

André Gonçalves
UNTITLED #06
August 17 to September 13
Fábrica Features Lisboa

Untitled #06

150 drawings, numbered and signed serie
*Microphone, envelope follower, arduino, servo motor, hacked turntable, indian ink pen, canson paper
TV set, DVD player, loop video*

Hacked turntables: the world is still spinning at 33 RPMs

Luís Silva

André Gonçalves (1979) is the opposite of a specialist, moving himself perfectly across an artistic field defined by the polymorphic and transdisciplinary features of the works stemming from it. The artistic practice commonly known as new media is the locus of reconfiguration of the empiric experience according to a digital logic, allowing everything to be processed in terms of zeros and ones, as information, and from there on into being reworked in an almost demiurgic way. Different sensory modalities, such as sight and audition, for the most part thought of as being ontologically different, and their corresponding artistic practices, visual arts and music, are blended together, fused, giving rise to a myriad of creative possibilities, either closer to the visual, musical or performative domains. It is in this endless possibility of reconfiguring all creative materials through the use of technology, not only as a tool but also, and primarily, as a medium, that we can place not only André Gonçalves's work, but his own persona, which can be seen as the archetype of the digital artist, multitalented and forever separated from the traditional (and ideological) conventions that define and divide the fields of artistic creation.

Recurring both to the digital conversion of contemporary experience and to the transdisciplinary aspect of new media art when thinking of André Gonçalves's work is not enough. Other phenomena, central to the debate around contemporary culture, are not only useful, but necessary in order to achieve a clear understanding of his body of work and of the project now being presented, Untitled #06.

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Untitled #06 is part of a larger series, simply named Untitled Series, consisting in, according to the artist, the creation of micro-environments, computer controlled devices that explore several physical phenomena related to the act of hearing.

These sound installations explore such physical phenomena through their sonic potential, connecting them to visual components that translate or interact with them. Untitled #06 is a device that converts analogical information, sound, into digital information and then back into analogical information again, but this time in a different output, a visual one. In this process Gonçalves uses two legendary audio instruments, the turntable and the microphone, the first being customized (hacked, to be more accurate) so it can register the data input coming from the later. Instead of holding the needle while reading sound from a vinyl disc, the turntable arm is attached to a motor servo that moves according to the impulses coming from an Arduino board that digitizes, handles and processes data coming from sound captured by the microphone. One Indian ink pen is attached where the needle used to be and draws in real-time the audio events taking place where the piece is installed. The circular drawings thus obtained can be seen as histograms of the audio activity of the installation space during a given moment in time. The present version of Untitled #06 relates directly to the artist's working space, his studio. The records now occupying the walls of the exhibition space document, on a daily basis, André Gonçalves's work; the drawings are full and dark when he is playing music, or empty and neutral when the activity he is carrying is silent and requires concentration.

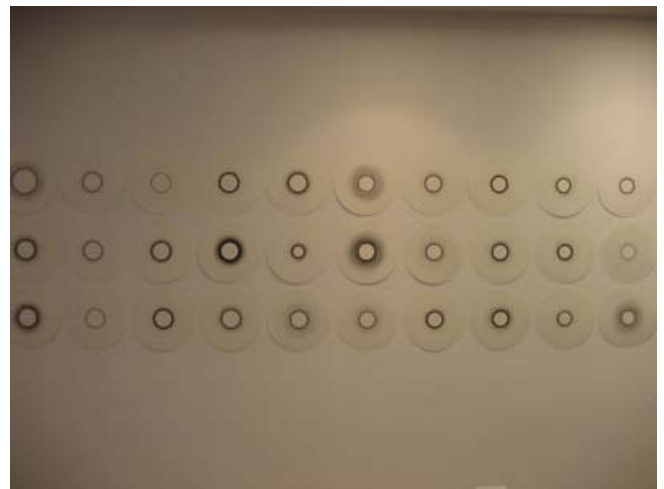
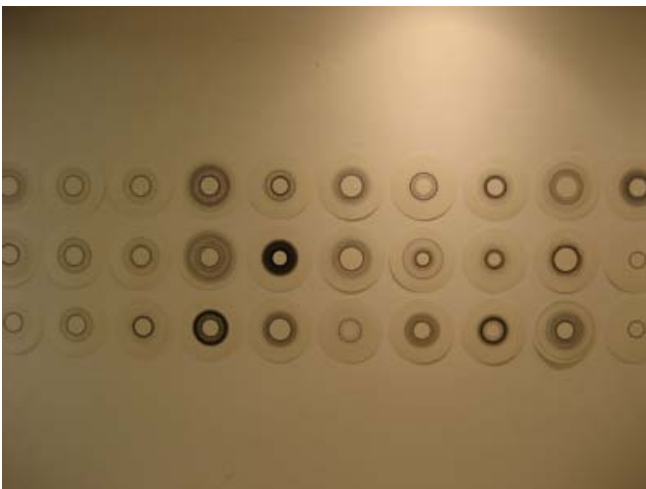
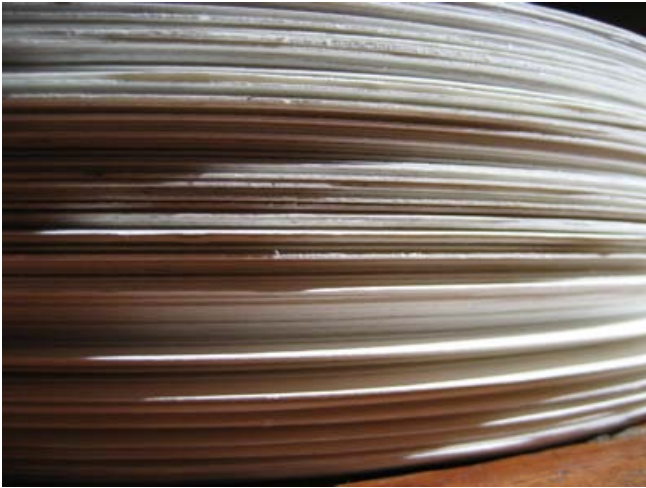
Independently of the shape it may assume, usually related to the exhibition space, Untitled #06 gains in relevance when contextualized, and two central aspects of that subdivision of contemporary culture often termed as digital culture are necessary when discussing this piece. They are the DIY ethics (and aesthetics) and the modding sub-culture, a slang expression deriving from the words modify and modification and that refers to an unauthorized modification of hardware or software to perform an activity not intended by those that created the equipment and that have legal rights over it.

The DIY approach is, according to Wikipedia (and the choice of an encyclopaedia collectively created by millions of online users isn't without a purpose here), "a term that focus on people creating things for themselves without the aid of paid professionals. Many DIY subcultures explicitly critique consumer culture, which emphasizes that the solution to our needs is to purchase things, and instead encourage people to take technologies into their own hands". Untitled #06 is such a clear example, and reflex, of the DIY culture. The piece reflects nothing but André Gonçalves's curiosity about exploring, testing, defining creative/artistic uses for technological equipment and doing it only through his own means and abilities, without any kind of external help.

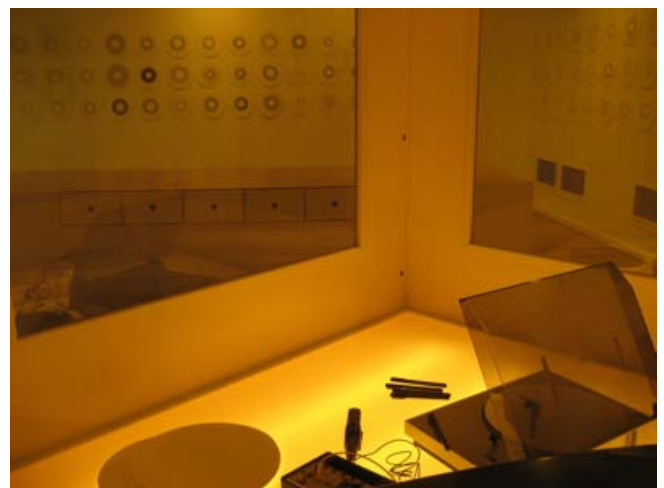
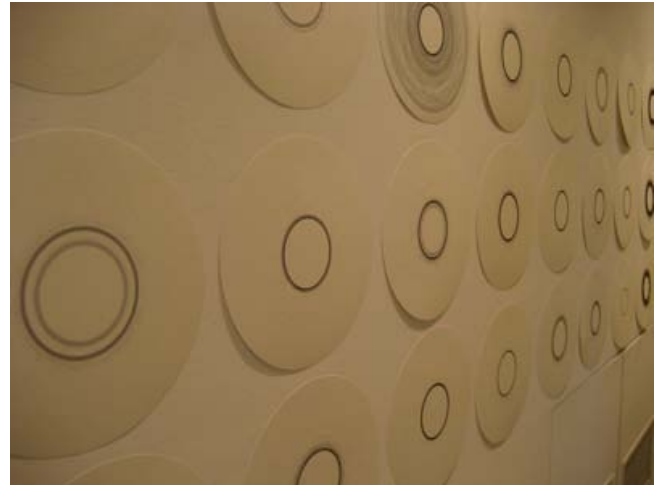
If the piece now on view is, on one side the result of the artist's work and curiosity, of the will to test his own knowledge and the possibilities it allows, in the good old DIY style, it is, on the other side, the result of customizing a massified artefact, a commodified object coming from a consumerist culture. The turntable, whose original function of playing music was completely set aside, gained a new and idiosyncratic use, one that reflects and is the result of André Gonçalves's artistic practice. The modding approach, not seldom defined as "you only own what you can modify", is the reflection of a tendency that emphasizes the meaningful and critical use of technology. More than passive consumers, for whom the uses of technological equipment are defined a priori, users want to be proactive in the way they interact with the technology they possess, creating and developing new personal uses for technological materials

The turntable of Untitled #06 is precisely an example of what we just stated, a piece of equipment that was transformed and by that process gained a new function, meaningful to its owner. However, this isn't a regular modding, like running Linux on an Xbox, for instance. This is not even a piece of software or hardware. This is obsolete, analogical equipment that was set aside and replaced when the world went gradually digital. Equipment with no place to call its own in our contemporary world, except for some small groups of enthusiasts. But this out-of-date turntable and its analogical sound were recycled and transformed into an instrument that analogically registers digital information. Ironical, isn't it? A cyborg, prosthetic turntable, modified and covered with digital devices, programmed and programmable in order to survive. A turntable now inside a Plexiglas mausoleum, recording the daily activity of the space surrounding it, the record of a reality it doesn't belong to anymore, but in which it can still find a place to call its own.

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