

Contaminated Survivals in *Inhalaciones territoriales* by Ana Laura Cantera

Gabi Balcarce – Andrea Torrano

In *Inhalaciones territoriales* (2022), artist Ana Laura Cantera, in collaboration with Demian Ferrari, explores the urban space of Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Bangalore (India) using a device for the collection of ambient CO₂. This work can be interpreted within the context of extinction, stemming from the planetary crisis we are witnessing, involving humans and non-humans alike. In scenes of devastation, the work explores ways to inhale, walk, feel, contaminate, challenging affective repertoires tinted with pessimism, in favor of delving into new affective expressions that advocate for multi-species alliances and solidarities. Drawing on the perspectives of Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, and Vinciane Despret we will delve into the sympoietic landscape of this work, aiming to establish the posthuman coordinates of coexistence and multispecies collaborations as a vigorous response to the Anthropocene. | Keywords: *Anthropocene, Contamination, Multispecies Solidarities, Survival Assemblages, Sympoietic Landscape*

1. Introduction

We live in an era marked by accelerated climate crisis, mass extinctions, increased emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases, loss of biodiversity, global warming, rising deforestation, water pollution, ecosystem degradation, privatization and over-extraction of common goods, and the destruction of territories, peoples, and cultures. Human lifestyles, grounded in consumption and unlimited appropriation of goods and living beings, have placed life on Earth – including our own species – at mortal risk. Crutzen and Stoermer (2000) proposed naming this geological epoch the Anthropocene, a period in which human activities have become comparable to geological forces in their capacity to transform the Earth. From Latin America, Svampa (2019) warns that the Anthropocene must be understood in relation to extractivism and neo-extractivism, which produce large-scale and intensive

extraction of material goods. For the author, this economic model is deeply connected to the 'invention of Europe', the expansion of capital, and the consolidation of a logic of dispossession that extends from the conquest of America to the present.

According to Tsing (2015, 2019), the Anthropocene is characterized by the destruction of shelters for humans and other species. During the Holocene, shelters still existed in which different organisms could survive under unfavorable conditions. The turning point between the Holocene and the Anthropocene lies in the destruction of these spaces and times of refuge (Haraway, 2016a, p. 17). In recent years, the Earth has progressively and rapidly diminished its capacity to welcome us, "global landscapes today are strewn with this kind of ruins" (Tsing, 2015, p. 6). But it is an "irregular Anthropocene" (Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt, 2019), since although the Anthropocene is global – it is not possible for climate change to happen in some places and not in others – the way the Earth is harassed by Man – with a capital M – is uneven and unequal. In this sense, the Anthropocene seems to leave certain clearings where it is possible to find forms of habitability. The inquiry, then, into these possibilities of habitability in crumbling capitalism.

In a similar vein, Haraway (2016a, p. 44) asks: "So, what have we provoked?" For the author, it is necessary to confront the consequences of the devastation produced in order to regenerate the world through modest, partial recoveries that allow us to continue living together. Confronting the desire for salvation or a final answer – whether rooted in technological optimism or theological promise – she insists on 'staying with the problem', that is, being 'in' and 'with' the problem, so that the world becomes a matter of care.¹ Thus, she emphatically calls us: "Think we must; we must think. That means, simply, we must change the story; the story must change" (Haraway, 2016a, p. 40). This involves producing new narratives, stories, that recover affection, care, and the capacity to learn how to live and die with others.

The Anthropocene refers to a specific *anthropos*: a white, property-owning, heterosexual male from the Global North, accompanied by stories of Man superiority over all other beings. Colonial worlds, plantation – the engines of European expansion and wealth (Tsing, 2015) – and the appropriation of bodies and goods are the corollaries of this *anthropos*. How, then, should we think about a world in ruins? With whom should we imagine forms of regeneration? How might we reconstruct habitability under these conditions? Starting to ask ourselves these urgent questions implies decentering the *anthropos*, and any stance on human exceptionalism, to entangle ourselves, make compost, and recognise ourselves in multispecies assemblages. In this sense, it becomes essential to recover the imaginaries that invoke a more habitable world.

¹ Following Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), care should be understood as what we do to maintain and repair the fabric that sustains life. In this sense, it should not be understood in relation to the social reproduction of life, nor to moral imperatives, but as the sustenance of life that includes humans and more-than-humans, where the importance of care given and received is highlighted.

‘Contemporary technological arts’ (Adler and Martin, 2022) constitute a privileged field of experimentation for testing alternative ways of knowledge and reflection. They allow for questioning naturalised conceptions of current living conditions and for exploring the relationships between sciences and living. At the same time, artistic practices propose to imagine and construct assemblages between humans and non-humans, based on alliances and solidarities, for a common survival.

We propose to investigate *Inhalaciones territoriales* (2019–2021 and 2023), by the artist Ana Laura Cantera² – in collaboration with Demian Ferrari – who traverses the urban space of Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Bangalore (India) with a device that collects carbon dioxide and other gases present in the atmosphere. It is a backpack with funnels and fans that absorb toxic gases. As noted in its description, the work involves two movements of the body: on one hand, the exposure of the artist’s corporeality in the territory and its atmosphere; on the other hand, the gases that enter the body as the artist consumes the suspended particles of the territory while traversing it. At the same time, it presents two methodologies: the first, digital, a CO2 sensor allows her to measure toxic gases in real time. The second, analog, is the intake of air towards the mycelium discs (fungal biocomposite)³ inside the backpack. Those biomaterials progressively get stained with pollution during the filtration process and are subsequently used to create a ‘cyanometer’, which serves to determine how polluted the atmosphere is.⁴

Both Argentina and India belong to countries of the Global South, with a similar history; both were colonized by European countries and maintain an unequal relationship with the Global North. In this sense, these territories often find themselves vulnerable to the extractivism imposed by economically powerful countries, forcing their inhabitants, human and non-human inhabitants to coexist in increasingly hostile environments.

Air pollution and water pollution are part of this scenario, posing a threat to survival. The work focuses on breathing, which becomes the action through which living beings – not just humans – ingest microparticles of toxic gases into their bodies. It also explores ways of walking, feeling, transporting, and imagining, stretching the affective repertoires tinged with pessimism, to immerse themselves in new affective expressions that bet on alliances and multi-species solidarities for a common survival. That’s why Cantera (2021) characterizes the experience in terms of ‘inhale and coexist’, accounting for the generation of survival assemblages in precarious environments.

² Ana Laura Cantera is an Argentine bioelectronic artist, researcher, and professor at the Universidad Tres de Febrero (UNTREF). She is co-founder of Mycocrea - Biomaterials Laboratory and the Robotícula collective of Art and Biorobotics, along with Demian Ferrari. She is part of the Ecoestéticas collective and is a member of the Laboratory of Subaltern Geopoetics. Some of their works are: *Territorial Inhalations* (2019–2021 and 2023), *Invisible Cartographies* (2018), *Utopian Reconstitutions* (2018), *You Are Not Eternal* (2013). His works are characterised by combining art, technologies, and biomaterials.

³ Cantera (2020) proposes a protocol for constructing and designing objects cultivated using fungal species.

⁴ The play presents two versions, the first one performed in Buenos Aires during 2019–2021, where it toured the City of Buenos Aires and the Greater Buenos Aires area, and the second one in 2023, in Bangalore.

The work is part of Cantera's interest in questioning the separation between human and nature and between subject and object, subsidiaries of the culture/nature distinction, which, among other things, is at the root of the exploitation and degradation of the planet. Inspired by Morton's work, the artist aims to dislocate the scale at which we think and the place that human beings occupy on that scale (Pérez, 2024). According to Morton, the notions of Nature and world have been framed from an anthropocentric perspective, as spaces containing objectified things, which is why they are not suitable for a true planetary consciousness. Thus, abandoning notions such as 'the end of the world' opens the way for what Morton describes as "a decisive pivot in Earth history, in which humans discern the nonhuman and thus reckon the fate of Earth with a greater justice" (Morton, 2013, p. 148).

Our interest is to approach this work through the notion of 'contaminated survivals', two words with seemingly opposite meanings, which allow us to abandon narratives that propose a return to a space of no contamination, assuming that environmental damage is irreversible, but that this does not mean that everything is lost, rather that forms of survival are still possible.

Still, these places can be lively despite announcements of their death; abandoned asset fields sometimes yield new multispecies and multicultural life. In a global state of precarity, we don't have choices other than looking for life in this ruin. (Tsing, 2015, p. 6)

In this sense, the notion of contamination is revisited, understanding it as a form of becoming-with, where there are no pure and independent existences; on the contrary, there are impurities, confusions, dependencies, and relationships. To this end, we will revisit the reflections of Haraway, Tsing, and Despret, who have explored ways to imagine forms of survival on a devastated earth by betting on multispecies solidarities. The new feminist materialisms – where the concerns of these authors can be inscribed – emerged philosophically as a reaction to the representationalist and constructivist radicalizations of late postmodernity that sidelined the realm of matter and reclaimed feminist debates as a process of materialisation (Fischetti, 2023).

In the first part of this work, we will focus on multispecies assemblages, which bring together humans and non-humans, and living beings as well as non-living ones, within a specific landscape. To do this, we will revisit Tsing's conceptualization of assemblage, which characterises them as a 'polyphonic set', and Haraway's notion of 'sympoietic system',⁵ as a way of 'making-in-symphony', in dialogue with Despret's 'habitability'. These theoretical proposals will serve as a compass to investigate *Inhalaciones*

⁵ The notion of *sympoiesis* developed by Haraway (2019) is inspired by Lynn Margulis's studies on eukaryotic cells and her proposal of endobiosis and symbiogenesis, in contrast to the idea of competition as the main factor driving the evolutionary process. In Margulis's genealogy, multicellular beings like animals (including ourselves) would be the result of the evolution of colonies of unicellular beings accustomed to living symbiotically, specialising into what would become tissues with different functions. This symbiotic condition of co-evolution would have been advantageous for survival (Margulis and Sagan, 1996). This conception of life aligns with concepts such as symbiogenesis by biologist Scott Gilbert (2010), or the proposals of thinkers like Tim Ingold (2016), for whom life does not unfold in opposition to, nor as a sum of parts articulated around 'and' but from 'together with'.

territoriales, which can be interpreted as a multispecies assemblage in the urban landscape of the Global South composed of a human body, air microparticles, fungi, and technological devices. In the second, we will focus on alliances, affections, and multi-species solidarities, where we will revisit the notion of becoming with others, as a mode of affectation and knowledge, as a possibility of engaging in a relationship of proximity, which appears in Despret. This will allow us to delve into the forms of collaborative survival proposed by Tsing, which are what make life possible in a world in ruins. In the third and last part, we focus on the modes of ‘thinking-with’ and ‘breathing-with’ as specific ways of conceiving contaminated forms of survival. This approach allows us to unsettle the narrative of individual salvation and to replace it with one that foregrounds coexistence. Cantera’s work calls for both raising awareness about environmental pollution in large cities and exploring collaborative modes of existence among multiple species, human and non-human, organic and inorganic.

2. Survival Assemblies

The current landscape of bioart presents us with a highly interesting proliferation of installations and experiments that use organic and inorganic materials. In particular, the use of mycelium and fungi has been a point of intersection between art, science, and activism in valuable current projects in Latin America. In that direction, Barrios (2016), a participant as a member of the Zooetics collective at the 32nd São Paulo Biennial, highlights:

The use of mycelium in this context not only demonstrates the versatility and potential of fungi in biotechnology but also reflects an interdisciplinary approach that combines science, art, and sustainability. Through this practice, a discussion opens up about how we interact with natural materials and how we can incorporate more sustainable and collaborative processes into our daily lives. (Barrios, 2016, para. 6)

It is interdisciplinary research, where politics, culture, and science come together to promote social transformation and dialogue about public spaces. In a very similar direction, then, *Inhalaciones territoriales* seeks to account for the anthropocentric landscape, marked by pollution. The work allows us to trace the dire consequences of the Anthropocene,⁶ but it also points to the possibility of living in its ruins. If Tsing’s (2015) proposal is to identify sympoietic landscapes in an era where habitability is at risk, for Cantera it is about recognizing the exchanges between technologies, corporealities, and organic and inorganic materialities. Precisely, therein lies the collaborative essence of bioart.

Tsing appeals to following the route of the matsutake in the forests, which requires a different bodily disposition compared to other methods of scientific inquiry, such as bending down, placing the body on the ground, directing

⁶ Although the notion of the Anthropocene was not accepted by the stratigraphy community as a period following the Holocene (postglacial period) and in March 2023, the decision was made public that it would not be considered an official nomenclature of any kind, it nonetheless had repercussions in other areas and, in some way, encapsulates the posthuman critical analysis, as it highlights and questions that long period of the planet in which the human colonized the existing, made it available to themselves, and erased the violence of that gesture.

the gaze downward, and enhancing not only sight but also smell. Descend to the ground to discover a network of relationships between roots and fungi, of entanglements and multi-species interactions. For its part, Cantera proposes to traverse the city, large urban conglomerations, and open field areas, with a high concentration of CO₂ resulting from industrial livestock farming, to experiment with ways of inhaling, circulating, perceiving, and feeling. Breathing occupies a central place in her exercise, both as a practice that characterizes living and as something at risk in the Anthropocene. As the artist herself expresses: “my goal in this work is to visualize that: to pay attention and be aware of the gases, the smog, the pollution that enters us and settles in our organs in a completely natural way” (Cantera, 2021). According to Berardi (2018), in the face of the suffocation caused by the capitalist way of life and the pollution that plagues cities, it is necessary to breathe at a new rhythm, a rhythm that knows of extinction, but that also paves the way for the creation of a harmonious movement of countless bodies that synchronize their steps by breathing together.

As Adler and Martin (2022) point out, Cantera’s work appeals to technoscientific instruments that allow for the understanding of exchanges between materialities and organic and inorganic agencies. On one hand, a digital instrument, a CO₂ sensor, which allows her to measure the levels of pollution in real time. This measurement is displayed on a screen on the front of the backpack and on the gas monitoring bracelet on the artist’s wrist. On the other hand, an analog one, a cyanometer, which is used to determine how polluted the atmosphere is. The cyanometer was an instrument created by de Saussure in the late 18th century to measure the shade of blue in the sky.⁷ On the contrary, Cantera’s cyanometer is used to measure the shade of gray, which reflects nothing but the level of pollution in the environment.

The combination of digital and analog devices that makes the degree of air pollution visible refers to an articulation between two diverse technologies, one mechanical and the other electronic, which, in turn, correspond to two distinct historical moments –and technological innovations–: the industrial revolution and the digital revolution. In this way, the work seems to suggest a coupling between two modes of visualization (and measurement) of air, or rather, of pollution. As Cantera states (2015, p. 36), “technology is not used as a casual element but rather stands as a tool capable of questioning itself”. In this way, art reformulates and challenges human and non-human relations (including technologies) beyond the utilitarian and efficiency-oriented interests of science.

The work consists of several stages, the first being where the artist focuses on cultivating fungal mycelium for the assembly of air filters. The white mycelium discs are cut and placed inside a backpack with openings for channels through which outside air enters. In a second stage, the artist traverses the city, where

⁷ The cyanometer had a circular shape with 52 different shades of blue (pieces of paper dyed by the meteorologist with a pigment evocatively called ‘Prussian blue’) that started with white and ended with black.

she collects carbon dioxide through the backpack equipped with funnels and fans that absorb the toxic gases, simulating organic inhalation. Finally, the micro and macroparticles of airborne pollutants that enter through the backpack are deposited in the fungal filters. This last point allows for a certain analogy to be conceived between the lungs, as human filters, and the fungal filters (Adler and Martin, 2022).

As Matewecki (2021, p. 8) points out, Cantera's work contributes to articulating critical thinking with the transformations of nature, from a perspective that questions science, technology, and the place of the human. Art contributes to promoting critical reflection on the implications of the human role in planetary collapse and invites recognition of its relationship with other materialities and non-human agencies, opening the space for experimentation and contact with alterities that are obliterated by the primacy of the human scale and its consequent ontological indifference. In this sense, it resembles the critical description proposed by Tsing to study social relationships and networks, that is, the "more-than-human sociality" (Tsing, 2015, p. 152), which includes both humans and non-humans, even inanimate objects. It highlights the notion of critique as it allows for the formulation of urgent questions and that of description because it expands the curiosity of life, that is, it allows us to learn how humans and other species access ways of life through networks of relationships. Critical description, then, is the one that allows us to investigate social worlds by observing the assemblages, which bring together humans and non-humans, and living beings as well as non-living ones, within a specific landscape. But it is not simply about organisms as mere grouped elements; rather, the assemblages configure forms of life based on the emergent effects derived from encounters.

Inhalaciones territoriales can be interpreted as a multispecies assemblage in the urban landscape of the Global South composed of a human body, air microparticles, fungi, and technological devices. The artist's body is the subject of experimentation in its circulation (on foot and by bicycle) through the city and as a breathing agent, forced to inhale the polluted air. The work allows, on one hand, to showcase the respiratory crisis resulting from the pollution of capitalist cities, but, on the other hand, it accounts for a new rhythm of breathing, a polyphonic rhythm composed of humans and non-humans, a tuning of multi-species rhythms.

In a similar sense, Haraway refers to the stories of co-evolution, of contamination between animals, humans, and other living organisms, which allow us to show how through contact "beings constitute each other and themselves" (Haraway, 2003, p. 6). With this notion, she highlights that they not only have a life together, but also a common history, a social, economic, affective, biogenetic history.⁸ This history is filled with violence and brutality, but also with love and alliances. According to Haraway, we inhabit a 'sympoietic system' (not self-making,

⁸ As Giannuzzi (2020, p. 141) warns, interspecific and *sympoietic* relationships are the crucial field for defining the 'human' experience, that is, 'critical' in relation to a set of problems that, according to Haraway, are pressing: 1. the plantation system of agribusiness, which structurally requires the genocide of atypical life and certain forms of captivity and forced labor (humans and plants, animals, microbes, and machines); 2. the capacity to educate through science fiction (science fiction, speculative feminism, science fantasy, speculative fabulation, scientific facts, and string figures); 3. the material-semiotic responses we represent with a non-anthropocentric difference (in art, action-research, archives); 4. the task of finding situated political exits in our present.

not autopoietic), making-in-symphony, making-with, never one, always looping with other worlds” (Haraway, 2016b, p. 216). Life unfolds from ‘partial connections’⁹ in which strange kinships are generated, disobedient to the human norm, where “kin is an assembling sort of word” (Haraway, 2016a, p. 103). As Despret (2022) points out, borders are much more elastic, where the way of thinking about territory moves away from modern conceptions associated with appropriation, conquest, and a certain coloniality. The idea of inhabiting thus allows us to consider “territories that become bodies and bodies that become territories” (Despret, 2022, p. 29), since territory is above all expression. Far from thinking of territory as something stable, fixed, timeless, like mere *res extensa*, the author asserts, drawing on Deleuze, that few things are as alive and mutable as territory. It is a place where rhythm, motifs, and counterpoints articulate among multiple worlds, making cohabitation possible.

Multispecies assemblages, polyphonic ensembles, stories of co-evolution, sympoietic systems, making-in-symphony, kin, are some of the expressions that allow us to decenter the *anthropos*, where a “permeability of the body” (Payrol Morán, 2022, p. 3) is shown, that is, a permeable human body, open to the environment and to being with others and their multiple interactions with technologies and other materialities, both organic and inorganic. And it is in this affectation where we can move away from human scales and their criteria, those that have silenced other modes of existence, human and non-human, that were always there but we had not turned to see them: animals, fungi, racialized populations, among many forms of being, outside the human norm and its way, perhaps, of forming community, always from the similar, in search of the specularity that reflects a self, far from the contact and vulnerability that hospitality towards the other implies. These encounters show us how we need others not only to survive but also to be able to see ourselves from another perspective. Even to miss ourselves, to nest something of the others, or more precisely, to be able to feel it.

3. Alliances, Affections, and Multispecies Solidarities

In What would animals say if we asked the right questions?, Despret (2016, p. 21) recalls the following statement from some ethologists: “We didn’t know what our bodies are capable of, we learned it from animals”. The quote takes us to Spinoza and his famous assertion that we do not know what a body can do. However, here an unthought dimension is added: that the knowledge of what bodies can do is provided by others, and in particular, by non-human others who, in their appearance, also allow us to learn about ourselves from another place, showing us our belonging to a being-with-others that dislocates any humanism or logic of the community anchored in ideals of similarity.

A becoming that is always with others, not to feel or understand precisely what the other(s) feel or think, but to embrace and create, in some way, the possibility of being inscribed in a relationship of proximity.

⁹ Haraway recovers this notion from anthropologist Strathern to understand the traces of relationality, that is, patterns where the participants are neither the whole nor the part (Haraway, 2003).

If we distinguish ourselves from others (individuals, species), it is because we exist-with, proximity is what enables distinction. And it is also this proximity that allows for forms of connection, relationship, and assemblages.

The human and non-human assemblages proposed by Tsing, like the multiple multi-species interactions emphasized by Haraway, point to a continuity between species –which breaks the subject/object distinction – where the way we have signified our corporealities, the relationship with other living beings (non-humans), and the planet is called into question. These notions are a bet on contributing to the generation of new knowledge and listening, fabrications that do not intend to say it all, but rather, to mark the impossibility of the universal, abandoning the limits of a physical and isolated body, and then overflowing into the encounter with others. Something of that seems to be present in *Inhalaciones territoriales*, where the collaboration between the human and the non-human can account for the coexistence and solidarity that allows for survival. These assemblages seem to emphasize the in-between, rather than each of the individuals or elements that compose it, thereby decentering the *anthropos* and blurring the pre-existing barriers between the human and the non-human. A kind of border, an ‘in-between place’ or in-betweenness (Anzaldúa, 2015), a liminal space that unites what had been separated and allows for questioning and re-imagining established delimitations.

Haraway’s invitation to “making kind as oddkin rather than, or at least in addition to” (Haraway, 2016a, p. 2) implies redefining the term kin beyond the familial or genealogical bond, to conceive it as “a lasting solidarity over time in layers of beings who come into the world in relation to one another, and who can and must demand things from one another” (Haraway and Segarra, 2020, p. 42. Our translation). Generating relatives –and not reproducing them – allows for the expansion of forms of relationality and affectivity to more-than-human universes; kinships can be human and non-human, organic and inorganic, living and non-living entities. Cantera’s work can be read in tune with the generation of rare relatives, as a way of composing with and becoming with other non-human entities, to which we must respond. In *Inhalaciones territoriales* forms of sympoietic kinships are revealed, from which the idea of human self-sufficiency is dismantled by a constitutive interdependence with other entities.

In times of extinction, pollution finds a certain twist in its negative connotation, both in Cantera’s work and in the readings of Haraway and Tsing, to pave the way for a more complex and fertile reinterpretation for our present. Contamination, precarity, and disturbance are notions that Tsing explores to seek other possibilities that move us away from the inherited anthropocentrism in our research: the thought of the *anthropos* detached from its environment and its others, positioning itself as superior to any other form of existence. Contamination is the contact with others from an ontological vulnerability that allows for the polyphonic configuration that shelters us with others. The emphasis on the situated thus favors the explicit articulation of scenarios that, far from being translatable to one another within

the coordinates of old universalism, urge us to weave and ally without a common measure and “without the promise of stability” (Tsing, 2015, p. 2). Precisely, it is fundamental to train oneself in the observation of the singular or the non-scalable, the diversity of meanings, and the multidirectional stories to guide a way of looking at and understanding reality that allows us to take on the complexity of the ecological issues we coexist with.

In *Inhalaciones territoriales*, it not only presents a critical and denunciatory stance on the exploitation and degradation of the planet, but it also promotes commitment to intervene in it. Against the defeatist positions, which express that there is nothing to be done in this devastated world, as well as the salvific ones that predict a solution, this work is an attempt to situate itself in the problem and narrate a story of multispecies assemblages and strange kinships that demand responses. A ‘cultivating responsibility’ – the ability to give answers – that entails “to venture off the beaten path to meet unexpected, non-natal kin, and to strike up conversations, to pose and respond to interesting questions, to propose together something unanticipated, to take up the unasked-for obligations of having met” (Haraway, 2016a, p. 130).

Becoming an experience with-others, a space for the formation of knowledge and ontological de-hierarchization: in shared affect, new post-anthropocentric scenarios of collaboration are inaugurated. As Tsing (2015, p. 19) points out, “neither tales of progress nor of ruin tell us how to think about collaborative survival”, both narratives have focused on the *anthropos*, which has prevented the recognition of fragmentary landscapes, multiple temporalities, and human and non-human assemblages. The forms of collaborative survival, symbiosis, or mutual benefit of interspecies life are what make life possible in a world in ruins. Indeterminacy and precarity (vulnerability) as the condition of our time shed light on vital dependence and the ability to forge human and non-human worlds.

Sympoietic landscapes are necessary for humans. It is there that we discover that nature is not a landscape or the backdrop of man, it is not something static, passive, and ahistorical, but the protagonist of our stories. At all scales, we need landscapes of common habitability, achieved through symbiosis and coordination. The multispecies resurgence is a work of multiple organisms without intentional coordination guidelines (with and without minds) that, by negotiating their differences, forge multispecies assemblages of habitability amidst disturbance. We need to assemble to stay alive.

Inhalaciones territoriales proposes a reflection on environmental collapse and the specific effects on air pollution levels. In this sense, the work invites us to become aware of the alarming levels of pollution in large cities for those of us who inhabit them. It also highlights collaborative modes of multi-species existence, that is, the importance of different modes of existence, organic and inorganic, that allow for life, human or otherwise, and therefore, survival. In recognizing the co-existence between the human body, air, fungi, and technologies, Cantera bets on a post-anthropocentric scenario traversed by capitalist devastation – and its promise of industrialization and

modernization. It is in that co-existence where collaborations, symbiosis, and coordination occur. Let's remember that for Tsing (2015, p. 28), "collaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination". Contamination, then, can be understood as a sign of capitalism in ruins, but also as a possibility for encounters and collaborations.

4. Thinking and Breathing-with

Inhalaciones territoriales invites reflection on environmental pollution in the major cities of the Global South, with a colonial past and that still maintain colonial relationships with the Global North. In this sense, Svampa (2019, p. 41, our translation) questions the narratives of the Anthropocene: "Can we talk about the human species in generic and monolithic terms, casting aside the historical responsibilities that allude to the role of social classes and imperialist nations?" The response that is attempted from the Latin American South, which incorporates environmentalist and feminist struggles, makes visible the forms of exploitation and neo-extractivism that also characterise the Anthropocene, something that seems to be noticed only when read in geopolitical terms. Cantera aims to traverse the landscape of colonised soils and polluted airs to highlight what happens there, between decolonial and environmental activism, in a task of territorial inhalation. The work is an invitation to think, to construct other narratives of survival, we could say, following Haraway, that it is about a "thinking with and from a deeply rooted feminist epistemological practice" (Haraway, 2020, p. 22, our translation), which transcends the *anthropos* to extend to the different modes of existence on the planet. Thinking-with is distinguished from thinking about or thinking in; it is "thinking in fruitful relation" (Haraway, 2020, p. 21, our translation).

At the same time, Cantera proposes a practice of 'breathing-with', in which respiration is not conceived as an individual act, but as a relational practice that unfolds in and with a damaged environment. Something that is evident in the way the artist refers to her installation as a "co-creation between her and the air" (Cantera, 2024). To breathe with entails acknowledging that respiration is always already a shared process, in which human bodies, polluted air, fungal filters, and technological devices participate in a continuous exchange of matter and affect. Breathing-with thus exposes the permeability of bodies and the impossibility of separating the biological from the political, as each inhalation incorporates the unevenly distributed effects of extractivist and neo-colonial economies inscribed in the atmosphere of the Global South. Moreover, breathing-with gestures toward a mode of coexistence grounded in sympoietic relations, where survival depends not on isolation or purification, but on learning to inhabit contamination through multispecies alliances. In this sense, breathing becomes both an aesthetic gesture and an ethical practice: a way of staying with the trouble by attuning to shared vulnerability and by cultivating forms of response-ability that emerge from breathing with others.

Faced with a narrative that urges the pursuit of individual salvation when the world trembles, we have come to believe, mistakenly, that problems are best addressed individually. This belief has confined our responses to modes of isolation and inaction, sustained by the illusion that technology alone might offer a solution to the collapse we are witnessing, as if we were not ourselves implicated in its causes. Yet, as Haraway (2016a, p. 100) reminds us, “no species, not even our own arrogant one pretending to be good individuals in so-called modern Western scripts, acts alone; assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors make history, the evolutionary kind and the other kinds too”. It is about recognising the assemblages of organic species with biotic actors, both human and non-human, of living beings as non-living, who mutually cooperate for collaborative survival. Both Haraway and Tsing work from a perspective that highlights the relationships maintained by human and non-human living beings, that is, a ‘relational ontology’, which opposes its ‘modern’ equivalent where the subject is seen as isolated in a specific time and episteme. Precisely, a relational ontology does not consider the existence of a unique and isolated thing, but rather a deep connection of co-existence (Arsenault, 2023, p. 8). In those scenarios marked by the seasonal pulses of different beings, the territory transforms into a shelter for metamorphosis, allowing for the consideration of other modes of habitability, of being-with-others traversed by contact and affectation, by scenarios of extinction “and of a deteriorated world that has modified our affections” (Despret, 2022, p. 94). Two contaminations traverse the *sympoietic* landscape: the contamination of the airs, of the lands ravaged by the *anthropos*, and the contamination as ontological contact, as a web that rhythms and protects, a polyphony that ensures survival.

Cantera’s installation, in the same vein, shows us that neither individuals nor species exist in isolation and independence: from the formation of a bioartifact – such as the filter backpack – *Inhalaciones territoriales* can be considered from a multispecies assemblage where human bodies and non-humans, living beings and devices, allow us to explore affective repertoires tinged with pessimism and disturbance, to immerse ourselves in new affective expressions that bet on multispecies alliances and solidarities for a common survival. Because it is no longer about observing from a distance, but about ‘letting oneself be affected’, about weaving bonds towards the worlds that matter to us and that we care for.

5. Conclusion

This work sets out to analyze Ana Laura Cantera’s installation *Inhalaciones territoriales* through posthuman readings, situating it within the framework of the Anthropocene and the Global South. It examines how practices of contemporary technological art mobilize multispecies assemblages, solidarities, and affective relations to problematize human exceptionalism and to explore alternative forms of habitability in contexts shaped by environmental devastation and neo-extractivist logics. Throughout the discussion, we show that the work not only makes visible the environmental crisis and the specific effects of atmospheric pollution

in large urban settings but also rehearses aesthetic modes of intervention that challenge naturalized narratives about the relationships between humans, technologies, and materialities, while opening new critical and methodological approaches grounded in situated, multispecies thought.

The analysis highlighted three main contributions: first, the articulation between digital and analog devices, mycelium and the human body, which reveals a posthuman aesthetics capable of destabilizing the separation between nature and culture; second, breathing as a shared and vulnerable practice, which becomes both metaphor and experience of collaborative survival; and third, the opening toward multispecies assemblages that exceed the human scale and allow us to imagine forms of habitability in ruins. These findings demonstrate that contemporary art, in its intersection with science and technology, can become a privileged field for experimenting with critical methodologies and expanding the horizons of aesthetics.

Cantera's work offers a situated perspective from the Global South, where the marks of colonialism and extractivism continue to shape territories and ways of living. In this sense, *Inhalaciones territoriales* does not merely denounce devastation, but invites us to think with others – human and non-human, organic and inorganic – in a key of hospitality and shared vulnerability. Contamination, far from being only a sign of destruction, is re-signified as contact and possibility of encounter, as a condition for the emergence of unexpected solidarities.

From an aesthetic standpoint, Cantera's work expands the horizon of technological art and bioart by displacing the emphasis from technical innovation toward relational and affective experimentation. The combination of digital and analog technologies, together with organic and inorganic materialities, does not respond to an instrumental or efficiency-driven logic, but rather functions as a critical device that interrogates technology from within. In this way, *Inhalaciones territoriales* proposes an aesthetics of exposure and vulnerability, in which breathing, walking, and becoming contaminated become political and poetic gestures capable of reconfiguring our sensibilities in the face of ecological crisis.

In times of collapse, when dominant narratives oscillate between defeatism and the promise of technological salvation, Cantera's proposal is inscribed in an open aesthetics that wagers on 'staying with the trouble', following Haraway's invitation. It is a practice that does not seek definitive solutions, but rather rehearses modes of collaborative survival, capable of generating affects, alliances, and odd kinships that expand the field of the possible.

This case study contributes, on the one hand, to the theoretical field by offering a situated articulation of the contributions of Haraway, Tsing, and Despret, showing how categories such as *sympoiesis*, becoming-with, and contaminated survivals acquire empirical density and analytical force when read through concrete artistic practices. On the other hand, it contributes to contemporary aesthetic discussions by demonstrating that art can be a laboratory for imagining more habitable futures, in which

interdependence and *sympoiesis* become principles of life. Cantera's installation reminds us that neither individuals nor species exist in isolation, and that only through multispecies assemblages and transdisciplinary solidarities can we think of habitability in ruins and open pathways toward a broader justice for the Earth.

Furthermore, this analysis advances posthuman debates by situating the Anthropocene within geopolitical and decolonial frameworks, making evident that its effects are not distributed homogeneously and that possibilities of survival are shaped by historical relations of domination. Within this perspective, contamination ceases to operate solely as a sign of loss or degradation and is instead re-signified as a condition of contact, interdependence, and the production of multispecies alliances.

In sum, *Inhalaciones territoriales* contributes to both the theoretical and aesthetic fields by functioning as a post-anthropocentric thought and sensibility. Through a multispecies assemblage that makes visible the interdependence among species, technologies, and territories, the work invites us to imagine and practice other narratives of survival in a world in ruins. Far from a contemplative distance, it proposes an ethics and aesthetics of involvement, in which allowing oneself to be affected becomes an indispensable condition for survival.

References

- Adler, J. and Martin, N. (2022) 'Artes tecnológicas contemporáneas: Tensiones teóricas, metodológicas e historiográficas en las fronteras del canon', *H-ART. Revista de historia, teoría y crítica de arte*, 12, pp. 15–31. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.25025/hart12.2022.02> (Accessed: 30 December 2025).
- Anzaldúa, G. (2015) *Luz en lo oscuro*. Buenos Aires: Hekht.
- Arsenault, L. M. (2023) 'Penser l'ontologie relationnelle chez Donna Haraway et Anna Tsing', *AnthropoCité*, 3, pp. 7–17.
- Barrios, S. (2016) *Laboratorios de Hongos. Cultivando Arte para el Futuro en la 32ª Bienal de São Paulo, Brasil*. Available at: <https://silviabarriosplasticeramista.wordpress.com/2016/10/12/laboratorios-de-hongos-un-futuro-en-el-que-los-objetos-artisticos-pueden-no-solo-ser-construidos-sino-tambien-cultivados-32-bienal-de-sao-paulo-brasil/> (Accessed: 30 December 2025).
- Berardi, F.B. (2018) *Breathing*. Chaos and Poetry. MIT Press.
- Cantera, A.L. (2015) *Co-creaciones híbridas. Horizontalidad y relaciones entre la naturaleza y el hombre, desde el arte, las nuevas tecnologías y el desarrollo sustentable*. Tesis Maestría en Tecnología y estética de las artes electrónicas. Universidad Tres de Febrero, Argentina.
- Cantera A.L. (2020) *Protocolo para construir y diseñar objetos cultivados mediante especies fúngicas*. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/42981429/Protocolo_de_Biofabricaci%C3%B3n_con_ (Accessed: 30 December 2025).
- Cantera, A.L. (2021) *Cómo narrar sobre mundos no humanos*. *Hipermedia Magazine*. Available at: <https://hypermediamagazine.com/dosieres-hm/conversando-con-artistas-latinoamericanas/ana-laura-cantera/> (Accessed: 30 December 2025).
- Cantera, A.L. (2024). *Inhalaciones territoriales*. Available at: <https://www.analauracantera.com.ar/inhalaciones#:~:text=Inhalaciones%20territoriales%20se%20basa%20en,particulado%20respirable%20de%20la%20atm%C3%B3sfera>. (Accessed: 30 December 2025).
- Crutzen, P.J., and E.F. Stoermer (2000) 'The 'Anthropocene'', *Global Change Newsletter*, 41 (May), pp. 17–18.

- Despret, V. (2016) *What would animals say if we asked the right questions?*, University of Minnesota Press.
- Despret, V. (2022) *Living as a bird*. Polity Press.
- Fischetti, N. (2023) 'Feminismo neomaterialista: metodología difractiva en Karen Barad', *Estudios Posthumanos*, 2(1) pp. 43–67.
- Giannuzzi, M. (2020) 'Anthropos und Mensch: Naturalismen der Nichtunterscheidung bei Tsing und Malabou', In: Bajohr, H. (ed.) *Der Anthropos im Anthropozän: Die Wiederkehr des Menschen im Moment seiner vermeintlich endgültigen Verabschiedung*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, pp. 153–170. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110668551-009> (Accessed: 30 December 2025).
- Gilbert, S. F. (2010) *Developmental Biology*. MA: Sprinkler.
- Ingold, I. (2016) 'Una mirada antropológica de la biología', *Apuntes de Investigación del CECYP*, 27, pp. 10–39.
- Haraway, D. (2003) *The companion species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Haraway, D. (2016a) *Staying with the trouble. Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.
- Haraway, D. (2016b) 'Companions in conversation (with Cary Wolfe)', In: *Manifestly Haraway*, University of Minnesota Press, pp. 201–296.
- Haraway, D. y Segarra, M. (2020) *El mundo que necesitamos. Donna Haraway dialoga con Marta Segarra*. Icaria.
- Margulis, L. y Sagan, D. (1996) *¿Qué es la vida?* Tusquets Editores.
- Matewcki, N. (2021) 'Inhalaciones territoriales: hacia una ecología de los cuerpos expuestos', *Revista Nómadas*, 54, pp. 45–59.
- Morton, T. (2013) *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Payrol Morán, M. (2022) 'Cuerpos permeables: microbioma, imaginación y existencia compartida', *Culture Machine*, 21. Available at: <https://culturemachine.net/vol-21-antropoficciones/cuerpos-permeables-microbioma-imaginacion-y-existencia-compartida-marilyn-payrol-moran/> (Accessed: 30 December 2025).
- Pérez, L. (2014) 'Acercarnos a la vida, alejarnos de los miedos', *Anfibia*. Available at: <https://www.revistaanfibia.com/acercarnos-a-la-vida-alejarnos-de-los-miedos/> (Accessed: 30 December 2025).
- Pérez, M.B. (2024) 'Respirar con el territorio: ecologías sensibles y afectos atmosféricos', *Revista Nómadas*, 60, pp. 71–84.
- Puig de la Bellacasa, Ma. (2017) *Matters of Care. Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*. University of Minnesota.
- Svampa, M. (2019) 'El Antropoceno como diagnóstico y paradigma. Lecturas globales desde el Sur', *Estudios. Utopía y praxis latinoamericana*, 24(84), pp. 33–54.
- Tsing, A.L. (2015) *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press.
- Tsing, A.L., Mathews, A. and Bubandt, N. (2019) 'Patchy Anthropocene: landscape structure, Multispecies History, and the Retooling of Anthropology: An Introduction', *Current Anthropology*, 60(20), pp. 186–197.

Gabi Balcarce
 Universidad de Buenos Aires (Argentina)
gabi.balcarce.78@gmail.com

Andrea Torrano
 National University of Córdoba (Argentina)
andrea.torrano@unc.edu.ar

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18640384