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Performance Is a Form of Knowing. Cosmopolitical Choreographies for a Burning Planet

AMANDA PIÑA

Artist, Researcher, Academic Founder of Instituto Tropical
nada productions@gmail.com

Abstract. This paper explores performance as a form of knowing and as a cosmopolitical practice that reconfigures human relations with the world. In dialogue with First Nations ritual practices from Abya Yala – specifically the Wixarika practice of *Asking for allowance to all directions* – the text challenges colonial conceptions of performance as presentation. Instead, it proposes performance as an embodied, relational, and epistemic tool for world-making. Engaging with the works of Stengers, de la Cadena, and Blaser, and grounded in the author's situated experience living between Europe and Latin America, the paper advocates for ontological pluralism and an ecology of knowledges. Through narrative, conceptual tools, and ritual practice, it offers performance as a counter-spell to modernity's extractivist logics, reclaiming its potential to compose un/common worlds. A ritual script is included as an invitation to engage performance as a cosmopolitical act of relational re-attunement.

Keywords. Compossession, cosmopolitics, political ontology, terran dramaturgies, site sensitive performance.

«Before digging the hole in the ground, we will do the ritual of asking for allowance to all directions», I said to Jozef while we were about

to start the process of digging earth for making clay at the back of my family's land in Zacualpan de Amilpas, Mexico.

«What is that about?» Jozef asked, with the shovel in his hand.

«Asking for allowance to all directions is a ritual that people native to this area still practice», I answered.

«But whom do we ask for an allowance when there is no one here?» Jozef asked.

«There are many here – just look around», I replied. «The trees, the insects, the animals, the plants, the fungi... all the communities of beings that live here, or dwell far off in the four directions – east, north, west, and south we will address them. Above us, in the cosmos; below us, in the soil – underworld; and within us, in our bodies, our hearts. All of them will be included in what we are about to do here».

«In Brussels, I usually ask the municipality or the police for permission – if I want to do a performance in public or throw a party, I always need a permit. But I've never asked non-humans for allowance. Do you think they'd get what we're doing?» said Jozef smiling while pointing to the surrounding forest.

We looked at each other and laughed for a while, then I answered: «Honestly, I'm not sure if they understand this ritual. For me, it's more of a performative practice – something I do to become aware of all others sharing this land. It's a way of recognizing them as beings, as people and not just as objects or natural resources. The practice enlarges our social relationships to include everyone – trees, insects, fungi, etc. The ritual teaches that, through the act of performing it».

«I see», Jozef replied.

We stayed quiet for a while listening to the sounds of the forest, birds chirping, leaves weaving, the wind sometimes passing through them... then he added:

«Who knows – maybe the earth is burning because it's missing more of these rituals».

Through learning rituals such as *Asking for allowance to all directions* from my First Nations teachers, I have come to realize that the socio – environmental-political capacity of performance, that is its cosmopolitical power, has been weakened in the western context of art and its colonial dissemination as global modernity. Modern colonial notions of performance, especially within the seemingly secular realm of Art, have limited its various societal functions, privileging the aspect of presentation and spectacle. This tendency to equate performance with presentation narrows its scope and diminishes its potential as a form of knowing and of knowledge transmission which is rooted in the body and in collective experience. Moreover, the exclusive focus on the aspect of presentation has excluded the complex relations between Humans and the non – and more-than-Human worlds (Cosmopolitics). In this context, theatre institutions, as well as museums that host performances, are designed to expel and resist any logic that extends beyond presentation. It requires effort, the right tools, and consider-



Fig. 1: *Asking for allowance to all directions during the first The School of the Jaguar at Tanz Quartier Vienna, Courtesy of the artist, 2018.*

able resistance from artists and cultural workers to transcend this narrow perspective, in order to explore *performance* as a form of knowing and *performative practices* as cosmopolitical devices for world making.

To imagine and compose worlds that redistribute agency and perception to non-humans, and to open up horizons for the emergence of alternative ways of being – new forms of relationality, attention, and perception – it is essential to interrogate the implicit assumptions about knowledge, time, space, and the body that underpin modern-colonial *naturalist ontologies* (Descola [2013]) and how they persist within performance studies and the artistic practice of performance. Precisely this was the focus of my work over the past decade. As a performance artist and researcher, I undertook to investigate alternative genealogies of performance. My particular interest lies in the relational dynamics between human and non-human beings in contemporary Amerindian ritual art, explored beyond colonial frameworks and outside the bounds of the Western art canon.

With roots in Chile and Mexico, and after two decades of working within the European art context, I advocate for an art practice that nurtures an ecology of knowledges (de Sousa Santos [2009]), challenging the monoculture of thought and practice embedded in Western modernity across both in Europe and

the Americas. My work engages with the re-emergence of ancestral modes of movement as social practice – ritual, dance, and song. Through the lens of decolonial aesthetics (Vázquez, Mignolo [2013]) and with the aim of de-canonizing art (Ndikung [2017]), I create work that confronts the erasures imposed by coloniality. In doing so, I seek to reclaim the socio-political-environmental potency of performance, envisioned as a form of cosmopolitics.

Cosmopolitics, as proposed by philosopher Isabelle Stengers (2010), is a philosophical and political project concerned with composing a common world beyond anthropocentrism and the monoculture of modernity. Anthropologists Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena (2017) complicate this notion by introducing the concept of the *Uncommons* as a key to developing both the concept and practice of Political Ontology. While Stengers envisions a re-composition of the world that includes and grants agency to nonhuman beings, Blaser and de la Cadena challenge the modern assumption of a single, shared world interpreted through multiple (human only) cultural perspectives – an assumption still rooted in naturalist ontologies. Instead, they propose a shift toward ontological pluralism: the idea that many worlds exist, each brought into being through distinct world-making practices.

Inspired by and in dialogue with de la Cadena and Blaser's view of cosmopolitics, I propose alternative approaches to composition, dramaturgy, the somatic and the site specific, that transcends the scope of performance as presentation. Learning from the rituals, dances, and songs of First Nations communities in Abya-Yala serves as a form of counter-spell, uncovering and challenging the modern colonial assumptions embedded per default in Western contemporary art, as well as in choreography and performance. This approach allows me to propose a series of pedagogical tools that function as onto-epistemic openings (de la Cadena [2015]), creating pathways to explore the cosmopolitical potential of contemporary performance.

Through this lens, the cosmopolitical dimension of performance manifests as a field and situation that propose a temporary composition of *Uncommon* worlds: a practice that re-composes the way we relate, think, and feel beyond naturalist ontologies, enacting other ways of being together. The capacity of performance to re-compose can be seen as the potency of a performance to contest a dominant view rooted in colonial practices that reproduce the modern canon of art and with it, performance as presentation¹. The generative force of performance lies in its ability to compose uncommon worlds, not merely as sociopolitical critique but as embodied counter-proposal.

1 I differentiate "Performance" and "Performative Practices" as two different realms of my practice. "Performance" refers to the public, collective moment or presentation, including performers and witnesses, while "Performative Practices" describe the realm of knowledge creation and transmission existing within and beyond it.

As a Cheje² (Rivera Cusicanqui [2018]) artist and academic living between worlds (Abya Yala and Europe), in this text I include conceptual formulations, first hand narrations and artistic manifestos, weaving together the artistic and situated experience with the scientific analysis. The land plot of my family in Zacualpan de Amilpas Mexico joins this journey as my collaborator. Since I am writing from this place, I am writing with it. Its waters, produced by the volcano in deep relation with the surrounding vegetation, the ocean, the clouds, and the winds, are harvested by the well in our garden and contribute to nourish these words and intentions with life.

In addition, this paper includes a script of the ritual practice of “asking for allowance to the four directions”, as it has been handed down to me by my teacher Juan José Katira Ramirez. You are invited to engage with the ritual as a performative practice and to explore its cosmopolitical capacities as a form of knowing and relating.



Fig. 2: *Montañas Vivas performative walk within The School of Mountains and Waters at Yerba Loca, Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral, Santiago de Chile, Courtesy of the artist, 2022.*

- 2 Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's concept of Cheje (also spelled Ch'ixi) is a foundational idea in her decolonial thought and practice. The term originates from Aymara language, where it refers to a color produced by the juxtaposition of contrasting elements, such as black and white threads woven together to create a gray hue. This “gray” is not a blend but an arrangement where opposites coexist without merging, embodying a logic of “the third included”.

1. *Composition becomes compossession*

«Everything has an eye, a hand, and can speak. It will see differently, it will touch otherly, it will speak with a different tongue», said my teacher Katira as we gathered around the ceremonial fire. «The underground waterways can sing; they are called by the moist trees that grow in the small mountain oasis», he said. «The ones who build the mine think water is stupid and that it has no preferences. For them, only humans have intelligence – all the rest are things. “Natural resources”, they say, and with this idea they go about transforming this mountain into money, poisoning its waters, air, and soil. They are the stupid ones, the younger brothers. The way they think is all twisted», he stated, moving his head from side to side and sighing.

We had come to the central Andes of Chile to create a performative walk in the site of extraction of the mine Los Bronces from Anglo American Mining Corp. We were at my mother’s house not far from the mine, sitting around a fire close to the river. Above us on the road I could see the lights of the giant trucks that were transporting the extracted copper and other minerals to the near port to be shipped to the global north. «Everything has an eye, a hand, and can speak», I thought while I could still listen to the songs of the river. This moment of shared presence by the river resonates with the notion of *compossession*, where human and non-human agencies intertwine. In Compossession time, relationality, space, the body and the senses are understood beyond modern/colonial capture as co-emergent forces shaping performance and experience.

Over the years, I developed the notion and practice of compossession (Piña [2019]) combining the terms composition and possession. Compossession refers to a practice of composition that wishes to transcend modern ontologies by borrowing inspiration from forms of knowing that happen through embodiment and identification, that have been devalued in modernity (Castro-Gómez [2005]). Performative practices of possession arrive from mestizo, afro-Caribbean, and Indigenous sources. Compossession relates also to the idea of a tropical institution³ (Haitzinger [2019]) as a context, counteracting abstraction with situatedness. Compossession operates in decolonial terms beyond the notions of knowledge, time, space, and body, transgressing the binaries of subject-object and nature-culture proposed by “the contemporary” as a continuation of modernity/coloniality.

The term composition, one of the two components of compossession, was developed by Bruno Latour in his *Compositionist Manifesto* (Latour [2010]) to emphasize the ongoing process of building and maintaining worlds. The manifesto

3 The Tropical Institution is proposed as a model of decolonial institutional critique focused on situatedness, associating the *diversity of the tropics* with *trope* as a collective term for rhetorical figures.

serves as a provocative counterpoint to traditional critiques of modernity. Instead of advocating for deconstruction, which dismantles established structures, Latour proposes compositionism: a practice of carefully assembling new, livable worlds that embrace attention and heterogeneity. Drawing on Stengers, Latour's compositionism carries a cosmopolitical dimension: how can we create space for many worlds to coexist – not just many cultures, but many ontologies – to be negotiated together? Both Latour and Stengers are particularly concerned with the worlds we inhabit in relation to non-humans, technologies, and environmental entities. They suggest that we need to compose worlds that include all existents, granting agency to non-humans as a way of transcending the nature/culture divide that has brought about current environmental, social, and political crises.

To compose relations that integrate non-humans into our social worlds – and to inhabit realms of sensing and meaning beyond the limits of naturalist, ontologies – we must first examine the very nature of composition. As it stands, composition is a tool already deeply embedded in the binaries and assumptions of Western modernity: nature/culture, subject/object, human/non-human, control over nature, and so on. Consequently, it risks reproducing the very worldviews we aim to transcend.

Audre Lorde's powerful insight that «The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house» (Lorde [1984]) reminds us that we cannot build different futures using conceptual materials forged within oppressive systems. Likewise, to genuinely create other worlds – worlds that resist and refuse the logics that have contributed to planetary crisis – we must reach for different tools for thinking, practicing and stablishing relations.

Compossession emerges here not as an alternative composition but as a different paradigm altogether: a building block for worlding through performance, energy, relation, and affect. Unlike composition, which often centers control, individual intentionality, authorship, and separation, compossession gestures toward entanglement, reciprocity, symbiosis and shared inhabitation. It enables the crafting of future proposals that do not replicate colonial or anthropocentric logics, but instead allow for multispecies, multi-ontological relations to flourish.

Compossession is proposed as a creolised term anchored at the crossroads of modern forms of composition and ancestral-contemporary ritual practices from Afro-Caribbean and Amerindian First Nations origins. For the development of “brown”, creole or “cheje” art, compossession is a practice of dealing “in” time and space, with both influences for the emergence of something else, a third space of performance.

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (Hara-way [2016]: 12)



Fig. 3: *Montañas Vivas* performative walk within *The School of Mountains and Waters* at Yerba Loca, Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral, Santiago de Chile, Courtesy of the artist, 2023.

A compossessionist manifesto:

Time: Composition, like modernity, is grounded in a linear conception of time – a straight line extending from present to future (Vázquez [2020]). This temporal logic reflects the developmental narratives of modernity and progress, where the future is assumed to be inherently superior to the present or the past. This forward-driving temporality is rooted in the human scale – a standardized, externalized sense of time measured by clocks, calendars, deadlines. The apparent universality of this time stems from its objectification. Once time is stripped of its plurality and made measurable, it becomes a tool of normativity. This “time-feel of the norm” is not just a tempo, but a political imposition – one that marginalizes other temporalities, other rhythms of life, and other ways of being in relation.

Compossession engages with time differently, by drawing on the notion of ancestrality found in First Nations philosophies. Here, time is understood not as linear progression but as a form of precedence (Vázquez [2017]) – a relational temporality connecting past and future. This multi-dimensional understanding gives rise to cyclical temporalities, where patterns evolve through repetition and variation rather than progress. The time of compossession is non-human; it reso-

nates with the rhythms of Earth, expanding perception as a way of exiting normative modes of sensing and relating to time.

Relationality: Composition, as traditionally conceived, is rooted in a subject-object relation. It is understood as something an individual does – adding to, shaping, or manipulating the world – acting upon materiality. This intentionality aligns with the modern/colonial worldview that seeks to control nature, and also with the classical notion of artistic creation as an act of individual intentionality, willpower or genius. To compose, in this frame, is to conquer materiality by imposing form upon it – a deliberate, authored act that reinforces human dominance.

Compossession, in contrast, is relational. It moves beyond individual intentionality toward the collective. It does not operate within a subject-object framework; rather, it is something we do with and are done by – a reciprocal dynamic in which agency is shared. Compossession is emergent and grounded in openness: the willingness to listen and be affected, to enter in relation. It is a listening practice, where attention takes precedence over control.

To compossess is to attune, to mediate between our needs and those of the other – whether human, non-human, or more-than-human – in a process akin to shamanism or diplomacy. Making, in this sense, is not about imposing but about meeting and being transformed by the encounter. The dance, the performance, the art is a being, not an object – a presence to be met, not a form to be mastered.

Space: In composition, space is typically understood as constructed – manifested through institutional architectures such as theatres, galleries, and museums. An abstract, decontextualized notion of place, apparently neutral, stripped of land, history, and relational depth. Shaped by colonial logics, this spatial conception allows composition to occur “anywhere”, reinforcing an uprooted, exportable framework that overlooks local ecologies and epistemologies. Within this view, space is treated as external to bodies – something that exists around or between them, defined by architectural form and designed to contain, frame, and separate.

Compossession, by contrast, insists that space is always situated and specific, rooted in the land and shaped by relationships. It is not a passive backdrop but a living, entangled presence, *not landscape*, but terrain, co-created with the multitude of beings that sustain it. It is something we are within and part of, not something we merely occupy. In compossession, space is at once within bodies, beyond their material boundaries, and alive in the pulse between them. This is not a space of neutrality or abstraction, but one of co-presence – defined by relation rather than separation.

The body: The body in composition is still the body-animal under the rule and control of the master, the mind. That body must be made into something dif-

ferent, be changed, controlled and manipulated in order to acquire value. It is a body, which needs to be tamed in some way, like a horse, by abstraction, stylisation, or deconstructions since it has no value in itself.

The body in compossession is bound to animality as a way of fullness. It does not need to be tamed by the mind but to be engaged in processes of “feel-thinking”. It is a manifold body – open, not singular nor self-contained. A body as a holobiont shaped by the presence of others, and by all beings that it hosts bringing it into existence. Multi layered, this body it is subtle and gross, visible and invisible, presence–form, content–container. Distal and proximal, cosmic and interior.

The senses: The senses in composition are subdued to visibility and to the coloniality of the senses. That is the use of sensory experience to establish and maintain the power and control of modernity/coloniality on a global scale. As Glissant states: «The west is a project, not a place» (Glissant [1989]: 2). This can include the use of imagery, language, and ways in which sensorial experience is organized and controlled. In coloniality, the senses the visual aspect of perception is predominant. This gaze is panoramic, grounded in the logic of classical perspective – a frontal view where the observer sees all while remaining unseen. This visual regime echoes the panopticon, not only in terms of surveillance. The dominance of the visual reflects a broader disciplining of the senses, enforcing a normative experience of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The coloniality of the senses evolves into contemporary mechanisms of sensory control, particularly through visual and virtual technologies that shape how we perceive, engage, and feel in digital and mediated environments.

Compossession marks a shift toward the decolonization of the senses (Vázquez [2020]). In this framework, the visual is no longer privileged above other forms of perception. Instead, the senses are reawakened – the ear, the eye, the mouth, the skin – undisciplined and reorganized. This is an immersive, multi-sensorial experience, where proximity and multi-perspectival involvement enable new-old forms of commonality. The audience no longer functions as a unified observer meant to witness a totality. Instead, a multi-perspectival wit(h)nessing emerges. The wit(h)ness – is with the event, not outside it. No longer passive, the wit(h)ness is deeply involved, emotionally engaged, and personally touched. Performance becomes a ritual of participation, not a spectacle of consumption. This mode of wit(h)nessing, of “being with” opens space for *new forms of identification and relation*. In the absence of distance, control, and hierarchy, a relational co-emergency becomes possible – where what is shared is not an object to be evaluated, but an art world to be inhabited.



Fig. 4: *Mountains in Resistance*, performative walk within *The School of Mountains and Waters* at Kaiser Brunnen, Tanz Quartier Vienna, Courtesy of the artist, 2021.

2. Terran dramaturgies of performance

«We don't need more violence in the world, there is plenty, we don't need more conflicts in the world, we are full of them, we don't need the stories we have told ourselves all this time, they have brought us here! We need other stories, new tales, told in different ways. We need new forms of narration», I thought while sitting at the rooftop of my family's plot in Zacualpan de Amilpas. From there I could see the Volcano: the Popocatepetl, alive and active, exhaling smoke through its conic mouth. In Nahuatl *Popoca* means smoke and *Tepetl* mountain. The smoky mountain attracts water as clouds, rain and snow. Its skin, the vegetation that covers its mountain body, absorbs water condensing it into the watershed underneath the earth. The volcano breathes and lives while making the weather humid and colder. Sometimes it pushes ashes through its mouth filling the valleys with darkness. This may cause people to fall ill, which is why evacuation routes are well indicated and emergency protocols habitually performed. Will the Volcano erupt again when the weather warms up two degrees?

In modern and postmodern dramaturgy, the climax functions like a volcanic eruption – a concentrated, high-intensity turning point where conflict

peaks. This emotionally charged moment, often marked by confrontation or revelation, occurs in a compressed time frame and propels the narrative toward resolution. As a key feature of dramatic storytelling, the climax crystallizes tension and forces decisive action, shaping the outcome of the story. In the dramaturgies of climax, narrative attention fixates on antagonistic conflict and climax as event – the eruption is the event. The rest of the volcano’s existence, its quiet durations, its role in sustaining ecosystems of different peoples, its slow accumulations of ancestral waters, are rendered narratively invisible. These dramaturgies prioritize antagonism and rupture over relation and normative time over biocentric time. This persistent focus on antagonism and rupture contributes to the very conditions of crisis, functioning as an *under-narration*, shaping attention toward the event while marginalizing other modes of experience.

To move beyond this paradigm, we must ask: how do we tell the stories of the volcano when it is not erupting? How do we account for the deep time it embodies – the slow gathering, the unseen transformations, the holding of life within and around it? This invites a shift toward biocentric temporalities, which recognize the value of interdependence. It calls for other modes of attention – slower, more attuned, more porous – capable of perceiving the subtle, the sustaining, the ancestral. Such a dramaturgy would not be structured around antagonism and climax but around *relation, existence and blooming* – foregrounding co-presence, mutual impact, and the layered temporalities of living systems, cultivating emotional through identification and resonance. Terran dramaturgies are an alternative to modern and post-modern dramaturgies.

The term Terran, introduced by Bruno Latour (1991), distinguishes modern humans from the broader category of the Anthropos, which encompasses all human beings throughout history. I use the term Terran⁴ following Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Deborah Danowski (2018), as a decolonial critique to the notion of the Human as a universal category (Vazquez [2019]), such as in “humans have created the current crisis”. As they argue, Terrans (first nation and rural mestizos), have done little to advance the ecological decay. Terrans in this sense would be the people who are at the margins of modernity, at the margins of the monoculture of thought and practice imposed by coloniality but also those who contest the Human as a universal category. In this sense, Terran Dramaturgies refer to the human as a being with earth, a pluriversal category. A post-antagonistic dramaturgical proposition relating to both to climax and climate. Rather than centering on conflict, they respond to the challenges of climate change – the Anthropocene as Capitalocene – by foregrounding «lis-

4 *Terran*, from Latin *terra* or Spanish *tierra*, meaning both soil and earth. Following the proposition of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.

tening to the land and its pedagogies» (Betasamosake Simpson [2014]). This post-naturalist dramaturgy expands social relation to include non-human beings, offering new possibilities of identification and relation with what western ontologies have called “nature”.

A manifesto of Terran dramaturgies of performance

Terran dramaturgies account for what it takes to be a mountain, a forest, a coral reef, the ocean, a land plot.

They aren’t eager for catharsis, climax and conflict nor from the habitual duration of a performance.

To create Terran dramaturgies, we must listen and learn from the cyclic rhythms of Earth, its biocentric temporalities, from geological formations, from non-human narratives, from the expressivity of earth.

Terran dramaturgies of performance provide time for existence beyond production and consumption. They can nourish and restore all presences involved.

They are beneficial and healing, restorative and nourishing.

They are political, they are militant, they create and provide us with what we are lacking, embodying resistance, enacting a live-able world to come.

Terran dramaturgies can transform perception.

They resist the event and don’t look for an applause.

3. Prácticas eco somáticas for becoming (with) earth

Chile’s geo-political history has tied the country to a neo-colonial extractivist regime, forcing it to remain an exporter of “raw materials” for the global North and undermining the future liveability of its territories. Within this context, the transnational mining corporation Anglo American is seeking to expand its operations, threatening Apu Wamani, a mountain in the central Andes that is vital to my community of origin.

Apu Wamani – “spirit,” “lord,” or “guardian” in Quechua – is what Marisol de la Cadena (2015) describes as a Tira Kuna or Earth Being: not a mountain in the Western sense of geology, topography, or tourism, but a living entity with agency and body.

In 2022, I created a performance about and with Apu Wamani. For this piece, I developed a physical score by embodying the mountain on whose slopes I grew up. Lending my body to the mountain revealed to me the immense power of performance and performative practices as ways of knowing through embodiment and identification – cosmopolitical devices that open spaces of relation between human and non-human worlds.

In that work, at the interface between art, activism, climate science and indigenous knowledge I had learned that terms like “natural resource”, “raw material”, “H₂O”, and “nature” have historically served the colonial extractive agenda, reducing existents into objects, living communities into resources, drinking water into commodities, and future existence in the territories to migration. The extractive logic has expanded sacrifice zones, polluting rivers and water wells in my community with heavy metals from mining.

Many Amerindian societies inhabit worlds best described as “animist” or “multinaturalist” (Neurath [2020]). In these contexts, identifying with the other – so fully as to transform into the other – is not only possible but often quite accessible. This ease of transformation is rooted in what is often referred to as *shared humanity*: while diversity is expressed through the exterior – through bodily appearance, skin, clothes, and furs – it is believed that within these varied beings resides a common interior, everyone is a human inside, all are people. Thus, amid the plurality of natures, there persists the notion of a single shared culture: people. Through this perspective, instead of reducing people to only humans, we have people-mountains, people-trees, people-buzzing bees, etc. Each carries agency and intentionality. Instead of having one nature common to all as in western ontologies, there are many different natures as the many habits of beings, as their different external forms, be them furry, scaly, barky. One culture, people, and many natures as the different external forms of all the beings that exist. Multinatural perspectives (Viveiros de Castro [1998]) to relate with socially. Multiple ways of seeing, touching, hearing, tasting and speaking. The perspective is in the body.

While 20-th century somatic practices in art drew on psychoanalysis, psychology, phenomenology, and semiotics, they remain embedded in modern colonial thought, centred on the self, the Human, its body and its experience. Knowing through identification, through the body and through the senses (first-person experience) constitute ancient forms of knowing. They emerged with artistic expression, long prior to the invention of writing persisting as an inborn capacity of Terrans and Humans alike. *Prácticas Eco Somáticas* tap into this form of knowing, opening the scope from the self-centered quality of modern somatics towards the ecosystemic and the relational. Towards forms of identification with non-humans in socio-, political-, environmental-configurations that contest naturalist ontologies and their extractive semantics. The name *Prácticas Eco Somáticas* remains in Spanish as a reminder of a situated knowledge of mestizo, indigenous and afro Caribbean resistances to the land degradation of so called “sacrifice zones” (*zonas de sacrificio*), particular to Spanish and Portuguese speaking contexts in Abya Yala.

One of the core principles of *Prácticas Eco Somáticas* is rooted in the thought of Amazonian First Nations, as interpreted/translated by Eduardo Viveiros de

Castro through the concept of Multinaturalism or Multinatural Perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro [1998]). This concept enables us to recognize non-human beings – such as animals, plants, mountains, and rivers – not as objects, but as peoples, each with their own body intentionality and agency. From this perspective, these performative practices embody other beings as a way of getting to know them through identification. These somatic socio-environmental practices are fundamentally poetic, political, and artistic, producing a form of sensory knowledge about the existence and current condition of other beings that radically differs from information. It is focused on environments such as mined mountains, deforested lands, and overexploited waters, seeking to establish solidarity between human and non-human bodies – be they mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, wetlands, or estuaries particularly within the context of neoliberal economic systems and their extractive processes. In these practices we get to know other beings, such as mountains, rivers, fungi, by identifying with them through methods of embodiment, oral narration, and the imaginal.



Fig. 5: Film Still, *Danzas Climáticas*, DeSingel, Antwerpen, Courtesy of the artist, 2020.

The knowledge generated through these practices sharply contrasts with scientific knowledge: it is poetic rather than quantifiable, subjective rather than objective. In an era overwhelmed by excessive information, this form of knowl-

edge offers a way to counteract the desensitizing effects of data overload, fostering new ways of re-relating with the living world through bodily experience.

One experience that often comes to mind as an example of the type of knowledge these practices can reveal is one shared by one of my students. An activist, who had been defending a clear-cut forest in Germany for several years, decided to embody that forest through *Prácticas Eco Somáticas*. In doing so, she realized that even after trees are cut down, their roots continue to live for some time. For the roots, the absence of the trunk felt like a phantom limb, a sensation she vividly recalled. This realization deeply moved her, as she truly understood, on a bodily level, what it felt like for the forest to be mutilated in such a way.

Listening to her and to many other similar accounts, I began to understand the power and utility of this kind of knowledge. It established a relationship between her and the forest as bodies, fostering an awareness of the forest's perspective.

4. Site sensitive performance, listening to Earth-beings and other bodies

One day, while harvesting figs from the trees my father had planted on the land overlooking the volcano, I realized – the volcano was speaking. Its language, made of smoke signals, could be called a *geo-graphos*, a form of the Earth's own writing. «This is an entirely different kind of geography», I thought. I then recalled a Chilean scholar, who had written a paper about Earth's expressivity, arguing that geological formations shaped by the Earth could be seen as artistic creations. His aim was to protect certain Chilean mountains from mining extraction, suggesting that – even if they weren't human made archaeological sites – these places, considered sacred by Indigenous communities, could be defended as cultural and aesthetic expressions of the Earth itself. «It would be far too arrogant to believe that only humans can make art», I thought. «Of course, the volcano can write».

When working with a land plot, a mountain, a volcano, or an earth being, performance cannot be proposed the same way as it would in museums or in theatres. Theatre and museums are spaces of apparent neutrality. They exist in diverse contexts, urban, rural, in the global north or south, but they don't address the specificities of those places, they resemble one another. Historically, they have been part of the pedagogies of modernity/coloniality (Vazquez [2020]) globalizing western ontologies as universal. Here, anthropocentrism functions as a central axis of separation from the Earth, underpinning the modern/colonial worldview. It positions the "human" – defined through Eurocentric ideals of reason, civilization, and culture – as superior to all other forms of life. This hierarchical ordering subjugates animals, rivers, forests, and other Earth beings, reducing them to resources or objects of knowledge. In doing so, these pedago-

gies of modernity enact a condition of *Earthlessness* (Vazquez [2020]), where the relational bonds with the more-than-human world are severed. Anthropocentrism, as it manifests through science, reason, and cultural institutions, reinforces a disembodied, extractive stance that alienates humanity from the ecological and spiritual dimensions of existence. As integral components of the narratives of modernity, both the museum and the theatre have been structured through anthropocentric logic, enacting this separation and aligning themselves, when not enabling with the broader extractive project.

In contrast, what I call site-sensitive performance is a situated practice that listens to the living context that hosts it. A living context can be a watershed irrigated by rivers, a forest with its own vegetation, an oasis, etc. When approached as bodies and through the lens of multinatural perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro [1998]), social relations can be enacted with these living ecologies, enabling forms of learning and listening that engage with them as pedagogies.

The practice and concept of the site-sensitive emerges from the work on *Compossession*, *Terran dramaturgies*, and *Prácticas Eco Somáticas*, sharing the conceptual frameworks and the theories and practices that inform them. As a multinaturalist practice, it thinks of the land and its different ecologies as having agency. This approach proposes an ontological opening (de la Cadena [2015]) between the western biological notion of Holobiont and the indigenous concept of Earth Being. The notion of holobiont redefines the individual organism. This idea challenges traditional views of individuality by emphasizing relationality, symbiosis, and collaboration as fundamental to life. The notion of Earth Being, drawn from Indigenous thought, understands the Earth as a living, sentient entity with its own agency and consciousness. Rather than a resource to exploit, the Earth is seen as a relational being, part of a kinship system that includes humans, animals, plants, mountains, rivers, and elements. This perspective emphasizes interconnectedness, rejecting the separation / dualism of nature and culture, and calls for humans to engage as stewards and co-participants in the life of a multispecies community. Between these two notions, the task of the site-sensitive is to feel and to listen to non-human others, (non-human people in multinatural terms) learning from them through a different notion of body that allows for other forms of identification.

In 2022-2023, I developed an artistic/educational project: *The School of Mountains and Waters*⁵: A school of unlearning that explored relations between science, first nations thought and practice, and art and activism, while addressing mining extraction in the central Andes of Chile. The school recognises mountains as living bodies actively involved in the reproduction of water. It comprised several activities: film workshops with children, an exhibition at the children's

5 <https://nadaproductions.at/index/escuela-de-las-montanas-y-las-aguas>

museum in Santiago de Chile, a series of curated conversations, and a walk – a performative walk to the site where the Anglo-American Mining corporation site Los Bronces was going to expand, in the area of the Yerba Loca natural park. Through different activities we aimed at establishing caring relationships between human bodies and bodies of mountains, glaciers, and water.

The school served as an interface between different forms of knowledge, scientific, experiential, artistic, and indigenous, by proposing frames of encounter between art, ecology, climate sciences, activism, biology, hydrology, and experimental geography. As a transdisciplinary team of mestizo and first nations' practitioners, we delved into walking on the Andean site, trying to sense its different places, rock formations, waters, and forests, at the same time incorporating the effects of mining extraction in the area. The performative walk titled *Montañas Vivas* (Living Mountains) was produced through site-sensitive research that explored the territory from these different perspectives, guided by Mapuche⁶ and Wixarika⁷ understandings of Mountains and Waters. The diverse strategies to the work on sensing the Mountain, the effects of the mining extraction on its body, vegetation, climate and water included Wixarika practices of address, such as asking for permission to all directions. The listening practices were guided by Mapuche poet and native forest restorer Leonel Lienlaf, and were based on ancient Mapuche chants that sing about the relations between mountains, forest and waters.

During a series of curated conversations with climate scientists, geologists, artists, First Nations experts, and activists, it became evident that terms like “natural resource”, “Nature”, “Geology”, “Topography”, and “H₂O” were not neutral but actively supported extractive logics. In response, we decided to challenge these terms within the site-sensitive practices we were developing for a performative walk, seeking alternative ways of naming and relating. This process revealed that site-sensitivity required breaking away from the subject-object divide embedded in language and instead cultivating new vocabularies as a form of resistance. In this way, semantic activism became a fundamental part of our approach to performance-making. The performance *Living Mountains*, made through site-sensitive practices included an audio tour that delved on the histories of the mining extraction, its consequences and the movements of resistance to it in the region. It recomposed the language used by the different actors in the political and environmental conflict, proposing new forms of identification with the mountains and waters at stake.

6 The Mapuche are a people native to south-central Chile and southwestern Argentina, particularly in the regions around the Araucanía and Patagonia. The name “Mapuche” comes from the Mapudungun language: “mapu” meaning *land* and “che” meaning *people* – so, “people of the land”.

7 The Wixárika (often spelled *Huichol* in Spanish, though Wixárika is their preferred self-designation) are a people native to the Sierra Madre Occidental mountains in western Mexico, mainly in the states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Durango, Zacatecas, and parts of San Luis Potosí.

Site-sensitive practices are an opening field for performance making and performance studies, that wish to take seriously the knowledge of non-human entities, their agencies and experiences. Listening to the expressivity of the land, to sites as places of non-human creativity and non-human knowledge. They contribute to breaking the spell of the modern/colonial idea of the human as pre – existent to that which sustains its existence. Moving beyond spectacle, representation and presentation the site-sensitive redefines what performance and what audience can be. In the future, site-sensitive artistic practices could become a ground for urgent cosmopolitical agency – if supported by curatorial and cultural policy shifts.



Fig. 6: *The School of Mountains and Waters*, Tangente St. Pölten, Courtesy of the artist, 2024.

This paper offers a set of cheje tools – born at the crossroads of First Nations ontologies and Western thought – This collection of tools for practicing performance as a form of knowledge is not intended to reconnect with nature. Instead, it offers ways to move beyond the naturalist ontologies that have enabled the extractive logics and practices that bring about the current crisis.

The political and environmental challenges we face today, compounded by the global rise of the extreme right that sustains the dualism of nature and culture,

call upon us as artists and thinkers to not only critique but also revolutionize our thinking and our actions. It is time to transform our practices into ways of creating alternative worlds. We must become portals for birthing possible futures. To decolonize performance, dance, and art does not only mean to understand the historical, economical, and environmental process that had led to the current crisis, nor to only criticize existing models. It urges us to transform the ways in which we practice art, the ways in which we create and relate, the very thoughts we use to think with. The crisis is a symptom of an ontological model (Naturalism) that understands through separation supremacy and control, that has devalued forms of knowledge that happen through identification, relation and symbiosis. In this state of affairs to transform this model of thought is urgent.

We find ourselves in a moment when Western thought is beginning to move away from the mechanical paradigms that once justified the exploitation of the Global South under colonial, capitalist, and neoliberal systems. Ailton Krenak, the great thinker from the Krenak peoples from Brazil states: «today myth and science are coming together» (Krenak [2020]). Amerindian knowledge and contemporary science increasingly align in their understanding of plant, animal, and material life. This shift calls for academia to pay attention to the body and its capacity to know through identification and experience, and to actively seek meaningful engagement with other ontological and epistemological systems of knowledge.

Further research perspectives may unfold in exploring deeper the relationship between first nations ritual practices and contemporary performance through the lenses of cosmopolitics and political ontology. Much remains to be explored about how to practice an art that actively responds to the current crisis by imagining and enacting possible forms of healing. May this writing serve as an invitation – to conversations, collaborations, and actions – with artists and thinkers across disciplines who are equally invested in rethinking how we relate, create and imagine.

Asking for allowance to all directions:

We begin by facing East – where the sun rises, the birth of the sun, where knowledge first arose. It is the direction of the children, and of wise elders like my teacher Katira. From here came the maguey and the ancient pulque. The ancestors said that the first beings appeared from the East. We ask permission from all beings that live here: the sacred deer, the trees that greet the sunrise, the birds nesting nearby, the ants, bees, insects, lizards, frogs – all life that dwells in this direction.

Then, we turn to the North – the direction of the air, the sacred mountain of the ancestors and the dead, a place of rest and transformation. It is the realm of the underworld, where life and death feed each other. We greet the women who died in childbirth, the winds and the cold, and the buffalo people. We ask permission from all beings that live here: All life that dwells in this direction.

Next, we face the West – the womb of the Earth, source of life on earth home of the oceans, salt, clay, and mud. This is where the snakes, all marine life, the whale, and other sea animals live. It is where the first songs were born, and the first shamans met with one heart and one eye. It is the origin of the drum, the sacred violin, the parrots, the goldfinch, and the cenxontle, birds that sing endlessly. We ask permission from all beings that live here: All life that dwells in this direction.

Now, we face the South – the place of rain and thunder. The direction of Huitzilopochtli, the humming bird that brings sacred messages. The sacred fire – We ask permission from all who live here. To all life that dwells in this direction.

We then look up to the sky – to the stars, suns, galaxies, and all the forces of the universe. We recognize how they move in great dances in tune with the dance of our Earth mother.

We now look down to the Earth – we touch it with our hands and give thanks for holding us, feeding us, giving us life, and keeping us alive. We cuddle you mother, we thank you, though we are your children. We honour the fungi realm connecting the trees and composting life, to the microorganisms in the soil, and the underground waters that nourish this land.

Finally, we bring our hands to our heart. We feel our heartbeat and we remember the sacred weaving of life we are part of. Here we have come to bloom together, to strengthen ourselves together.

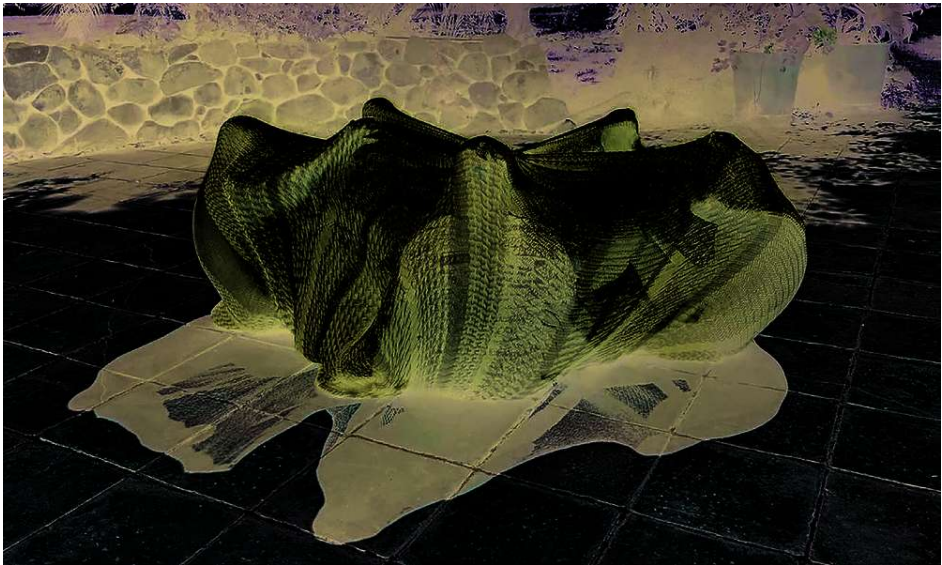


Fig. 7: *To Bloom – Florecimiento*, Performative Sculpture, at Instituto Tropical México.
Courtesy of the artist, 2024.

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The Performer Without Qualities. Empathetic Signification, Non- Performative Performance and Mimesis in Artistic Practice and Populist Politics

HELENA BOTTO

University of Roehampton
helenabotto@gmail.com

Abstract. This article reports on instances of my performance practice developed through strategies of over-identification, while establishing a parallel relation with certain types of right-wing populist performance and their theatrical processes (of identification). By doing so, I question the ethics of these theatrical processes when applied to politics. Departing from Lacan and Laclau's notions of signifiers, I introduce the term empathetic signification, to reflect on the process by which populists re-signify signifiers to construct provisional and multiple political identities. I then draw on iterability and the performative to reflect on how the non-performativity of populist performance constructs a mouldable subjectivity. Finally, situating this subjectivity within the framework of mimesis and plasticity, I examine populists' relationships with their audiences and environments, showing how they strategically acquire power by making themselves sufficiently *plastique* to be shaped by their audiences' affects, and subsequently imprinting a newly created form upon them.

Keywords. Over-identification, empathetic signification, non-performative, mimesis, populism.