

FESTIVAL TRANSITIO 2017

“¿Cómo decir nosotrxs?”

<http://transitiomx.net>

In our times of environmental crisis, Transito 7 explores the themes of energy, sustainability and the environment through the question of “¿Cómo decir nosotrxs?” (How to say us?)ⁱ, focussing on the complex network of relations that constitute the environment and the capacity to perceive and recognise the diverse agents involved in the constant co-creation of a world in common. The environment is not something outside of ourselves, it is us. As Timothy Morton puts it, recognising this collective identity “*implies including nonhuman beings in this new picture of the human. The only way “us” makes sense is as an ecological “us.”*”ⁱⁱⁱ

This “*ecological us*” is what Vandana Shiva refers to as the current “*ecological change*”ⁱⁱⁱ, the shift to seeing ourselves as part of the complex network of life, members of the Earth family and not bosses or rulers to exploit as we please. She points out that current science is undergoing a paradigm shift from separation to interconnection, from the mechanistic and reductionist to the relational and holistic. While solar panels, electric cars or other technologies can contribute to reducing human impact on the planet, it is the conscience of our interdependence with other beings, our openness and ability to listen, perceive, care for and enjoy the myriad relations that compose us that is the great hope of the Anthropocene, the geological period we are now living in, leading us to change our “*core ideas of what it means to exist, what Earth is, what society is*”^{iv}.

Of course this perception of the world is nothing new, rather it is and has been basic to many indigenous cultures around the world for millenia. In the Andean, and some Amazonic, cultures this vision is resumed in the concept of Sumak Kawsay – Good Living for all creatures and communities and the Earth herself. In Lakota territory, in North America, the phrase “Mitákuye Oyás’in” (we are all family) also resumes this idea, referring not just to humans or animals but to everything from the elements to the stars.

Ana Mendieta, whose series “Esculturas Rupestres” (Sculptures on Cave Walls) is featured in the Transito exhibition, was profoundly influenced by indigenous art and claimed that her art was seeking that “*one universal energy which runs through everything: from insect to man, from man to spectre, from spectre to plant, from plant to galaxy.*”^v In 1981 she returned to Cuba, the country she had left 20 years before to emigrate to the United States, and produced this series, carving the shapes of goddesses into the soft limestone rock of the Aguila cave in Jaruco Park, formerly inhabited by prehispanic peoples, and naming them after goddesses from the Taíno and Ciboney cultures. In a letter to her sister she spoke about how these sculptures connected her to the earth and how her body became part of nature and nature part of her body. Today these silhouettes also suggest absence, the absence of Mendieta, herself victim of feminicide, the absence of all the women who have disappeared in Mexico and other places, the exploitation of both the earth and the bodies of women, the ancestral territories invaded by mining and agricultural exploitation.

Currently the only country in the world that recognises rights for both human and non-human bodies is Ecuador, where the constitution of 2008 explicitly recognises that nature has legal rights. This new contract that recognises the agency of the natural world was impelled by the

indigenous movements but its application is very conflictual. Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares explore “*this new constitutional space wherein both humans and nonhumans gather in a political assembly*”^{vi} in their installation *Forest Law*, recently shown in the 2016 Bienal of Sao Paulo and now in *Transitio*. The double channel video shows the conflicts between the extractivism of the State and exploitation by transnational mining companies of the rich mineral deposits of Amazonia and the struggle of the indigenous peoples of Sarayaku, through the constitutional courts and actions in the territory, to preserve the living forests, their inhabitants and the planet itself.

The Democratic Republic of Congo in West Africa is also a theatre of intense struggles for valuable natural resources, submerged in war due to its deposits of uranium and coltan, mineral which is essential for almost all consumer electronic goods like phones, tablets or computers. Jean Kayatambi grew up beside a uranium mine where his father worked as an electrician and his mother as a typist. His sculptures explore the questions of energy, the relationship with nature and (post)colonialism, building precarious machines to process these flows of energy. In *Transitio* Kayatambi will be creating a site-specific work during two weeks of residence in which he will build “*Nebuloza*”, an algorithm of cardboard, wire and everyday items that tries to include in its processing the different inputs and outputs of the contemporary world.

Smits & Smits, from the previously Soviet republic of Latvia in the Baltic Sea explore, through their project *Biotricity*, the RIXC institute that they have directed for the last decade and the network of like minded artists that they provoke, what they call a “*poetics of green energy*”, exploring “*local ecosystems for envisioning renewable future scenarios, by reconsidering our relations with nature and technology, biological and social systems, human and microorganism worlds*”^{vii}. At the same time their installation enables us to perceive the otherwise invisible electrical activity of the bacteria, both in the natural pond environment and the bacterial battery that they have constructed with the collaboration of a team of artists and scientists.

This use of technology to work things through, to construct thought, to visualise the invisible, marks a very different approach to how we traditionally use or understand machines. *TZ'IK* is another example in the exhibition, a spherical robot made of mud by Paula Gaetano-Adi and Gustavo Crembil, that doesn't seem to do anything useful, rather its erratic behaviour and artisanal construction undermines the utilitarian view of machines and invites us to think of them as other forms of life, requiring relationships that we must build from observation and tenderness. In *Transitio 7* the technologies are for amplifying perception, operating within consciousness itself and opening our awareness and sensibility. As Paul Klee said in 1920, “*Kunst gibt nicht das Sichtbare wieder, sondern macht sichtbar*”, (art doesn't reproduce the visible, rather it makes visible)^{viii}.

Just as “*Biotricity*” makes the electrical activity of bacteria visible and audible to humans, so Nelo Akamatsu's installation “*Chijikinkutsu*”, winner of the *Ars Electronica Golden Nica* in 2015, makes geomagnetism perceptible to our ears by the construction of an analogue machine made of hundreds of tiny needles floating in glasses of water. The title is a neologism that combines the words *Chijiki*, geomagnetism and *Shuikinkutsu*, a sound installation in traditional Japanese gardens that uses water drops and bamboo. *Chijikinkutsu* incites us to

listen, to become sensitive and expand our senses to enter in delicate relationships with the world and its invisible, ubiquitous and mysterious currents.

The Antarctic, land of ice and spectres, is the laboratory that Alejandra Perez uses to investigate invisible forms of power, electromagnetic webs, the clash of the geopolitical and the territory itself, hunting “*ontologies in movement, that hide and flicker in and out of visibility*”, translating the imperceptible to 8 channel sound. Martin Howse's laboratory is the silent soil itself, he uses electronics, software and the body to give it voice, “*uniting deep earth currents and atmospheric signals with vocal beak and tongue fragility*”. While Howse is a tecnomagician who draws on the Western tradition, from the Alchemists through John Dee and Thomas Pynchon, using home made technologies to enter in contact with other forces and spirits, Pablo Amaringo came from the Peruvian Amazon and was trained in the use of Ayahuasca, an ancient vegetable technology for healing and heightening perception. After practising as a healer for many years he later turned exclusively to painting, encouraged by the Colombian anthropologist Luis Eduardo Luna, and was able to depict the visions and insights that he experienced, revealing a forest full of a myriad of beings, an animated world where everything has its spirit and relationships are to be negotiated, contracts made and dangers dodged.

“Every tree, every plant, has a spirit. People may say that the plant has no mind. I tell them that the plant is alive & conscious. A plant may not talk, but there is a spirit in it that is conscious, that sees everything, which is the soul of the plant, its essence, what makes it alive. The channels through which the water & sap move are the veins of the spirit.”^{ix}

Several works in the festival explore the relationship with plants through their own forms of communication, movement and odors. Anirara Rodado and Jean-Marc Chomaz, in their work “Basic Transmutation / Alien Migration” build a tentacular distilling machine for Eucalyptus in which Rodado dances a choreography inspired by the night time movement of the trees. The piece searches for communication beyond the verbal or rational, taking the vegetal Other into the body and building other communication spaces. Diana Olalde and the Lombricultura collective explore the sacred vanilla plant through the different temporal levels of individual action, sound, smell and digital transmission, bridging ontologies and perceptions. The change in time scales and points of view in both works, the activation of nonrational forms of communication open spaces for coexistence and communication between species.

The Mexican collective Interespecifics has dedicated the last few years to exploring forms of communication between species: plants, bacteria, machines and humans. Their intricate performances and installations create sensitive spaces that enable us to perceive the beings with whom we constantly co-create the world, crossing the frontiers between ontologies and sensing the multiplicity of worlds that continually cohabit. The relationships between species, biology, machines and the environment have also inspired much of Robertina Sebjanic's work. In *Transitio* she presents a new project, coproduced by the festival, called “*lygophilia_transfixed gaze*” where she explores the world of the axolotl, a salamander native to Mexico but under threat of extinction in the wild that has the astonishing ability to regrow severed limbs and organs, questioning and stimulating our ability to think about and perceive “*the parameters of ecological needs of other species in the times of dark-ecological situations*”.

In the exhibition Bureau d'Études unfolds this multiplicity in an immense map that they call "Cosmogony of Communism". The map attempts to visualise all the different aspects of what we can call the Commons – the shared conditions of existence for all human and non human bodies. The map, painted by hand on the wall of the gallery by the art students Victor Lucero & Emerson Balderas, enables us to do a zoom out and look at our conditions of co-existence as embedded in the cosmos and including everything from stars to bacteria. The Lakota phrase "Mitákuye Oyás'in" (we are all family) takes on graphic form, situating us in the cosmos and visualising the shared "*network of multiple bonds where all things, congruent, conspire and consent*"^x.

This network is the context for Sumak Kawsay as well, good living is the balance of all these "things". This immediately opens up a political perspective, indeed one of the major themes of the Parliament section of the festival is to question what changes in political or social organisation are required to respond to these reflections on the environment. Indigenous thinkers have been fundamental in this debate, proposing social and political models that incorporate ancestral practises to generate alternatives to capitalism and its devastating ecological and social effects. One proposal, developed in particular by Jaime Martinez Luna and Floriberto Diaz, is called "Comunalidad" (Communality) and stems from the systematization of the cosmovision, resistance and everyday life of the Zapoteca indigenous people of Oaxaca in the South of Mexico. This "nosotrxs" is articulated by 4 principal pillars or directions – territory, organisation, work and party – proposing an alternative to capitalism based on a system that we know already works, that we know already is ecologically integrated.

The Parliament is the heart of the Transitio festival, the house of difference that Audre Lord imagined, a utopian machine in the centre of State territory^{xi}. It is the assembly space for talking and listening, the place where the collective work of the festival takes place, four days organised thematically with a magistral session each morning and three presentations in the afternoon followed by evening performances and ample times for discussion and assembly. At midday the radio kitchen is for eating and talking and also serves as the raw material for Julie Faubert's piece "The Table" who records and then edits the conversations each day and finally installs them in headphones at the eating table on the last day, a sound sculpture that explores the memories of public space and the community of eating together.

Jaime Martinez Luna leads the master class on the last day of the Parliament devoted to the commons. His discussion of communality is followed in the afternoon by interventions from three women who question and situate these reflections in a contemporary urban environment. Irmgard Emmelhainz wonders how to practise communality in the city and recompose social autonomy, Estrella Soria reflects on digital culture and the commons while Lucia Linsalata explores the possible expansion of a community based logic for political articulation.

The first day of the Parliament is devoted to Materia Prima (Raw Material) and opens with a magistral session from Don Santiago Ortela Sarmiento who explores the 4 elements of the Mazoteca cosmovision, the guardians of the four directions and grandparents to be respected and cared for. He orients the intention of the Parliament, integrating it into ancestral tradition and giving us conceptual tools to think about these relations. He is also responsible for

opening the entire festival, two days before, with a Xoliltli ceremony of payment to the Earth and request for permission from the local spirits (followed by a performance that unites the French group Gigacircus with indigenous Raramúri artists from Chihuahua and a session from DJ Guaguis). Don Santiago orientates and blesses, opening the paths and calling for a new relationship with energy, the elements, raw materials and the Earth itself.

Industrial society is notorious for its voracious, destructive and every increasing appetite for raw materials and energy. Indeed this voracity is at the root of the Anthropocene, the geological period which we now inhabit, where human activity and its consumption of raw materials such as petrochemicals have now become one of the principal forces of planetary change. Some thinkers situate the beginning of the Anthropocene in the development of agriculture around ten thousand years ago, others in the development of coal driven steam engines in the 18th century while still others consider 1945, and the explosion of the first atomic bomb, to be the turning point. The results of this process are now visible globally in the rising sea levels, the ubiquity of plastics, the extinction of species and habitats and rapid climate change.

In this first afternoon of the Parliament, Pablo de Soto talks about the role of nuclear energy, and especially Fukushima, in the Anthropocene while Jean Kayatambi shares his artwork and thoughts on energy from the viewpoint of the Congo and Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle explain their ecosexual environmental activism against extractivism, particularly in the Virginia coal mining area of the United States.

Ecosexuality^{xii} proposes a sexual, physical relationship with the planet, replacing the idea of Earth as Mother with Earth as Lover with all that implies in terms of reciprocity, responsibility, free choice and conditional love. They have been getting married for the last ten years with elements such as water, coal or soil and recently developed their Ecosexual Walking Tour which was presented in the Documenta 2017 in Kassel and Athens and, for the first time in Mexico, will take place the day before the Parliament in the park beside the festival spaces, accompanied by a marvellous group of performers that includes the Fulminante (Nadia Granados), Lia Garcia and other queer artists. The question of love is also explored by the performance of Taniel Morales, Geraldine Eguez and Goldjan, aiming to “re-signify love as an active practice, a radical action and a path towards learning and revolution.”

The remaining days of the Parliament are Interspecies and Ecologies. The first proposes that we reflect on the relationships between species in this constitution of *nosotrxs*, thinking about cyborg beings that assemble distinct ontologies, crossing boundaries between machines, plants and the cosmos, building relationships between species, between beings. Michael Marder, in his master class, invites us to a session of plant thinking in dialogue with Hegel: “*plants against technocracy; sexual difference against abstract indifference; the finite, limited-gendered-growing-decaying “us” against the disembodied, gender-neutral but actually masculine, metaphysical “us” who invariably stand against “them”*.”^{xiii} The afternoon sees presentations by the Colombian artist and investigator Aniara Rodado on the alliances of the forgotten, Kristen Simmons and Zoe Todd, indigenous feminist killjoys, explore the relationships between Indigenous land, life and being in North America while the Mexican artists Gilberto Esparza and Marcela Arnas present their investigations of plants, meteorites and bacteria.

Finally, *Ecologies* features Dianne Rocheleau introducing us to Feminist Social Ecology, Raisa Smits talking about Ecology and Art in the north of Europe while Laura Ashuar presents her work in the Ecology Institute of the UNAM in Mexico. The day opens with a master class from Susana Pacará y Sandra Cossio Colque, indigenous women from Bolivia who work with communication as a means of resistance and progress towards the realisation of Sumak Kawsay (Good Co-Living). This Andean concept of the harmonious coexistence between all the beings of the planet and the Earth itself is one of the fundamental axis of the organisational processes of the indigenous movements and, thanks to their incidence, is now included in the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador. They consider the Earth, or Pachamama, as a mother to respect and care for. This female identification with the earth is connected to individual women themselves, each of them a Pachamama also, and their capacity to give life and to nourish, making them the vanguard of the resistance in defence of the earth. Another of the fundamental axis of the movement is the insistence on diversity, translated politically to the indissociable concepts of plurinationality and interculturality, now incorporated into the official title of the Bolivian state. Diversity is basic to all ecosystems, biodiversity and cultural diversity is what maintains resilient ecologies. Monocultures are inherently fragile.

This insistence on diversity, heterogeneity and the weaving of relations is a constant also in the work of biologist and feminist science fictionist Donna Haraway, unavoidable reference for contemporary studies of ecology, the Anthropocene and reflection on “nosotrxs”. Since the *Cyborg Manifesto* in 1987 that made her famous and heralded a new chapter for feminism and the study of scientific thought she has continually explored relationships, becomings and caring for others beyond the family and beyond human. Her most recent *Manifesto Chthuloceno*, with its final exhortation of “Make Kin, Not Babies”, is the basis of a workshop given by Helen Torres previous to the festival and presented as an evening videoperformance on the Parliament stage. The workshop program previous to the festival also included *Gynepunk* in Border Cultural Centre (thanks to Edith Medina) – the DIY appropriation of gynelogical tools and the reclaiming of our bodies for ourselves from punk feminisms and technological sovereignty – and Constanza Piña in MedialabMX with her work on the *Khipu* (and her wonderful group of collaborators: Melissa Aguilar, Ana Cervantes, Daniela Sofía Main Reyes, Ana Ortiz, Stella Cerezo and Valentina Díaz), textile computing and sonification of shadows, a textile computer that recuperates the Incan recording technology of cords and connects it to electricity and the cosmos. The final piece can be seen and touched as part of the festival's exhibition.

The *khipu* also turns up in the performance by Jose Luis Jacomé Guerrero, from Ambato in Ecuador and bassplayer in Cafeterasub, one of the country's most influential bands of experimental metal. He and his collaborator, visual artist Noe Mayorga, investigate precolumbine Andean cosmovisions and technologies, creating an retrofuturist speculative mix, with roots in postcolonialism, tecnoshamanism and the idea of the New Indian (inspired by the work of the Peruvian José Uriel García Cusco), that they call *Khipunk*. This mixture of technology, science fiction, magic and history is also a hallmark of the work of Arcangel Constantini, indisputable reference for Mexican electronic art, who presents two spectacular works that investigate raw materials, water and petrol. The first of these works, *JetPulse*, is a recreation of the V2 rocket engine that Werner von Braun (later to found NASA) developed and launched at London from Berlin in the latter years of the Second World War. Instead of a continual thrust the rocket is propelled by a series of controlled explosions, hearing these in

the centre of CENART will be without a doubt one of the high points of the festival – burning gasoline and collapsing time.

Radio is also one of these arcane and once magical technologies but which has become a fundamental part of the infrastructure of contemporary life, war and resistance. The discovery of the capacity to transmit signals by electromagnetic waves meant a decisive shift in communications and a new era for global humanity, announced by thinkers such as Marshall McLuhan. Radio is also the medium selected for the documentation of the festival and to share it in real time anywhere on the planet. Cheap, accessible and the continuation of orality in digital technologies, radio is and has been fundamental to indigenous and popular resistance movements throughout south america. Community radios, like the Bartolina Sisa women's network in Bolivia or Radio Waruguma and the other Garífuna Radios in Honduras, continue to provide information and counterinformation for autonomous organisation, defence of territory, education and entertainment. In Transito the radio is a homage to the history of radio and a work in itself by a group of Latinamerican radio activists (from Bolivia, Chile, Colombia and Mexico), using the raw material of the festival to weave a new tentacular entity, another way of seeing nosotrxs, as well as being the official medium for documentation. In addition, in these times of media saturation where everything is photographed and absorbed into the endless spectacle, radio preserves visual anonymity and a degree of technological sovereignty, enabling participation without threatening privacy.

Radio, and later internet (and the combination of both), have held out the promise of the possibility of global assembly and provoked numerous utopian visions. While many of these dreams have disappeared into a totalitarian state of vigilance, the utopian trace cannot be eradicated, the possibility of a nosotrxs beyond the limits of shouting distance. Juan Downey was one of these thinkers:

"Ironically, the man-nature chasm can only be closed by technology . The process of reweaving ourselves into natural energy patterns is Invisible Architecture, an attitude of total communication within which ultra-developed minds will be telepathically cellular to an electromagnetic whole."^{xiv}

The utopian assembly of things and beings in diversity is celebrated in the last act of the Parliament, a cacophonous assembly orchestrated by Daniel Godinez. Instead of taking turns, each participant will speak, sing or shout their reflections on the question of nosotrxs at the same time. In this festival the invited speakers, artists and other participants are not an end in themselves but rather contributions to a collective process of thinking, gathered in writings, notes, recordings to be published in the web, which culminates in this assembly (the final act of the festival, following the assembly, is a concert by the hip hop feminists from Oaxaca, Mare Advertencia Lirika and the Hijos de Rap). The Parliament, and the festival as a whole, is a collective process of situated knowledge production, a new *nosotrxs* where all the voices are important, and nobody can tell what will happen for there are as many forms of saying “us” as there are people, agents, entities. Perhaps then, as Marina Garcés writes, “*us will no longer be a subject in plural but rather the sense of the world understood as the coordinates of our common activity, necessarily shared*”.^{xv}

Pedro Soler.
Curador.

- ⁱ Nosotrxs is a neologism in Spanish for the word “us” which combines nosotros (masculine) and nosotras (feminine) and is actually unpronounceable.
- ⁱⁱ Email from the author.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Vandana Shiva, *Introducción a la reedición de Ecofeminismo*, escrito con Maria Mies, 2013
- ^{iv} <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/15/timothy-morton-anthropocene-philosopher>
- ^v Ana Mendieta, “A Selection of Statements and Notes,” *Sulfur* (Ypsilanti, Mich.) no. 22 (1988), p. 70. Referenced in <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/5220>
- ^{vi} *Forest Law / Selva Jurídica*. Ursula Biemann & Paulo Tavares. First edition © 2014 Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University. P6.
- ^{vii} <http://transitiomx.net/en/parlamento/403186ISDJz3558>
- ^{viii} Schöpferische Konfession. In: *Tribüne der Kunst und der Zeit*. Eine Schriftensammlung, Band XIII, hgg. v. Kasimir Edschmid. Reiß, Berlin 1920. S. 28
- ^{ix} Amaringo died in 199xx. The exhibition was to include 3 of his original paintings on loan from Luis Eduardo Luna. Unfortunately, after a year of negotiation, Luna refused at the last moment to send the paintings. The exhibition thus includes his first book “Ayuaasca Visions” which contains the best of his work from the 1980s.
- ^x Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, pp 110-11
- ^{xi} The festival is held in the Centro Nacional de las Artes which belongs to and is run by the State.
- ^{xii} <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/may/15/nature-ecosexual-annie-sprinkle-porn-star-queer>
- ^{xiii} Quote from the text Michael Marder contributed to the Parliament.
- ^{xiv} Juan Downey, 1973, *Radical Software*. <http://www.radicalsoftware.org/e/volume2nr5.html>
- ^{xv} Marina Garcés, *El Mundo Común*, 201x. Ediciones Bellaterra.