

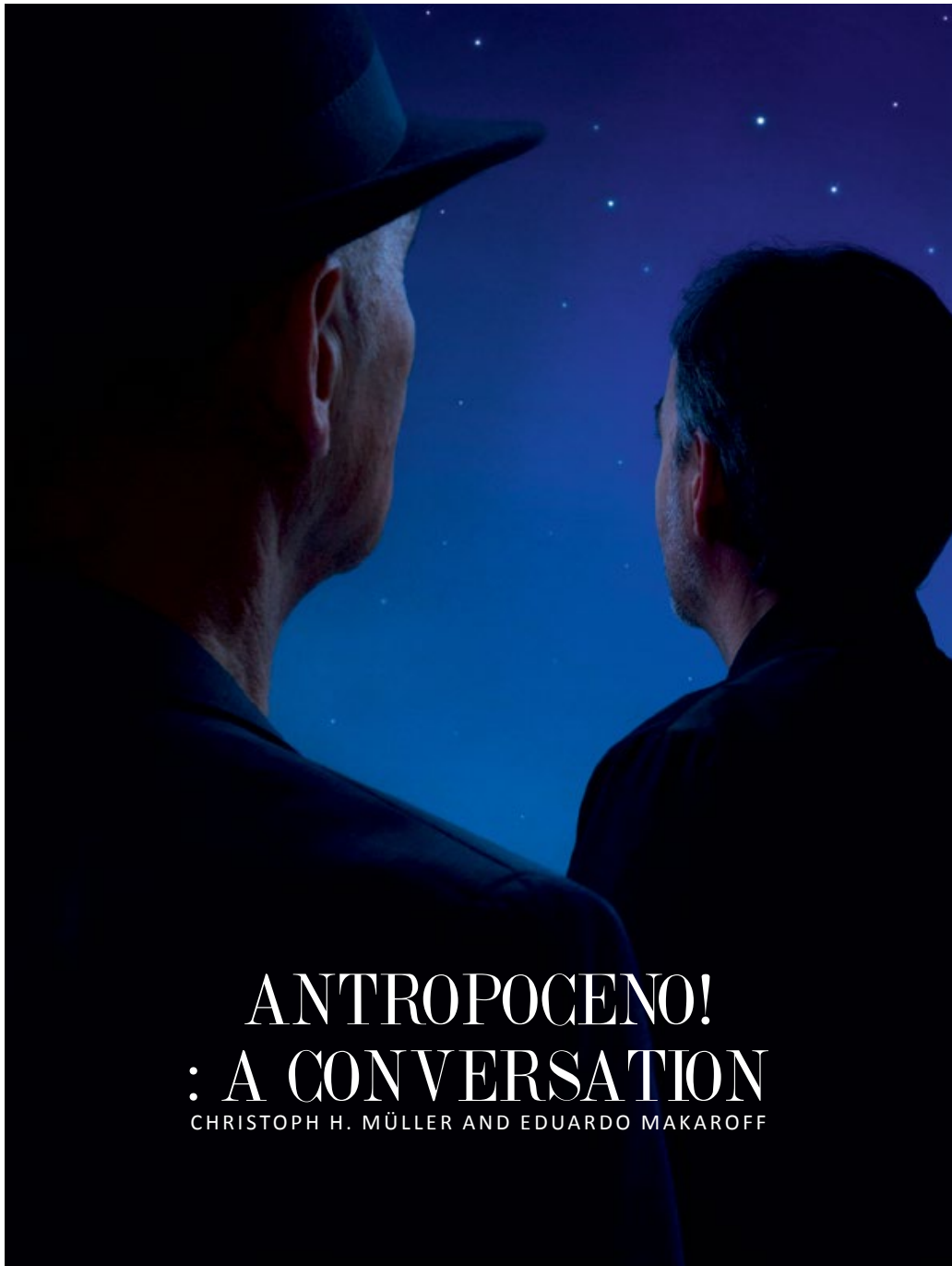
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ANTROPOCENO! : A CONVERSATION

CHRISTOPH H. MÜLLER AND EDUARDO MAKAROFF

Taken from a conversation between Müller & Makaroff from Gotan Project, this interview presents the ideological backdrop to their new project *Antropoceno!*, where music and science come together in an urgent call for action. In 1998, the Swiss and Argentinian musicians met in Paris, where they started creating music inspired by tango and intertwined with rhythms from all over the world. In their new project the merging of folkloric and electronic music still survives, entangled with the voices, languages and music of many other 'messengers' who collaborate in this comprehensively human project. The Anthropocene is a particular historical moment through which we are living: humans have taken over nature and created an imbalance which is destroying the soil, polluting the air and sea, and killing the biodiversity that surrounded us. We are the only mammal capable of inflicting such dangers but, at the same time, the only one who is able to change this. Antropoceno! is a hymn to the bright future that we must choose and fight for.

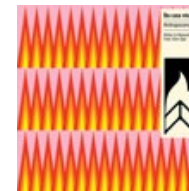
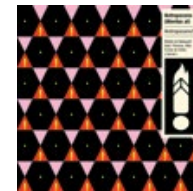
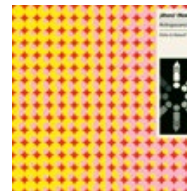
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Eduardo Makaroff: So, what is music to you, Christoph? I will give you half an hour to answer, no more.

Christoph Müller: Music is my life. It's important for Anthropocene because we use it as a weapon. It has a sort of power which we use to transmit in a creative, poetic or musical way the data that we have read or know regarding what's going on right now in the Anthropocene, the era of the humans.

EM: I agree with what you say. Music is part of life on earth, it is part of the universe. Physically and scientifically talking, music is made by waves that expand in the air. When these are regular and isochronous, as they are called, they create musical sounds. It is an activity as old as humanity itself. I believe this is one of the deepest connections between music and the earth, and in our project we try to influence people's awareness of this. As you say, I think that the majority of women and men on this earth aren't aware of the Anthropocene, but it is crucial to understand what is happening and how the human species is provoking such catastrophic changes. The most recent is the pandemic, which is part of the Anthropocene too. It isn't simply a coincidence that this infected us, it is fruit of the productive and expansive action of the human species over virgin places. Science

tells us that most epidemics come from animals we breed in captivity or intensive farming. We can't fight this through a vaccine, as this would counter only the effects: we must fight against the cause itself, which is the destruction of biodiversity.

CM: That is very true. And in case this virus came from a lab, then it is even more anthropogenic. I just want to add one thing to this Eduardo: as artists, we simply believe that everybody should start seeing what she or he can do on an individual level, and in order for this to happen, people must be aware of the fact they have to do something. When we became aware of it, we decided to do what we know best and that is music: we are no politicians or scientists, so we hope that through music we can at least try to change the vision in people's minds. It is important because humans have a tendency to put their head in the sand when something seems bad, just like small children covering their eyes. This simple reaction makes us believe that if we don't see the problem, it doesn't exist anymore. We cannot pretend we are able to provoke real change, but if we don't move it is even worse. So I really think that everyone has the potential to put a stone on the building of consciousness in their own way.

EM: Science is always our source of inspiration in this process. We want to make music that provokes emotions in others and in ourselves, this is always the first thing we look for. As the most known thing in the Anthropocene is climate change, we take this varied scientific knowledge and translate it into music. Many don't know that life on earth is 3.8 billion years old and we are currently living through its sixth extinction, as in the last 40 years 60% of animals and plants have disappeared. We are not predicting this: it is a fact that has already happened. Within this framework, rather than looking at the tragic side we should search for the optimism of hope, which we try to do in the most empathetic and humorous way particularly in one of our songs.

CM: We believe science is fundamental, of course. However, even if it gives us all the data, science is never 'the all-knowing truth', it is more of a work in progress. Technology can give us quick fixes, but in the end these will always be short-term solutions to a problem and more will appear. It's like a hydra: you cut one head off, three others will grow. For this reason, a mental shift has to happen in parallel with the scientific understanding of what is happening. We try to understand and communicate the data without simplifying too much, and through art we are able to fill those gaps where even science has no answers.

EM: I agree with you, art is another way of approaching and analysing reality, as an approximation of it. With art, in fact, we are not looking for the truth, we are looking for beauty. The true beauty, if you want. I think that with

poetry, art, music we can understand reality, and then transform it.

CM: Actually, if you think about it, many of the things we see in nature we consider as beauty, whilst for the animals or plants who employ them, they are functional. There is always a connection between beauty and function. We believe in the power of beauty to also have a connection to what is happening, which could be something like a change of mind or awareness. Beauty is a good device not to manipulate, but to attract and gain attention.

EM: Let me talk about our music though, because you and I started to experiment with tango music at first, particularly with our past musical group Gotan Project. In fact, for many years we were working with the material of tango, transforming it with electronics and technology. Tango is a musical genre native to the Río de la Plata, the natural border between Argentina and Uruguay. We have always been inspired by the folklore of Argentinian provinces and Latin American music more generally. Now with Anthropocene we continue to follow a musical line with us for a long time, always in the sonorities of tango, which has somewhat contributed to the whole Latin American music scene.

CM: That's true. What I always liked about tango and American music more generally, is that it is always a mix. It's born from the encounter of people brought over as slaves from Africa, European colonists and the indigenous peoples who lived on the land. Out of this forced meeting, all of the beautiful musical styles that you can find from the



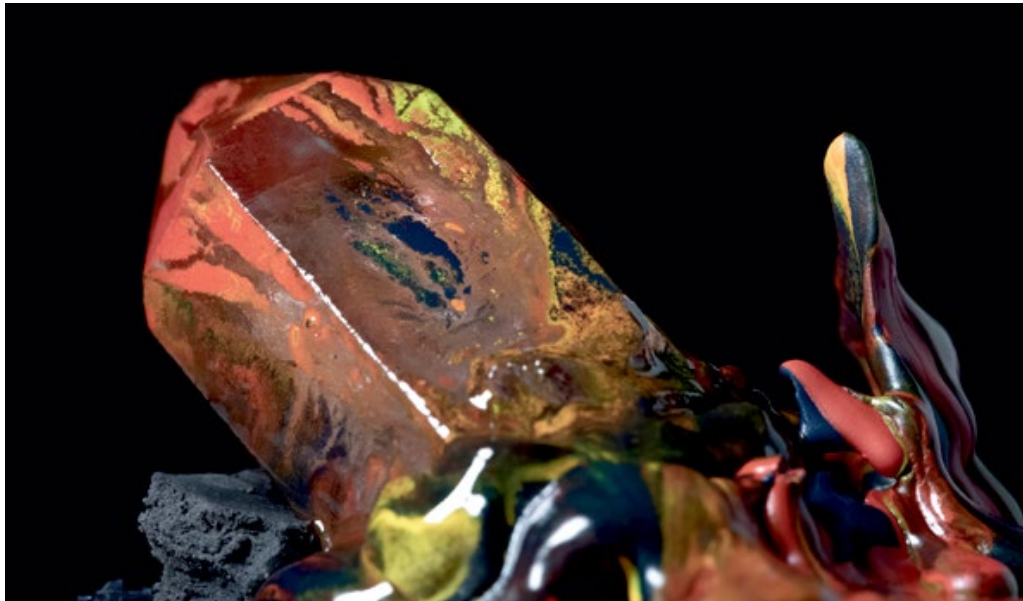
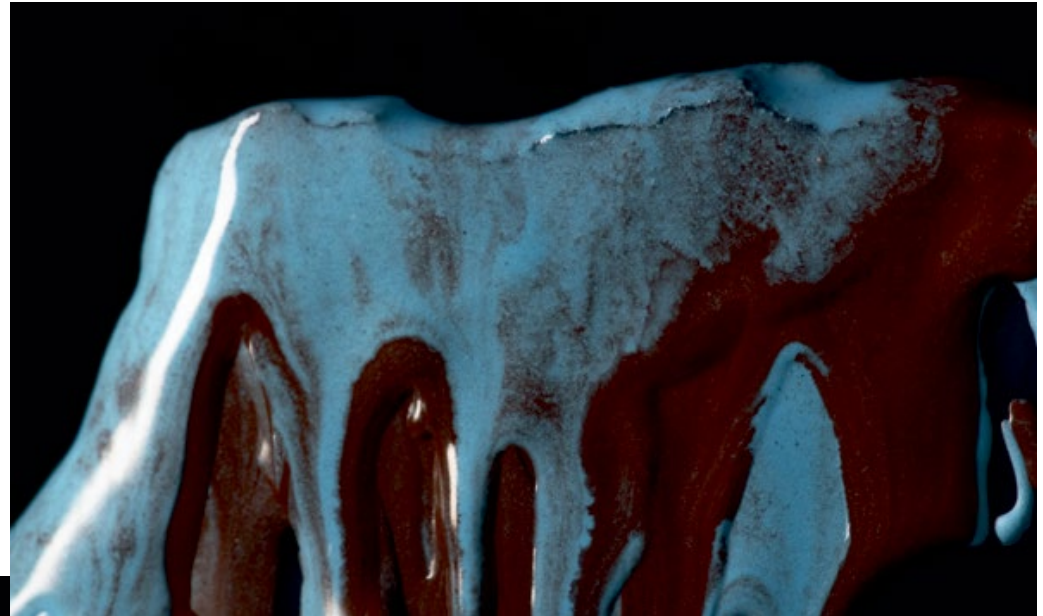
north to the south of America were created, the most known being probably jazz or bluegrass music. However, I think this is much richer in South and Central America, where you have so many diverse rhythms and styles. Tango is one of them. A lot of people might think of it as a very specific or indigenous music, but it is fundamentally an expression of this encounter. That's what I like about it: this music is universal, a melting pot in itself. It is a very interesting material to work with and, as I originally started with synthetic and electronic music, with no instruments, I was quickly attracted to the very contrary, which is roots music. It's similar when we talk about how technology can create or develop new things, but never forgetting the roots. That's the beauty of trying to make things work together, even though they may appear in conflict at the start. I'll be honest with you, sometimes it doesn't really work out, but when it does it's like when human beings work together: something bigger can come out of it.

EM: Exactly, every animal is a little system of symbiosis. But it even comes down to the single individual. You, for example, are not just you: you are you, along with millions and millions of bacteria that live with you. That is what scientists today call a 'biont', the being of a human or any other mammal which is made up of all the bacteria and little creatures that we have inside us living in cooperation. This is why the other law of the jungle is cooperation.

CM: Yes, we are a sort of ecosystem ourselves.

EM: Speaking of humans, we are part of nature but we are very special animals. Our species has adapted to all sorts of climate: from the polar cold, to the warmth of the desert, to the forests or the mountains, moved by a very adventurous spirit which has even allowed us to reach outer space and the depths of the ocean. We have an intelligence which is able to deeply transform nature, at the risk of destroying not simply the earth, but the only ecosystem within which life is possible. We may disappear along with many other mammals, just like the dinosaurs 66 million years ago after the fifth extinction, but the earth will keep living: we are part of this system.

CM: Yes, in the last hundreds of years, humankind has sort of alienated itself from nature. There are still people living in the virgin forests in India or Brazil, but most of us now live in cities, detached from nature. I believe the problem is that nature has no rights in the eyes of humans, it is only a source that provides oxygen, water, food... everything we need to survive. Nonetheless, it has no rights: it only has duties. Even a company, which is just a human invention, has rights and laws. Nature, on the contrary, has nothing: no rights, nobody to speak or defend it. It makes sense to say that nature should have rights so people can start defending it on a political basis... we cannot just take and take. There has to be a more integrated and balanced connection, and as artists I believe our work always has this political side somehow.



EM: Everything is political. I think change also has to be political. We must learn to use politics in the noble way in which humans organise and relate to each other. But I agree with you Christoph, it is quite complicated because if you don't mind about politics, then politics will come to you, and even if you say you don't care about politics, that is still political. I think that in music, many more artists are going to deal with the problems of our times. I find it quite strange that everybody, not just artists, is not talking about this crisis and the problem of the Anthropocene. What catastrophe are we waiting for now? I find it unconceivable that we are not on the streets, uniting rather than competing, to solve a problem that involves the whole of humanity. For women, men, homosexuals, rich, poor, young, old, African, Chinese, European... all the world is implicated in this, it is the general human interest.

CM: And that's the true strength of our species: working together is what made the success of homo sapiens. People not knowing each other, but still working together, is part of our evolutionary success.

EM: Yes, what they call 'mutual aid'.

CM: And it is important to consider that we have within us the competition and the fight, but also the mutual aid. We have both and can choose what we want to do. Especially during a pandemic, many have been working together at a

real distance. Yet, in our project Anthropocene for instance, we still try to be collaborative and open to different languages, different people, different cultures.

EM: That's what we do with our music after all, or at least we try our best. But we cannot think that humanity is destroying everything and just drown in our tears. On the contrary, we have to fight in some way, even though we don't know who is going to win, living our life in the hope of betterment. Overall, I believe the future is bright.

CM: I think I will disagree, yes, allow me to disagree!

EM: Of course, please do.

CM: I think the big difference between the past and the future is that there is one past, only one. The future, on the other hand... there is no future, there are only futures. A bright future is definitely possible but we cannot be sure yet: every decision we make, individually and socially, will define this future. It's not possible to go to the future, because this will be what we make out of it.

EM: That is true, one cannot live without optimism and hope. Without hope, the things that happen around us are not enjoyable at all, and that's why we have to fight against bad things in an amusing way. It is in our nature, as human beings, to attempt to make the best of all things.