expand politics beyond the human, encompassing human and non-human negotiations.
 - 15 *Transmissão Fordlândia*, 6:20:00, <https://radioee.net/event/fordlandia/>

Article received in July 2022. Accepted in November 2022.

[Artigo recebido em julho de 2022. Aprovado em novembro de 2022.]