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Desisto – o que não vejo imagino

Nuno Sousa Vieira

15.05.26 – 12.09.26

Opening 15.05.26, 18h – 21h

In 1913, just before Europe descended into catastrophe, Kazimir Malevich and the Russian Futurists staged an opera called *Victory Over the Sun*. The title itself felt prophetic. The sun, ancient symbol of coherence, continuity, reason, and divine order, was captured and destroyed. Language fractured. Time destabilized. Meaning disintegrated. What remained were fragments, sounds, rhythms, geometric forms, and the ecstatic intoxication of rupture.

Looking backward, the work now appears uncannily prophetic. The Futurists anticipated both the exhilaration and the terror of technological acceleration. They sensed the collapse of inherited symbolic worlds before the twentieth century fully enacted it through war, industrialization, propaganda, mechanization, and mass destruction.

Yet perhaps even they could not foresee our present condition.

Today we no longer suffer primarily from scarcity of representation. We suffer from its excess.

We are drowning in images, explanations, reactions, simulations, notifications, generated content, algorithmic certainty, and continuous exposure. Every silence is immediately filled. Every ambiguity is rapidly converted into commentary. Every emotional tremor becomes content before it can mature into experience. The psyche is given less and less time to metabolize reality.

In such a world, abstraction may no longer be merely an artistic gesture. It may be a psychological and political necessity.

This is why the recent exhibition by Nuno Sousa Vieira feels so timely. His work revisits the historical avant garde not nostalgically but diagnostically. Abstraction here no longer functions as escape from reality but as protection against hyperreality. Against what the exhibition describes as the excess of “true constructed reality.”

That phrase deserves careful attention.

Constructed reality has become so totalizing that it increasingly abolishes the intervals necessary for psychic life. Everything must be visible, explicit, optimized, categorized, measurable, and immediately interpretable. Opacity itself begins to feel suspicious. Yet human beings do not psychologically develop through total illumination.

Psychic life requires shadow.

Desire requires absence.

Music requires silence.

Without intervals there can be no resonance.

The ineffable dimension of music emerges precisely here. Music does not communicate primarily through direct statement. It moves through rhythm, suspension, return, timing, tension, spacing, and silence. Meaning arises not only from the note itself but from the breath between notes. Music neither fully states nor fully conceals. It hints.

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And perhaps this is what contemporary culture increasingly struggles to tolerate.

The psychoanalytic tradition has long understood that the unconscious cannot emerge in conditions of total saturation. The psyche requires spaces where thought remains unfinished, where meanings are not immediately collapsed into certainty. Wilfred Bion called for the capacity to remain with uncertainty without compulsively rushing toward premature explanation. Donald Winnicott described the transitional space where imagination and symbolic life can emerge. Christopher Bollas spoke of the unthought known, those dimensions of experience that shape us before language can fully organize them.

Today those spaces are increasingly endangered.

Artificial intelligence intensifies this dilemma. AI does not merely generate information. It accelerates representational density itself. It fills gaps instantly. It transforms latency into output with unprecedented speed. What once required waiting, frustration, reverie, uncertainty, or internal symbolic work now risks becoming immediately externalized and endlessly reproducible.

But psychic life cannot survive permanent immediacy.

The human nervous system requires pauses, incompleteness, and symbolic breathing room. Without them we lose not only reflection but depth itself. Experience becomes flattened into endless stimulation. We no longer metabolize reality. We consume it.

This is where abstraction re-enters not as aesthetic elitism but as resistance.

Abstract art refuses compulsory legibility. It interrupts the demand that everything become instantly consumable. It restores the right not to fully signify. In doing so, abstraction protects the unconscious from colonization by hyperrepresentation.

One of Nuno Sousa Vieira's pieces in the exhibition, *The Narrator (Declamador - O Artista Sombra)*, embodies this tension with extraordinary force. The sculpture has lost its right arm. The severed arm lies beside the figure while the narrator continues through the left arm alone. The artist himself is left handed. The image immediately evokes histories of normalization and violence that many people still carry in their bodies. For generations, left handed children across multiple cultures were disciplined, corrected, shamed, and even physically struck in schools for writing with the "wrong" hand. The proper hand was enforced not merely practically but morally.

The symbolism here feels profound.

Historically, the right hand has been associated with order, legitimacy, administration, authority, rationality, and control. The left hand became associated with awkwardness, deviation, irrationality, imagination, embodiment, and danger. The left hand carries a buried political unconscious.

And in Portugal, with its memories of dictatorship, censorship, Catholic discipline, and authoritarian schooling, the image acquires even greater weight.

Yet *The Narrator (Declamador - O Artista Sombra)* is not simply a sculpture about mutilation. It is about persistence.

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The narrator has lost the dominant arm.
Yet narration continues.

Perhaps even more truthfully than before.

The left hand has long symbolized what exceeds official order:
intuition,
art,
the unconscious,
the poetic,
embodied imagination,
dissidence,
ambiguity,
symbolic freedom.

Authoritarian systems fear precisely these qualities.

Totalitarianism fears ambiguity because ambiguity cannot be fully controlled. It fears opacity because opacity resists surveillance. It fears abstraction because abstraction escapes compulsory legibility. It fears silence because silence allows thought to gather outside ideological capture.

Everything in authoritarian systems pushes toward simplification, visibility, certainty, categorization, and immediate alignment.

In that sense, the triumph of the left hand becomes more than political affiliation.
It becomes a defense of psychic complexity itself.

The left fist also carries the memory of labor movements, anti-fascist resistance, solidarity, and refusal. But in *The Narrator* (*Declamador - O Artista Sombra*) the left hand is not triumphant in a simplistic sense. It feels adaptive, wounded, surviving after symbolic amputation.

The detached right arm lying beside the sculpture feels hauntingly contemporary. One could almost read it as the severed limb of technocratic rationality itself, disconnected from eros, imagination, reverie, vulnerability, and symbolic depth.

And perhaps this returns us again to Malevich and the death of the sun.

When symbolic structures collapse, societies often oscillate between two poles:
rigid authoritarian certainty,
or creative symbolic reconfiguration.

Our era increasingly pressures us toward the first.
Toward compulsive explanation.
Toward endless representation.
Toward hypervisibility.
Toward ideological simplification.
Toward machine generated certainty.

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But art continues to defend the second possibility.

This is where awe becomes increasingly important.

The work of Dacher Keltner suggests that awe alters the ordinary structure of perception. Awe interrupts habitual self organization and opens the mind toward something larger than immediate utility or control. Under conditions of awe, time slows. Attention widens. The self becomes less rigidly defended. One feels both smaller and more connected simultaneously.

Awe restores scale.

And scale matters psychologically.

Much of contemporary life compresses human experience into constant reaction and narrow attention. Awe interrupts this compression. It allows us to inhabit mystery without immediately resolving it. It restores permeability between self and world.

Perhaps this is the deeper role of art now.

Not to provide more information.

Not to clarify ideology.

Not to accelerate stimulation.

But to restore symbolic breathing room.

To create intervals where psychic life can reconstitute itself.

To defend ambiguity against totalization.

To preserve silence against saturation.

To allow imagination to emerge where certainty recedes.

The Futurists once dreamed of destroying the sun. Today we may need something different. Not a return to rigid metaphysical certainty, but the recovery of symbolic intervals. The restoration of silence, abstraction, reverie, awe, and incompleteness.

Not every silence must be filled.

Not every image must resolve.

Not every uncertainty is a failure.

Some spaces are what allow us to remain human.

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Eda Arduman, MA. Clinical Psychologist