TRANSLATION AGAINST EPISTEMICIDE THROUGH CONTEMPORARY ART

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses on the translation of non-Western knowledges. It aims to describe different types of translation which anthropologists have used to approach a kind of knowledge that is constructed not only with the intellect but also with more than five senses. Including the ideas of the so-called 'sensory anthropology', which, together with other types of translation in anthropology, such as 'shamanic translation', 'translation as equivocation', 'intercultural translation' and 'total translation', open the door to a new way of addressing and dealing with the translation of this knowledge. The article also shows how some contemporary translation theories can be combined with the sensory turn in anthropology to be able to translate a type of knowledge that from time immemorial has not been transmitted through the conventional channels of the Western world.
KEYWORDS: Indigenous Cultures; Knowledge; Translation

1. Introduction: against epistemicide

On so many occasions, translation practices have facilitated colonialism (Price, 2023). They have facilitated epistemicide. Some decades ago, the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2001; 2005; 2016) denounced the suppression and silencing of non-Western forms of knowledge by coining this term, 'epistemicide', which refers to how the indigenous knowledges of the Global South have been completely marginalized. 'Epistemicide' has to do with the suppression of other, non-scientific forms of knowledges (Santos, Nunes and Meneses, 2007, p. xix). It has far-reaching consequences because it "disempowered these societies, rendering them incapable of representing the world as their own in their own terms, and thus of considering the world as susceptible to being changed by their own power and for their own objectives" (Santos, 2018, p. 8).

Today, Karen Bennett (2007; 2004a; 2024b), Joshua Price (2023), Valerie Henitiuk (2024), Vicente Rafael (2024), Christina Korak and Rafael Schögler (2024) are some translation scholars who warn about epistemicide as a way of "denigrating, disappearing, ignoring, or discrediting knowledge produced by subaltern intelligentsia. Eurocentric scholarship, the Global North, and the West tend to sideline or disregard intellectuals from the Global South and undervalue their contributions. This amounts to epistemic marginalization" (Price, 2023, pp. 53, 74). As Price stated in his presentation at the Lisbon conference, translation can involve "theft (for example, intellectual extractivism, piracy, cultural appropriation, vampirization, Frankensteinization, and museumification)" and also "destruction (degrading, ridiculing, or simplifying subaltern knowledge beyond recognition, denying its coevalness, rendering it nonsense)".[1]

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[1] Available at: https://www.epistran.org/international-conference/abstracts-and-bios (Accessed: 12 May 2024).

They also warn us against framing cultures reductively as homogeneous, since this "is seething with internal differences, striations, and power divides" (Price, 2023, p. 141). Stereotyping and downplaying differences has led for centuries to the most cruel situations: "…the stereotype of the carefree, lazy native, coasting through a life free from material ambition, was deployed by thousands of Europeans conquerors, plantation overseers and colonial officials in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania as a pretext for the use of bureaucratic terror to force local people into work: everything from outright enslavement to punitive tax regimes, corvée labour and debt peonage" (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021, p.149).

If we consider that knowledge can only be used in the singular, all other ways of understanding the world cease to be valid, or even possible. The sole epistemology that has prevailed in the West utterly disdains cultural diversity. One of the most insightful criticisms of the domination of Western knowledge is that of Talal Asad (1986) in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, co-edited by historian James Clifford and anthropologist George Marcus. Asad accuses anthropologists and translators of acting as colonial agents. Also very relevant are the 'relational ontologies' of Arturo Escobar (2018), which propose a 'pluriverse' that includes other worlds, and other knowledges. It is ultimately a question of going beyond the 'One-World World', criticized by John Law (2015).

2. Anthropology and non-western types of translation

To translate knowledge without contributing to epistemicide, to translate knowledge that is not constructed according to Western parameters, we need a type of translation that takes into account the plural, relational nature of the knowledge created by human, nonhuman, and extrahuman beings. We need a translation capable of achieving what Viveiros de Castro ([2009] 2014, pp. 40, 48) calls "a permanent decolonization of thought" (see also Page, 2021, pp. 15-16).

It goes without saying that translational processes play an extremely important role in the creation and distribution of knowledge and are "essential not just to the spread of knowledge but also to our conceptualization of what knowledge actually is" (Bennett, 2023, p. 444). Translating is both a way of disseminating knowledge and a way of disseminating power, and this power is of a very specific type. For centuries, the West was the original text that had to be translated in the colonies, so that those who lacked knowledge would learn and adopt the knowledge of the dominating power.

In recent decades, anthropology has proposed new practices in indigenous translation and interpreting that are in vivid contrast to the traditional ones, which "are being dismantled, with new approaches being developed by various communities, who rightly focus on their own needs and priorities. Social justice activism is fighting back against the conquest model that for centuries has dominated in the Western world, where various forms of intercultural communication have too often functioned as acts of violence serving political agendas" (Henitiuk and Mahieu, 2024, p. 170).

In anthropology, forms of translation have emerged that are well suited to indigenous knowledge. For example, shamanic translation stems from the idea that the shaman is a translator, because as observed by Abram (1996, pp. 14, 15), he travels to and from different worlds. There are many types of shamanic translation, which highlight "the error of generalizing Amazonian shamanic experiences under the same modus operandi. It encompasses a multitude of what we propose to understand as modes of translation, which perhaps only share the commonality of being a way to connect worlds and facilitate communication based on their differences" (Laia and Guimarães, 2022, p. 12). Shamans translate between human and non-human worlds. Their translations do not necessarily rely on words (Taylor, 2015, pp. 124, 141). Shamans include other bodies "in the movement of transpecific translation. The narrative of this displacement […] is communicated to the rest of the people through the body-language, in a radical exercise of alterity" (Laia and Guimarães, 2022, p. 10). A very relevant feature of shamanic translations is that they want to preserve difference and not homogenize it by imposing equivalence (Taylor, 2015, p. 119). This feature, which emphasizes difference rather than sameness, appears in other anthropological translation proposals, such as those of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro or Boaventura Sousa Santos. This characteristic radically distances these proposals from the more traditional Western mode of translation, which values equivalence and faithfulness to the original text above all else.

Based on a cosmology inhabited by human and extrahuman beings, Viveiros de Castro ([2009] 2014) constructs and advocates perspectivism, whose aim is "not to find in human conceptual language a synonym (a co-referential representation) for the representations that other species employ to indicate the same thing 'out there'; rather, the objective is to not lose sight of the difference concealed by the deceiving homonyms that connect/separate our language from those of other species" (Viveiros de Castro, [2009] 2014, p. 74). For Viveiros de Castro, shamanism is a mode of action "entailing a mode of knowledge, or, rather, a certain ideal of knowledge. In certain respects, this ideal is diametrically opposed to the objectivist epistemology encouraged by Western modernity" (Viveiros de Castro, [2009] 2014, pp. 60, 62). Perspectivism as translation means that translation encompasses the worlds of extrahuman subjectivities — dolphins see a river as a house, the small creatures that inhabit a garden see it as a forest, and jaguars see blood as manioc beer. Far from equivalence and faithfulness, translation is equivocation (Viveiros de Castro, 2004, p. 10).

Boaventura de Sousa Santos' intercultural translation also eschews the dichotomies or dualisms typical of Western translation, preferring instead to focus on the differences and similarities between cultures. Santos proposes intercultural translation as a way of avoiding the epistemicide of non-Western knowledge in its many varieties. For Santos, the two main procedures underlying the epistemologies of the South are ecologies of knowledges and intercultural translation (Santos, 2016, p. 212). Santos understands intercultural translation as the translation that could and does occur between "the knowledges or cultures of the global North (Eurocentric, Western-centric) and [those of]

the global South, the east included" (Santos, 2018, p. 34). He opts for what he calls "an ecology of knowledges" or "the recognition of the copresence of different ways of knowing and the need to study the affinities, divergences, complementarities, and contradictions among them in order to maximize the effectiveness of the struggles of resistance against oppression" (Santos, 2018, p. 8). This ecology of knowledges is closely linked to intercultural translation, because this must lead to nonhierarchical communication, with respect to difference. Translation thus becomes a political project that aims "at reciprocal empowerment" (Santos, 2016, p. 216).

Another type of translation that emerges from indigenous cultures is Jerome Rothenberg's 'total translation'. Total translation is related to 'ethnopoetics', a term that first appeared in Rothenberg's *Technicians of the Sacred* (1968). 'Ethnopoetics' explores the potential of primitive oral literature and its translation into English. In this sense, another important contribution is *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* (1970-1980), a journal with sound recordings that reflects on the importance of ethically translating indigenous knowledge and their oral verbal and non-verbal art. Rothenberg is aware that to translate Indian songs and poetry, he has to translate everything, especially orality and the visual aspects of language, as is the case of Navajo visual poetry since visual languaging among the Navajos consists of ceremonial sandpaintings, or drypaintings, which are part of the complex "Navajo chantway system, along with songs, masked dances, and a range of smaller and larger event-pieces (body painting, prayerstick planting, pollen events, herb events, et.) that work toward a balance of negative & positive elements in the patient and the world".[2] As in the previous cases, Rothenberg does not regard translation as a search for equivalence. Total translation "is not the reproduction of, or stand-in for, some fixed original, but […] it functions as a commentary on the other and itself and on the differences between them. It is much more a kind of question than a summing up" (Rothenberg in Swann, 1992, p. 65). Total translation signifies translating not only meaning but sounds, sensations, emotions. Its aim is to bring us closer to the other, so that we do not remain in the one-world world: "I translate, then, as a way of reporting what I've sensed or seen of an other's situation […] I know that in so far as I developed a strategy for translation from Seneca, I tried to keep to approaches I felt were consistent with their life-style" (Rothenberg, [1962] 1981, p. 78). His total translations of Navajo poetry deal with seemingly meaningless words, nonsense utterances and many other aspects of Indian poems that other translators had not considered, such as the music that accompanied the original. His translations of the Horse Songs are not easy to read because they are far from orthodox. We find phrases like *baheegwing hawuNnawu N nngahn* which we do not know to pronounce 'correctly' —since we assume there is a correct way to pronounce them, a right way to read these poems.

All these types of translation arise from ways of knowing the world that are far removed from traditional Western scientific knowledge. Anthropologists and poets who

[2] Available at: https://www.ubu.com/ethno/visuals/navajo.html (Accessed: 14 May 2024).

are close to the different and varied indigenous epistemologies have demonstrated the need to translate with more than five senses, with the whole body, those types of knowledge produced by human and non-human entities, that communication that takes place among the trees, among the birds, in the rivers and in the mountains. In this context, the so-called 'sensory turn' in anthropology (Howes, 2024; 2023; 2022; 2019; 1991) may be useful to develop new ways of translating non-Western knowledge. The sensory turn shows how different cultures use and prioritize the senses, how knowledge is not only achieved through the intellect. Following the sensory turn implies that knowledge is acquired in a polysensory way, and if this is so, the concept of translation needs to be broadened:

> Can smell be translated into sound? How are biochemical signs translated into electro-magnetic signs? What kind of reality does translation studies construct if it never deals with the translation of touch, smell or taste? […] translation is a complex process: Meaning is a complex trajectory to which a multitude of factors contributes (Marais, 2019, pp. 55,56).

These ways of translating arise from the conviction that our bodies have formed themselves "in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth — our eyes have evolved in subtle interaction with other eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves and the honking of geese […] We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human" (Abram, 1996, p. 22).

3. Joseph Beuys: Shamanic translator

Decades ago, earthworks, Fluxus, and body art artists experimented and translated meaning with the whole body, especially using the so-called 'lower senses'. Worth mentioning are classic earthwork sculptures, such as *Spiral Jetty, Broken Circle* and *Double Negative.* Also relevant are the site sculptors of the 1970s, such as Gordon Matta-Clark, Walter de Maria, Charles Simonds, Nancy Holt, and many others, who do not view the landscape as a subject for their work. Instead, their goal is to merge with it, commit themselves to its conservation, and become one with nature. Moreover, earthworks are also a way of avoiding gallery appropriation -thus, Richard Long sees art "as a return to the senses" (Rodaway, 1994, p. 3).[3] Although some of these works leave no trace, and do not modify the landscape, others do not. This has led to harsh criticism from those who claim that such art does not conserve the land, and in fact, harms it.

Artists such as Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock were genuinely interested in primitive myths. Pollock is especially interesting here because he was also familiar with the world of shamans (Rushing, 1989, p. 282). He grew up in the Southwest United States, where early

[3] Long "builds his art from walking across the landscape, from an intimate sensual experience with space and the materials of his environment and forms his 'sculptures' in pattern with the landscape, its structure and material substance, both by leaving arrangements of stones and other materials in lines or circles in the landscape" (Rodaway, 1994, p. 3).

on, he interacted with Native American art and culture (Rushing, 1995, pp. 169-190). In an interview (Landau, 1989, p. 56), he stated that "I have always been impressed with the plastic qualities of American Indian art". His visits to the Museum of American Indian Art and the American Museum of Natural History were important to his work, but the exhibition that marked him most deeply was Indian Art of the United States (1941) in the Museum of Modern Art. The collaborative exhibition by Donald Ellis Gallery and Washburn Gallery at Frieze Masters London featured a series of Pollock's drawings from the early 1940s with a selection of Native American art dating from the late 19th century, which included Yup'ik dance masks, Hopi kachina dolls and a totem pole attributed to Haida chief John Robson.

Works such as *Naked Man* (1938-41), *Guardians of the Secret* (1943) and *The Magic Mirror* (1941) exemplify Pollock's shamanistic influences (Firestone, 2017; 2008). Navajo sand paintings greatly inspired Jackson Pollock. His drip paintings are extremely haptic, in part inspired by the tactility of Navajo sand paintings. The sense of touch is here very important. Pollock's drip paintings reflect the integration in his work of the Native-American shaman as both a healer and artist. Seeing Pollock lay his whole body on the canvas covering the ground is clearly reminiscent of the Navajo healers in direct contact with the materiality of their sand paintings. Similarly, Pollock's paintings are also multisensory. A closer look reveals their multiple layers, textures, colors, and sensations that appeal to all the senses. Pollock paints with his whole body, translating sensations and emotions through the 'lower' sense of touch. Touch is here synonymous of bodily intimacy. In the same way as the shamans of the Navajo sand paintings, Pollock is in direct contact with the work of art. Like these shamans, he lives within the work, immersed in the creative process, which is more important than the final result:

> On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting. This is akin to the Indian sand painters of the West […] Pollock also declared that, when actually painting, he was unaware of his actions: "When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing […] because the painting has a life of its own" (Adams, 2011, p. 521).

But perhaps the most important artist-shaman in the second half of the 20th century is Joseph Beuys:

> Beuys has clearly read a good deal about the role of the Shaman and about religious and magic practices in primitive tribes. And as in these tribes, in Beuys's work we cannot see the Shaman and his practices as separate from one another. (The Shaman has to take responsibility for his predictions - he is not only answerable to himself but to society) […] Beuys goes back to the Shaman's original private function as investigator of the natural sciences, making references to the world of hunting, fishing and farming, but he combines that role with the more complex public one for the good of society, exploring the powers of plants, of drugs and minerals, the phases of the moon, the mysteries of life and death and so on (Seymour, 1983, p. 12).

Joseph Beuys is an example of what Rosalind Krauss (1984, p. 514) calls "hard primitivist". Soft primitivists are those artists who are inspired "by the forms and symbols of indigenous cultures, that is their surface *visual appearance* […] Here the ethnographic sources are appreciated primarily for their aesthetic qualities, not for their ethnographically specific symbolic and religious content […] Hard primitivists, on the other hand, become involved in the recreation of indigenous rituals, assume the indigenous on a more personal level, and show a greater interest in the cultural context" (Schneider, 2006, pp. 38-39). Beuys was profoundly engaged with the 'other' "ever since his reported close encounter with the Tartars who saved his life after he had crashed his Stuka plane in the Crimea during World War Two. Beuys conceived of his art practices as similar to those of a shaman (or healer) and of his works as "social sculpture" (Schneider, 2006, pp. 38-39).

Some of Joseph Beuys' works directly refers to the shaman, such as his drawings, *Trance in the House of the Shaman* and *Dance of the Shaman.* In the 1960s, his actions include *The silence of Marcel Duchamp is overrated*, *The Chief, and in us ... under us ... flooded,* and *How to explain pictures to a dead hare*, among others. These initiation rites all involve organic and magical forces, which expand the concept of 'art'.

The Chief (1963-64), performed in galleries in Copenhagen and Berlin, is a ritual action lasting nine hours. He lay in a felt roll with two dead hares attached to his head and feet. Beuys positioned himself on the gallery floor, wrapped entirely in a large felt 2.25-meter blanket; the felt insulating him from the external world and facilitating his shamanistic communication with the animals. Emerging from either end of the blanket were the two dead hares, and at the base of the left wall, there was a 167 cm block of German margarine. At 165 cm from the floor, there was an installation of copper rod, a lock of hair, and two fingernails. On the right, against the wall, there was another block of margarine similar to the first one. Inside the blanket, Beuys held a microphone into which he breathed, coughed, groaned, grumbled, whispered, and whistled at irregular intervals. Spectators could hear his heart as well as the letters of the alphabet in disarray. The 'theme' of this action was 'how to become a revolutionary', which Beuys believed was necessary for any evolutionary process.

The hare, mythologically linked to notions of transformation and access to the earth's energies, is also present in his 1965 solo performance, *Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt* (How to Explain Paintings to a Dead Hare).[4] Beuys, with his head entirely coated in honey and gold leaf, performed a sort of a guided tour of the art gallery by showing and explaining each work to a dead hare, which he held in his arms. Beuys communicates with the hare through touch:

> Feeling is to touching as listening is to hearing. Feeling is active and exploratory. It takes things in hand, turning them over in all directions in search of information. Such is the tactility of the blind, who seek to identify the objects in their paths or throughout the day

[4] Re-enacted in 2005 by Marina Abramovic, alongside with Ai Weiwei, Olafur Eliasson, Christoph Schlingensief and Matthew Barney, to name but a few.

> with a precise probing of their surroundings, most often through simple contact with things already known. Feeling is a kind of tactile penetration that goes deeper to discover what surface information alone cannot provide (Le Breton, [2006] 2017, p. 102).

Spectators had previously been locked out of the gallery and could only observe his performance from the outside through a window. Occasionally, he would stop and return to the center of the gallery, where he stood over a dead fir tree lying on the floor. After three hours, the public was let into the room. Beuys sat upon a stool in the entrance area with the hare on his arm and his back to the onlookers. He is an example of the sensory turn in anthropology because he communicates through touch, a very important sense to translate knowledge:

> The tactile sense encompasses the entire body, inside and out. It emanates from the whole expanse of the skin, unlike the other senses, which are more circumscribed. We feel the surrounding world at every bodily surface and in every instant, even while we sleep. Sensory experience is first and foremost tactile experience, contact with others and objects, the feeling of our feet touching the ground. The world imparts its forms, volumes, textures, shapes, masses, and temperatures to us through its endless layers of skin (Le Breton, [2006] 2017, p. 95).

Human rationality is not something too appealing to Beuys: "The idea of explaining to an animal conveys a sense of the secrecy of the world and of existence that appeals to the imagination. Then, as I said, even a dead animal preserves more powers of intuition than some human beings with their stubborn rationality. I try to bring to light the complexity of creative areas". In Beuys' performances, rational models of thought are eliminated, and the earth thus becomes a means of communication:

> The hare has a direct relation to birth […]. For me the hare is a symbol of incarnation. The hare does in reality what man can only do mentally: he digs himself in, he digs a construction. He incarnates himself in the earth and that itself is important. Or so I see it. Using honey on my head I am naturally doing something that is concerned with thought. The human capacity is not to give honey, but to think -to give ideas. In this way the deathlike character of thought is made living again. Honey is doubtlessly a living substance. Human thought can also be living. But it can also be deadly intellectually, and remain dead, externally deadly in the areas of politics or education (Beuys quoted in Adriani et al., 1979, p. 132).

The relationship between reason and intuition is key to understanding Beuys's actions as shamanic translations. In the concept of 'reason', Beuys includes logical thinking, which, because of its rigid and closed nature, paralyzes all activity. On the other hand, Beuys believed that intuition could effectively broaden this limited form of thought. The conventional concept of knowledge can expand, thanks to the world of sensations and emotions. Without rejecting more traditional stances, the scope of this organic principle can be enlarged to include spiritual and sensual dimensions. This is all related to what Beuys called 'the primitive wisdom of being', to mythology, to the development of the animal part of man, and to his cosmic concept of creativity.

His installation *Plight* (1985) is an idea with a positive pole and a negative one. On the one hand, there is a difficult situation or dilemma and on the other, there is trust and a bond. This bond is not only between human beings, but also between human beings and Nature, which includes animals, plants, and the Earth. As Bastian (1985, pp. 12-13) writes, Beuys champions freedom as the very foundation of '*Ausgeliefertsein'*, the surrendered being. Beuys is concerned about man's lack of sensitivity towards Nature:

> In an epoch that linked man with water, and the animal with the stars, the moon could be the head of a decapitated goddess. We have buried that era, which the Stoics called 'sympathia universalis', under a mountain of earth. In the face of it, nothing stands today but a circular, closed structure, a truth that is nothing but a beginning. Just as the 'fact in itself' is something that exists without interpretation, so 'man in himself' is a thing that cannot be grasped. In the conclusions of modern philosophy and modern ethnology - which suppress the dichotomies of society and history, of wild thought and convergent thought - man is the 'figure of a process'...The answers that we give ourselves today with respect to ourselves must remain a step behind, and are, at the same time, the unknown (Bastian, 1985, pp. 8-9. My translation).

However, for Beuys, the primitive world is not a form of evasion, but quite the opposite. It is a way of attacking the closed, static, and dogmatic structures of contemporary society:

> I do not want to go back to the magical or mythical world, but I want to pursue with the help of these pictures a visual analysis, and also to bring an element of visual analysis to consciousness [...] I do not want to go away from modern achievements, I want to go closer to them, I want to expand in that I attempt to create a larger basis for understanding [...] Had I expressed all this in recognizably logical statements, in a book, for example, it would not have been successful, because modern man is inclined only to satisfy his intellect and to understand everything according to the laws of logic. But it was not up to me to unilaterally address logic, it was up to me to break off all the residues present in the subconscious and to transfer a chaotically detached orderly procedure into turbulence, the beginning of the new always takes place in chaos (Beuys in Bastian, 1985, p. 72).

Relevant to all these ideas is Beuys' interest in animals (Seymour, 1983, pp. 14-21) and, particularly, in bees, which began when he was a student of Ewald Mataré. The archetypal representation of animals becomes the equivalent of Nature and the primitive world, of everything that civilization has not yet modified. In 1971, in an interview with Achille Bonito Oliva, Beuys said about the significance of animals in his work: "If I want to give man a new anthropological position, I also have to attribute a new position to everything that concerns him. To establish his downward ties with animals, plants, and nature, as well as his upward links with angels and spirits" (in Bonito Oliva, 1990, p. 81).

Bees, hares, deer, mice, and sheep are recurring motifs in Beuys' actions. They are ways of expanding our knowledge of the world and of ourselves. In fact, Beuys' theories on sculpture are based on the analysis of the physical-organic universe of bees. This type of sculpture is based not so much on the optical and rational perception of reality as on physical stimuli as well as on intuitive and sensual experiences that defy codification. On

this issue, as on others, he was influenced by Rudolf Steiner, and also by the pantheistic, mythological, and symbolic interpretations of Maurice Maeterlinck.

Bees generate heat and are thus capable of producing wax, from which they 'sculpt' hexagonal cells. For Beuys, this creation of heat and the construction of honeycombs are primary sculptural processes that consist of the chaotic flow of heat retention. This is in turn a source of energy that gives off 'spiritual heat', as Steiner would say. The final result is a set of geometric forms that arise from the initial chaos. The analysis of all these processes is the origin of Beuys's interest in materials such as wax or fat (e.g. his works *SaFG SaUG* and *Fat Sculpture*).

The heat organism of the bee colony is without a doubt the essential element of connection between the wax and fat and the bees. What had interested me about bees, or rather about their life system, is the total heat organization of such an organism and the sculpturally finished forms within this organization. On one hand bees have this element of heat, which is a very strong fluid element, and on the other hand they produce crystalline sculptures: they make regular geometric forms. Here we already find something of sculptural theory, as we do in the. corners of fat, which also appear in certain situations in a geometric context. But the actual character of the exiting heat is a fluid element, whereby the fat is affected by the heat and thus flows off. From this undefined element of motion, by way of a diminishing element of movement, surfaces a form which appears in abstract, geometric configurations. This is practiced regularly by bees (Beuys in Bastian, 1985, pp. 41-42).

In 1974, Beuys performed *I Like America and America Likes Me*, his first performance in the United States, also known as *El Coyote*. The work began when Beuys started his trip from Düsseldorf to New York. When he arrived at the airport, he wrapped himself in a felt blanket - the artist's fetish material - and leaned on a large shepherd's crook. Beuys was driven in an ambulance to a gallery where he shared a room for three days with a wild Coyote. The viewers watched the two specimens behind a wire mesh and observed the artist's and the animal's continuing interaction with each other, how the artist talked to the animal, offered it various objects and interacted with it. The coyote would bite the felt, circle the artist or piss on the *Wall Street Journal*, a symbol of capitalism. At the end of the three days, Beuys hugged the coyote. Apparently, they had become friends, and just as he had come, he returned to Germany without having set foot on New York soil for the entire trip.

Beuys argued that this week-long performance at the Rene Block Gallery in New York reflected the history of the persecution of the American Indians, as well as the relationship between the United States and Europe. He wanted to concentrate only on the coyote, which symbolized a once-pure natural world and the disappearing land of Native Americans. He said he wanted to isolate himself, to see nothing of the United States but the coyote and to exchange roles with him. The confrontation between Beuys and the coyote symbolized for many the reconciliation between culture and nature. The artist's howls and Teutonic words, a kind of meeting of cultures. The work in general, a kind of

attempt to heal America from the trauma caused by one of the greatest genocides of Native Americans in history. In performances such as *Coyote*, Beuys presented himself "as a shamanic figure, communing with an animal formerly deified by the American Indians in order, symbolically, to recover a lost relationship for the materialist West" (Hopkins, 2000, p. 86).

4. Conclusion

The first half of the 20th century was a time when contemporary art showed a great interest in primitivism. Western artists and writers have been interested in non-literate societies ever since the beginning of the 20th century. Examples include Gauguin's paintings in Tahiti, and the primitivism of early 20th century art, such as Picasso's African masks or the primitive art of Mark Tobey, Adolf Gottlieb, Eric Fischl, and Franz Kline, among others. *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, for example, was featured in the MOMA exhibition *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984). However, we should bear in mind that the painting aroused heated controversy[5] because it was presented alongside African masks, which could have been Picasso's inspiration for two of the women in his painting. However, according to the catalogue, he claimed never having seen these masks. Cubism transformed African sculpture into something completely modern.

For centuries, museums have spoken on behalf of people. They have created knowledge from a Western perspective. They have "a long and troubling history" (Sturge, 2014, p. 431). From their emergence in the eighteenth century, they have imposed how to look, walk, hear and talk in those spaces (Leahy, 2012). Museums are translation sites (Simon, 2019) which have power because they rewrite history through the construction of official knowledge (Sleeper-Smith, 2009) and have contributed to epistemicide by translating non-western peoples as stereotypes,[6] as wordless and powerless objects of visual consumption […] it was the mid and late nineteenth century that saw the great expansion of museums as sites to show artefacts collected – under anything but reputable circumstances – from what were considered the 'primitive', 'natural', or 'tribal' peoples of the world (Sturge, 2014, p. 431).

Beuys was one of the first artists in the 20th century who highlighted the possibility of using the space of the museum as a way to contest Western forms of knowledge. Only recently museums have started to think critically about who and how decided to present objects (Geismar, 2018). "Post-museums" (Neather, 2018, p. 365) are now "translation zones" (Neather, 2021a, 2021b). Whereas traditionally museums privileged the sense of

[5] According to Clifford (2013, p. 358), the exhibition of tribal objects deprives them of their context and cultural significance. See also Schneider, 2006, pp. 29-31.

[6] "Notions about the 'primitive' nature of Indian society influenced what was collected and how it was displayed. Most frequently, Indigenous peoples were described in terms of deficiencies. Consequently, Indians were measured against the ideals of Western society; and whether describing beliefs, values, or institutions, they were measured against the institutions that Western society most cherished about themselves at the time" (Sleeper-Smith, 2009, pp. 1-2).

sight (Howes and Classen, 2014), in these new translation zones they are beginning to translate knowledge with all the senses.

In the 21st century there are many other examples of how post-museums are beginning to change the traditional way of translating knowledge (Edwards, Gosden and Phillips, 2002). Post-museums are now spaces occupied by indigenous artists (Page, 2023; Schneider and Wright, 2016; Gadoua, 2014; García Canclini, 2014; Loft and Swanson, 2014; Dudley, 2010) and non-human beings (Page, 2021; Woodward and McHugh, 2017) where knowledge is translated not only through the intellect but also through the senses (Salter, 2015; Jones, 2006). And new research programs focused in cultural and artistic activism of Indigenous peoples in relationship to new media show "how can different bodies and cultures engage, transform, and resist dominant paradigms of power and oppression through the senses" (Salter, 2018, p. 87).

All these examples and many others show that new research avenues are being developed which demonstrate that contemporary art can be an example of the new way of translating non-western knowledges. These new avenues are characterized by openness, equivocation, the sensorial, and the intermingling of different worlds. They are the opposite of the One-World World and of epistemicide.

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