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SPIRALS OF ENUNCIATION. TOWARDS A DEMOCRACY OF THE LIVING¹

- This song is entitled *Presage of the Birds*,² and it is composed and sung by Luzmila Carpio, Quechua singer and translator of Birds.

And some words by Marielle Macé:

- Listen to what the bird tells you.
- Because he talks to me?
- No, he does not speak, much less to you; no more than trees or stones address you their convictions (“Colonizers of the world, we would like everything to speak to us”).³ Actually, it might not even

¹ This intervention is constructed as a dialogue between the two authors. As the discussion progresses, the reference to the speaker is lost and both voices meld into one.

² Carpio, Luzmila. (1997). *El Presagio de los Pájaros*. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIS4nkTYRyI>.

³ Marker, Chris and Resnais, Alain. (1953). *Status Also Die* (film).

sing; it is us who suspect the birds of singing; it is something else for them.

- Then what?

- Then listen to what this bird says to you, which non-speaks and non-sings, but which thinks no less, which conjugates, and which falls.⁴



[Fig. 1]. Luzmila Carpio, *Presage of the Birds*, 1997. Photo: Fernando Cuellar.

Our talk today is entitled *Spirals of Enunciation. Towards a Democracy of the Living*. We would like to discuss with you the emergence of what today could be called a Biocracy, not in the traditional sense of the term, that is, the reign of an “aristocracy of doctors”, but rather a democracy where the *bios*—the living—would replace the *demos* as a constituent power. A *more-than-human* democracy, a democracy extended to all

⁴ Macé, Marielle. (2019). Lectures at the Maison de la Poésie. *Poésie et anthropologie élargie*. Paris. Our translation.

living beings, animals, plants, and all those who, in the symbolic order, have been spurned by the Moderns, both in the literal sense (the so-called sixth mass extinction) and in the figurative sense.

The purpose of this two-day symposium is to focus on Indigenous epistemologies, their links to globalized artistic practices, and the recent inclusion of “Indigenous thought” in the global art world. Firstly, with the aim of defining what we are perhaps meant to understand by “Indigenous thought”, I think we all have in mind anthropologist Philippe Descola’s “square”. In his work *Beyond Nature and Culture*,⁵ he identified four ontologies that currently structure both the field of contemporary anthropology and the very definition of what we mean by “Indigenous thought”. In this view, “Indigenous thought” is seen as equivalent to “non-naturalist ontologies” and, as such, it allows us to group perspectives and knowledges from radically different peoples under an umbrella term.

- To which we would reply that it is not up to anthropologists to determine who is Indigenous and who is not! Indigenous epistemologies refers to a structured political movement in which four hundred million Indigenous people in the world self-identify and recognize themselves as Indigenous. This self-identification certainly has no natural basis (it is not a question of finding an “essential link” between Pygmies and Aymaras), but rather it structures a community of political thought in the global context of capitalist predation, extractivism and neo-extractivism, deforestation, and territorial rights issues. Moreover, it reveals the potential persistence of the many worlds in the world, of cultures in all their diversity. The principle adopted in a 1983 UN report recognized

⁵ Descola, Philippe. ([2005] 2013). *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

“the right of Indigenous peoples to define for themselves who is, and what is, Indigenous”.⁶ That is to say, a principle of self-identification, self-designation, despite the paradoxes that this can pose when we are all living in complex communities.⁷

- Sure. Nevertheless, Descola’s categories may still be useful when many formerly colonized peoples, particularly in French-speaking areas of influence, do not want to retain the label of “Indigenous” that non-native oppressors used during colonization. Some even see in the use of the category “Indigenous” the effects of a certain domination of Latin America in the so-called Indigenous arena. Indeed, most Francophone peoples prefer to speak of “local knowledge”.⁸

So, for the time being we would like to keep as our object of analysis “non-naturalist cosmologies” (or “relational ontologies” as Arturo Escobar has called them⁹), on the one hand, and the “Indigenous political agenda”, on the other. The latter, as you mentioned previously, consists mainly of the struggle against capitalist extraction and neo-extractivism, as well as the defence of biodiversity, through exciting constitutive and democratic transformation processes. Of particular interest to us today, the Indigenous political agenda takes into account the real conditions for the emergence of a *Rights of Nature*, three decades after early attempts to institute them by American environmental advocate Christopher

⁶ Martínez Cobo, José R. (1983). Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations. Retrieved from: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/MCS_xxi_xxii_e.pdf.

⁷ Roué, Marie. (2012). Histoire et épistémologie des savoirs locaux et autochtones. De la tradition à la mode, *Revue d'ethnoécologie*, (1): 13.

⁸ Roué, Histoire et épistémologie, 12.

⁹ Escobar, Arturo. (2018). *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Stone, who published *Should Trees Have Standing?* in 1972, a work which, however, remained on a purely theoretical level.¹⁰

Actual Non-Western Democracies

- From this point of view, and mainly in South America, constituent processes and ecological constitutions have emerged. The Ecuadorian and Bolivian Constitutions (in 2008 and 2009, respectively) incorporated the Andean notion of *buen vivir* (*sumak kawsay*) in Ecuador and the notion of *bien vivir* (good living, *suma qamaña*, in quechua) into the Bolivian Constitution, guaranteeing, on the one hand, the plurinationality of the state and, on the other, rights for Pachamama (Motherland), as well as enforceable rights against ecological damage.¹¹

These bioconstitutions have distinguished themselves by their great legal sophistication and have constituted themselves as the vanguard of an ecological and pluriversal constitutional utopia. Nevertheless, in practice, with the return of the right wing regimes that have often undermined them, but also with the developmentalist and neo-extractivist and agricultural policies on which the social redistribution effort was based (in Bolivia, for example), these bioconstitutions have shown their ambivalence in giving way to real ecological advances. Before the coup that toppled him in November 2019, Evo Morales had been criticized by Indigenous and ecologist sectors for his policy towards the Amazonian fires. And despite the recognition of Indigenous

¹⁰ Stone, Christopher. ([1972] 2010). *Should Trees Have Standing? Law, Morality, and the Environment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹¹ For a comparative approach to the limits of the Andean Bioconstitutions, see Cletus, Gregor Barié. (2014). Nuevas narrativas constitucionales en Bolivia y Ecuador: el buen vivir y los derechos de la naturaleza. *Latinoamérica. Revista de estudios Latinoamericanos*, (59), 9-40. Retrieved from http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1665-85742014000200002&lng=es&tlng=es.

autonomous states, the conceptual framework of these bioconstitutions remains ultimately centralist and vertical, such that the recognition of communalism, founded on the *ayllu* (a type of community in Bolivia that lives and works in a commons on a collective territory), has remained subservient to the verticality of the modern Nation-State, even if the latter has been nominally pluralized. Here, reference should be made to the invaluable work of Aymara intellectuals and academic debates on *ayllu* form and State form, led by Pablo Mamani,¹² Simon Yampara,¹³ Julieta Paredes,¹⁴ and Taller de Historia Oral Andina¹⁵, among others.

In this respect, the Bolivian filmmaker Jorge Sanjinés—in a visionary gesture—visibilized these ghost nations to the broader nation in his film *The Clandestine Nation* (1989). In this film, he sought to translate cinematographically, through a cinematographic grammar, the very form of collective organization of the community that characterizes the *ayllu*. He was able to build a type of visual grammar that restores pride of place to collective agency and not just to individuals. His last film made with the Ukamau Group,¹⁶ *The Clandestine Nation*, develops an acting

¹² Mamani Ramirez, Pablo. (2006). Territory and Structures of Collective Action: Neighborhood Micro-Governments. *Ephemeria, Theory & Politics in Organization*, 6 (3): 276-286, translated by Miguel Imas. Retrieved from: http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/6-3mamaniramirez_0.pdf.

¹³ Yampara, Simon. (2017). The *ayllu* and territoriality in the Andes, translated by Sue Iamamoto. *Alternautas, (Re)Searching Development: The Abya Yala Chapter*. Retrieved from: <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2017/5/22/the-ayllu-and-territoriality-in-the-andes>.

¹⁴ Comunidad Mujeres Creando Comunidad, Paredes, Julieta and Guzmán A., Adriana (2014). *El tejido de la rebeldía ¿Que es el feminismo comunitario?* La Paz, Bolivia: Mujeres Creando Comunidad.

¹⁵ Taller de Historia Oral Andina. (1995). *Ayllu: pasado y futuro de los pueblos originarios*. La Paz, Bolivia: Taller de Historia Oral Andina: Aruwiwiri. Cusicanqui, Silvia Rivera; Conde, Ramón; Santos, Felipe; Universidad Mayor de San Andrés. Taller de Historia Oral Andina (1992). *Ayllus y proyectos de desarrollo en el norte de Potosí*. La Paz: Ediciones Aruwiwiri.

¹⁶ *Ukamau* means “it’s like that” in Aymara.

theory of the “Integral Shot Sequence” (*plano secuencia integral*), a narrative device based on a cyclical conception of time inspired by Andean cosmogonies.¹⁷ Long, stretched-out sequence shots between skies and clouds in which the filmmaker restores the separation between individual and community.

Green Theory and Indigenous Futurity

- What is interesting, to go back to the political and theoretical field before going on to the art field, is that we have been conceptualizing a form of convergence between Indigenous activism, Global South environmentalism, practices of Earth jurisprudence, and certain currents of, let’s say, “green theories” in Europe for several decades now.

In Europe, from Michel Serres’ *Natural Contract*¹⁸ and *The Parliament of Things*¹⁹ to the idea of an “extended republic of environments and ecosystems” defended by Bruno Latour, it seems that, because of the current environmental emergency, non-naturalist cosmologies are more broadly emerging from their longstanding obliteration by Modernity. Many proposals for transforming democratic deliberation and participation processes have been invoked and argued from Europe. Western artistic practices, from poetry to theatre, from visual arts to action research, have consistently defended non-naturalistic ways of being and doing.

¹⁷ Sanjiines, Jorge and the Ukamau Group ([1979] 1989). *Theory and Practice of a Cinema with the People*. Translated by R. Schaaf. Willimantic: Curbstone Press.

¹⁸ Serres, Michel. ([1990] 1995). *The Natural Contract*. Translated by Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

¹⁹ Proposed by Bruno Latour in *We Have Never Been Modern*, a 1991 book by Latour originally published in French as *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes: Essai d’anthropologie symétrique* (English translation, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

As Achille Mbembe has shown in his recent work, late capitalism may in itself be seen as a reinvention of animism.²⁰ Objects function as virtual transformations of ourselves in relation to them. In this sense, desire in late-capitalism is largely defined by the desire of subjects to become animist objects who have life in that transformation of the self in, and through, their relation to animistic commodities. The mobile phone, the computer, the virtual world, social media personae, identification with various cultural objects—all animate in themselves—function as a lure of liberation from the alienation of contemporary life (in which there is no life for the human herself) through the transformative power of the object-object relation.

In a somewhat less controversial approach, Bruno Latour's work can also be seen as a return to animism on the Western theoretical front, particularly when he maintains in *We Never Have Been Modern* that the notion of modern people who cleanly separate the world of subjects and objects might have been an illusion from the very start. The emergence and holism of James Lovelock's *Gaia hypothesis*²¹ is also, at the very minimum, non-naturalistic, and we could cite numerous examples in most contemporary scientific fields, from vegetal neurobiology to biosemiotics (which investigates the proto-language of plants).

On the other hand, some Indigenous cultures claim hybrid forms of cultures and ontologies, such as the "Indigenous futurism" movement

²⁰ Mbembe, Achille. (2013). Democracy in the Age of Animism, talks at Harvard University and Cornell University. It can be consulted at Drabinski, John E. (2013). Mbembe, Democracy, Animism. Retrieved from: <https://jdrabinski.wordpress.com/2013/12/06/mbembe-democracy-animism/>.

²¹ Lovelock, J.E. and Margulis, L. (1974). Atmospheric Homeostasis by and for the Biosphere: The Gaia Hypothesis. *Tellus*. Series A. Stockholm: International Meteorological Institute.

conceived by Anashinaabe scholar Grace L. Dillon²² to describe Indigenous artists who work with science fiction to both refute the representational expectations of “the Great Aboriginal Story” and to play with boundary crossings, claiming the spaces of science, technology, and futurity as their own. Today we can find Indigenous Futurism in artistic movements such as Ancestrofuturism or technochamanism, as the site of another entanglement between technological knowledge and traditional knowledge at the point of confluence between DiY cultures, hacking, and Indigenous cosmovisions, as well as a reflection on the “machinic unconscious”.²³ At the heart of these practices, we could read the beginnings of a machinic, holistic democracy that would otherwise herald the crisis of the anthropocentric presupposition of democracy. A democracy that would otherwise knot together machines, minds, humans and the living (which would, actually, be a subject for a whole other conference).

At the very least, it seems to us that it is getting more and more difficult, from Western non-naturalist thinking to Indigenous futurism, to draw a clear demarcation between what is part of an Indigenous epistemology and what signals the very decline of the Modern era.

- But only if we consider the real effects of invisibilization that have been formulated, for instance, among many others, by Bolivian Aymara sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui: a critique that has been directed at decolonial thinkers (such as Walter Dignolo), and which highlights the effects of signature and academic *caché* on thinkers from the South. We could also take into account Zoé Todd’s criticism of Bruno Latour and his

²² Dillon, Grace. ([2003] 2012). *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

²³ Guattari, Félix. (2010). *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis*. Los Angeles, CA and Cambridge, MA: Semiotext.

postulate that climate is a “common cosmopolitical concern”, yet he fails to cite the work of any thinkers from First Nation cultures that have long held such beliefs.²⁴ Similarly, and to paraphrase T.J. Demos, when Rosi Braidotti argues for a “postanthropocentric creating of a new pan-humanity”,²⁵ Demos questions whether her futurism overlooks present resources located in, for instance, Indigenous heritage and current political engagements that were never anthropocentric in the first place. In other words, we must not lose sight of the question of enunciation, the question of who speaks and who can speak, the geopolitics of knowledge, and the coloniality of knowledge.

- Perhaps we should think in terms of alliances and a possible relational ecology, which implies recognizing the sources of knowledge, quoting them, and trying to invent a new relational ethics similar to Felwine Sarr’s proposal in the report he co-wrote with Bénédicte Savoye on the restitution of ethnographic objects. We should continue the search for a new relational ethics²⁶ for the constitution of a common world and, let us add in the face of the emergency that we have today, the urgency to make the world habitable. To defend the plurality of worlds in a common habitable world.

²⁴ Todd, Zoe. (2016). An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on the Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just another Word for Colonialism. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 29 (1), 4-22. *Wiley Online Library*, doi:10.1111/johs.12124.

²⁵ Demos, T.J. (2016). *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

²⁶ Sarr, Felwine and Savoye, Bénédicte. (2018). *Rapport sur la restitution du patrimoine culturel africain. Vers une nouvelle éthique relationnelle*. Paris: Philippe Rey/Seuil. The full report is also available at http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_fr.pdf.

Rights of Nature

- The emergence of a *Rights of Nature* and the recognition of legal personhood to natural entities are an appropriate sign of the *rapprochement* between Indigenous movements (such as the notion of *terricide* used by Indigenous movements) and the work of Western lawyers and intellectuals (for instance, Christopher Stone's text or the notion of *ecocide*, discussed since the late 1940s).

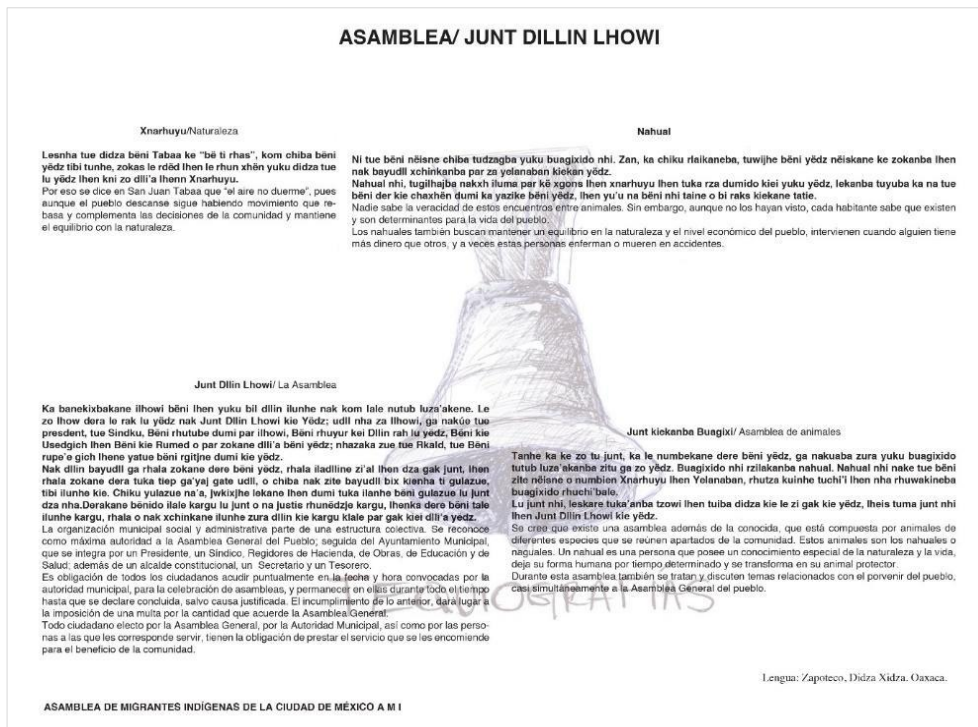
Indeed, the rights of nature have been developed at a rapid pace on a global scale over the past three years. In New Zealand, the judicial struggle led by the Māoris for the recognition of their ancestral rights on the Whanganui River resulted in the recognition of its legal personhood in March 2017. In the *Te Awa Tupua Bill*, the river becomes the ancestor of the Māoris, in accordance with their cosmology. Today, ten bodies of water in the world have rights (the latest being Lake Erie, on the US-Canadian border). Granting a natural entity the capacity to sue and to have enforceable rights allows the use of individual rights in ecological litigation to be by-passed. The creation of these legal entities tends towards a more global jurisprudence of the Earth. It thus signals a specific entanglement between non-naturalistic cosmologies and modern institutions. A way of bringing the non-spoken voice of a forest, the non-spoken voice of the lakes, into the theatre of speech that is a courtroom.

- I think we are now starting to see the spiral that we were talking about in the title of this presentation, a spiral that leads us to a Global Biocracy. This spiral is the circle of enunciation that is widening and transforming what was considered by modern people to be inanimate objects into subjects.

The question underlying all these initiatives is: what effects are non-naturalist cosmologies having on the enunciative landscape—that is, restating the traditional question: who talks and from where? From Bourdieu (the academic eye) to Haraway (and Situated Knowledge), from Spivak (Can the Subaltern Speak?) to Castro-Gómez (the zero point of view), Enrique Dussel, María Lugones or Walter Mignolo (and his geopolitics of sensing and knowing), amongst many others, questioning the authorities that structure democratic speech and its mechanisms, but also questioning the history of documentary cinema, practices of self-fiction, psychoanalysis or ethnography.

We might say that in recent years the question of enunciation within Indigenous communities has crystallized around the debate of “cultural appropriation” as a totalizing concept, assumed to be able to respond globally to all different sorts of power relations. Moreover, “cultural appropriation” suggests a legalistic exit to cognitive extractivism when its “raw material” is neither protected by copyright, nor by patent law, nor by—at the very minimum—the “too universalist” legal framework of Unesco’s intangible cultural heritage programme. There could actually be, once again, a whole keynote dedicated to this debate, but our intuition is as follows: the enunciative framework in the 21st century in the era of the Anthropocene (what we would rather call the naturalist scene) is being profoundly disrupted by non-human agency and the need for its recognition in politics.

- In Mexico, in Zapotec communities, it is said that there are animal assemblies in parallel to human assemblies, assemblies composed of animals from different species that congregate outside the community. These animals are the *nahual* or *naqual*. A *nahual* is a person who has a



[Figs. 2 and 3]. Daniel Godínez Nivón with the AMI (Asamblea de Migrantes Indígenas de la Ciudad de México), *Tequiografía No. 4*, recto and verso, 1990-2020.

particular knowledge of nature and life, who leaves his human form for a time and becomes his protective spirit animal. During the *nahual* assembly, that takes place simultaneously to the General Assembly of the People (between humans), issues related to the future of people are also discussed. No one knows the truth about these encounters between animals. However, even if no person can attend the *nahual* assemblies, every inhabitant knows that they exist and that they are decisive for the life of the people.

It is these different experiences and forms of assembly that the *Tequiografías* project by artist Daniel Godínez Nivón transcribes. *Tequiografías* is an ongoing project that began in 2010. It consists of the creation of a series of printed materials that parody *monografías*, a kind of educational pamphlets which generally convey stereotypical images of Indigenous communities and are typically used by primary students in Mexico. *Tequiografías* are made with the help of a group of Zapotecs, Mixes, Mixtecs, and Triquis that belong to the Assembly of Indigenous Migrants. Daniel Godínez Nivón then distributes the *tequiografías* he has produced to ten thousand primary and secondary school teachers. These are also sold in bookstores where the more traditional monographs are usually available for sale.

Assemblism (through Art)

- More broadly, many artistic practices are very stimulating in this regard, especially at the intersection between forms of assemblism,²⁷ par

²⁷ This term was coined by artist Jonas Staal. (2017). Assemblism. *E-flux Journal*. Journal #80 - March 2017. In this text based on Judith Butler's reflections, Staal called for the multiplication of "new infrastructures—parallel parliaments, stateless embassies,



[Fig. 4]. Richard Bell, *Embassy* (2013-), 2016. Installation view for the 20th Biennale of Sydney. Courtesy of Milani Gallery and the Biennale of Sydney.

liamentary forms, and forms of fictional diplomacy and law.

One of the best-known examples is Richard Bell's *Embassy* (2013-), which is intended to be an extension of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy which was established in 1972 outside of the Australian National Parliament. It was erected to challenge the status, treatment, and rights of Aboriginal peoples in Australia. Forty-six years later, the Tent Embassy remains in place, one of the longest ongoing protests in the world. As an extension of this protest, Richard Bell's *Embassy* is a public space for imagining and articulating alternate futures and reflecting on or retelling stories of oppression and displacement, drawing on black power politics, theatre, and performance art. So far, *Embassy* has been shown in many cities across the world including Moscow, Amsterdam, New York, Brisbane, Sydney, and Cairns. In each case, *Embassy* has

transdemocratic unions—needed to establish the institutions that will make a new emancipatory governance a reality”.

addressed its local context. For example, in Performa 15 in New York, activists from Black Lives Matter, the Black Panthers, and the Idle No More movement gathered to screen films, give lectures and discuss issues in a spirit of solidarity. In its ability to demount and reappear in different contexts, Bell sees his *Embassy* as a satellite of the original Tent Embassy, utilizing his agency within the infrastructure of art as a means of furthering its reach. *Embassy* maintains a global presence as part of the long history of Indigenous diplomacy asserting Indigenous sovereignty and resilience in the face of relentless settler-colonial oppression.

- I am also thinking here of Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama's project *Parliament of Ghosts* (2019).

The heart of *Parliament of Ghosts* is a haunting assemblage of lost objects, rescued and repurposed to form a vast parliamentary chamber in the heart of the city of Whitworth in England. Abandoned train seats and faded railway sleepers, scrapped school furniture and documents from governmental archives: Mahama lends powerful new context to this residue from a nation in transition in the context of Brexit but also as ghosts of colonial time.

Its title challenges us, a parliament of ghosts, a parliament of presence-absences, of those inter-*homines*,²⁸ of those who have literally ceased to be among human people while remaining somewhere close by. The promise of a parliament that does not shirk from the common world, a parliament of all presences, even the most invisible.

²⁸ From the Latin for "men", "people", and "mankind".



[Fig. 5]. Ibrahim Mahama, *Parliament of Ghosts*, 2019. 2nd class train seats, train workshop lockers, school cabinets and archive material including 1st class carriage lining, blueprints, photographs, school exercise books, metal shavings from re-conditioning train wheels and other salvaged materials. Dimensions variable. © The artist. Photo © Michael Pollard, courtesy of The Whitworth. Originally commissioned by Manchester International Festival and The Whitworth, University of Manchester, and premiered at The Whitworth for MIF19.



[Fig. 6] Ibrahim Mahama, *Parliament of Ghosts*, 2019. © The artist. Photo © Michael Pollard Courtesy of The Whitworth. Originally commissioned by Manchester International Festival and the Whitworth, University of Manchester, and premiered at The Whitworth for MIF19.

Paradoxical Enunciation

- We propose, thus, that it might be necessary to re-found the politics of enunciation firstly on the basis of this absence-presence, these paradoxical identities. Here we refer to the ghost, neither alive nor dead, but also both alive and dead. More broadly, we think that it is the whole history of identity politics that we should reread today in function of that which is paradoxically enunciated. As we mentioned at the opening of this presentation, “listen to what this bird that doesn’t speak and doesn’t sing says to you”. bell hooks, feminist, and social activist, did not say “I’m a black woman”; she said “Ain’t I a Woman?”.²⁹ Monique Wittig, French author and feminist theorist, said “lesbians are not women”.³⁰ “Are not”, as a negative identity, as an impossible, paradoxical identity.

The poet Jean-Christophe Bailly in “Le parti pris des animaux” (*The Bias of Animals*) carried out the same conversion:

Animals, it is almost their definition, do not have the ability to speak, it is a question of going beyond their silence and trying to identify what is being said there. [...] An inhabited, populated silence, a silent but vibrant world. The animal appears here as an intercessor for the thinker, the writer, the poet.³¹

²⁹ hooks, bell (1981). *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Boston: South End Press. The title of the book refers to the famous speech delivered in 1851 at the Ohio Women’s Rights Conference by Sojourner Truth, the slave-born abolitionist activist who managed to escape before gaining her freedom in 1826.

³⁰ “Lesbians are not women” was the sentence with which Monique Wittig ended “The Straight Mind” at Modern Language Association’s annual conference in 1978.

³¹ Bailly, Jean Christophe. (2013). *Le parti pris des animaux*. Paris: Christian Bourgois Editeur.

For Bailly, the animal's modes of being, its movements, are directly thought: they do not *express* a thought but the movements *in themselves* are thought, a silent thought, without words, without speech, a thought immediately embodied in bodies, which says something but silently. They conjugate verbs in silence.

- This matter, which is raised very briefly here, tells us something about the site of poetry, art, the site of politics, and their separation. It is often said that “the subject of politics is Us”,³² i.e. as if politics began with subjects already constituted or about to become constituted. But this would be to ignore language itself and what has remained invisible to it.

Politics would be this space of conflict between the subjects who express themselves and the circles of belonging, these centres of fidelity, at the core of which everyone has to situate themselves. From these “We” that are always configured by multiple belongings and which have been pluralized, complicated, denaturalized (becoming the very history of identity politics), we would seek, at the same time, to amplify their listening by paying attention to language itself, to its powers. That sentences such as “We are all German Jews” (pronounced by students in 1968 who defied any police identification), “I am another” (Arthur Rimbaud), or “We, the River”, “I am the River, the River is me” (by the Māoris), that these special places of poetry and literature, that these suggestions of an “Us”, which unfold themselves without possible literal identifications, are not threatened by inconsistency in the political arena.

³² Garcia, Tristan. (2016). *Nous*. Paris: Bernard Grasset.

Translating Plants

- The Moroccan artist Abdessamad el Montassir, originally from Boujdour in the Sahara in southern Morocco, has experienced the need to listen to non-speech. He is confronted with a story made of silence, a silence in which lives have been murdered. This territory is, as we know, the theater of a slowly mounting tension between Morocco and the polissario front that has been simmering since the departure of the Spanish in 1976. Yet there is no historical work accurately documenting the events and no archive remains. The event became the place for a family secret about the violence to which his parents were witnesses and probably also victims. Abdessamad and his generation of friends are all confronted with the silence of their families. Is this silence an amnesia, an impossibility to speak following a trauma, a way for the elders to protect their children? A mother of a friend finally answered his frequent questions with “if you want to know what happened, ask the plants”. Abdessamad el Montassir then went to question the plants of the Sahara Desert, and he took them seriously as witnesses.

He gathered a team of scientists specialized in plant memory, in this case *daghmous*, an endogenous euphorbia in the Sahara. This plant, originally producing leaves, has developed systems of resistance, and it is now covered with thorns. By measuring its acidity, biologists can date the stress and trauma experienced by the plant. The plant then becomes an indicator of the political power relations in a given territory. Abdessamad el Montassir presents his project as follows: *Résistance naturelle* (*Organic Resistance*, 2017-ongoing) is an interdisciplinary art and



[Fig. 7]. Abdessamad El Montassir, *Achayef*, 2018-2020. With the support of IMÉRA - Institut d'études avancées, l'Institut Français du Maroc, Le Cube - independent art room, Moussem Nomadic Art Center and Pro Helvetia. Courtesy of the artist.

research project whose process aims to follow the traumas that have arisen in the context of a “non-event” (as recorded in Moroccan official history) in the Sahara south of Morocco, and the forms of amnesia, shame and guilt generated by the situation in this territory. Building a singular ecology of knowledge, which takes into account both scientific knowledge, the words or silence of the Sahrawis, and Indigenous Tuareg poetry, he is also interested in the temporality of fictional representations and imaginary projection spaces developed by the inhabitants of this region. Sahrawi poetry, Tuareg poetry, is fleeting and metamorphic, and it draws maps. Time and relationship maps. Poetic maps that are not fixed. The poems indicate places and geographical points always fleeting and moving; these poems say and do not say, in a fugitive and encrypted way, what has happened.



[Fig. 8]. Abdessamad El Montassir, *Al Amakine, une cartographie des vies invisibles*, 2016-2020. With the support of Cube - independent art room and Al Safar. Courtesy of the artist.

Emancipation of Nature (through Art)

- The voice of nature is found even more directly in the field of the assemblist practices we were talking about, which meet with this concern for renewed political representation, and the need to make lakes, rivers, mountains, forests, oceans and, more generally, the land of legal subjects now able to claim rights and bring to justice those who are responsible for the great contemporary ecocide.

I am thinking, for instance, of the work of Portuguese artist Maria Lucia Cruz Correia who, in *The Voice of Nature* (2017-2019), sets up a trial where the “voice of nature” can be heard. Her trial, inspired by documentation gathered in Ecuador and the United States, as well as a wide range of contemporary legal proceedings and literary and legal



[Fig. 9]. Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, *Voice of Nature: The Trial*, 2017-2019. © Mark Pozlep. Courtesy the artist.



[Fig. 10]. Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, *Voice of Nature: The Trial*, 2017-2019. © Far Nyo. Courtesy of the artist.

sources, is a new protocol, a speculative version of a trial.

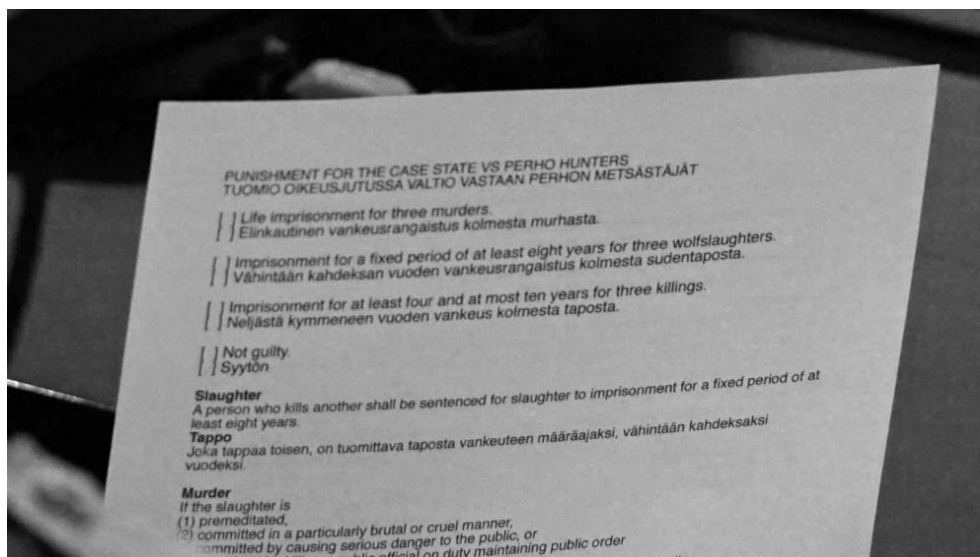
- Finnish artists Terike Haapoja and Laura Gustafsson are another example, with their works *Party of Others* (2011-ongoing), *Museum of Non-Humanity* (2016-ongoing), and *The Trial* (2014)—a mock trial on non-human rights, conducted around the case of the wolves in Perho, a Finnish rural municipality, where in 2013 a group of residents killed three wolves in cold blood. Twelve people were prosecuted and found guilty.

The Trial is a participatory performance investigating the standing of non-human species in law. Based on a re-enactment of the Perho wolf poaching case, the performance examines the ways in which existing legislation constructs our relationship with other species, and how the emerging fields of law (such as animal law, wild laws, or nature jurisprudence) could change these relations. *The Trial* is a laboratory for developing and testing this new legal ground. The performance appropriates the form of a trial, playing out existing cases in a dramatized, documentary-style theatrical setting. The audience is invited to take on roles in the legal process. The cases and related legislation are presented to the audience, and both the claimant and the accused have their own attorneys. The verdict will be given by a jury consisting of members of the audience. Thus the participant/viewers have to actively take a stand on the application of the law.

Finally, to conclude, we would like to mention projects that are being held in France at this very moment, which are intended as constituent processes to have the Seine and the Loire, two French rivers, recognized

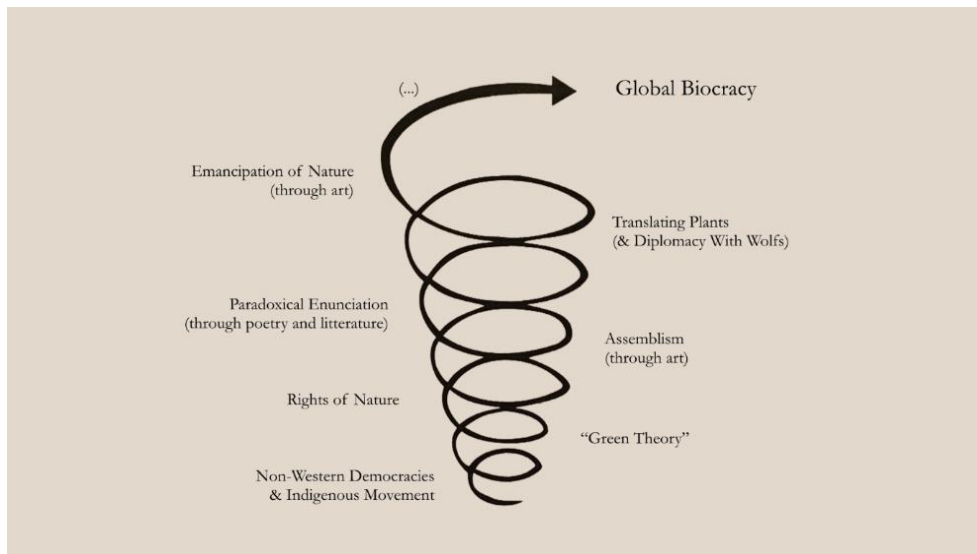


[Fig. 11]. Terike Haapoja and Laura Gustafsson, *The Trial. Courtroom Lecture Performance on the Legal Rights of Non-Humans*, 2014. Premiere: Konsistorin sali, Helsinki University, November 2014. Photo: Terike Haapoja. Courtesy of the artists.



[Fig. 12]. Terike Haapoja and Laura Gustafsson, *The Trial. Courtroom Lecture Performance on the Legal Rights of Non-Humans*, 2014. Photo: Terike Haapoja. Courtesy of the artists.

as the first natural aquatic entities as legal subjects in Europe in a kind of pragmatic animism. Initiated by artists, activists, and scientists, these constituent processes and, notably, the *Parliament of the Loire* aim to define the forms and functioning of a parliament for a non-human entity



[Fig. 13]. Aliocha Imhoff and Kantuta Quirós, *Spirals of Enunciation. Towards a Democracy of the Living*, 2019.

(the Loire), where fauna, flora, and the various tangible and intangible components might be represented. This process is structured by a series of public hearings that bring together an interdisciplinary committee composed of people interested in the creation of this Parliament, with professionals (philosophers, anthropologists, biologists, lawyers, etc.) and users of the Loire. In fact, these projects are proposing a form of biocracy against the temporal myopia of our democracies. They follow the principle of the criminal court and a selected jury, where humans are drawn by lot to represent the voices of non-humans “on honour”, nourished by scientific “impact reports” but also by hearings of shamanic voices, people who are known for their intensity of connection with non-humans. That is to say, subjects governed on a multitude of time scales: that of a geological scene (several million years ago), that of giant sequoias (2000 years), that of the reconstitution of biomass after a disaster (40/50 years). In other words, to govern not on the basis of a purportedly pacified nature—as if a “return to Nature” were the marker

of a greater overall harmony—but rather to govern on the basis of a growing number of conflicts and tensions.

The road to a biocracy will of course be much longer. The Latin American experiences, the emerging legal frameworks and, undoubtedly, we hope, these last few thought-experiments, when developed on a 1:1 scale in the field of art, will be important pillars of this policy with non-humans, as a superposition of what takes place and what could have taken place. While these examples sometimes may reflect our political powerlessness, we see them as the long waves of contagion effects and contamination of these Indigenous epistemologies. Thank you very much.³³

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