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Geographical landscapes / changing landscapes of geography

A geopoetic exploration of the Matinha vacant land, Lisbon.

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Our purpose in this communication is to present an exploration of the Matinha vacant land in Lisbon. Initially a sonic exploration, this endeavour would turn to the figure of the natural cyborg, an almost silent formation that thrives in the site, in the form of vegetal-technological hybrids.

We have explored the presence of these natural cyborgs through the creation of a geopoetic photographic and audio short novel on the Matinha site, where a gas factory operated since 1944. The factory was partially demolished in 2007, but some of the buildings remain, along with four gasometers. Since its demolition, the Matinha site has been closed to the public, but its fences and gates have been illegally opened at times. In the last ten years, the landscape of the Matinha site was slowly transformed by the appropriation of various agents: homeless people, graffiti artists, photographers, urban explorers, water, several animal and vegetation species. The greater part of such agents left easily recognisable traces in the landscape, or is indeed a part of it. Among these appropriations, some hybrid entities seem to have sprout: bindweeds entangled in mechanical ruins, Alamo tress growing in manholes, or fig trees thriving near tar roads. These natural cyborgs are now providing shelter to a number of living beings.

After a brief presentation of the short novel, we will discuss how this geopoetic approach allowed us to grasp and communicate certain processes of the Matinha site that escaped capture in previous studies done by social, cultural and biogeographers.

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