



MA Arts and Society thesis

# **Curating the Indigenous at the Venice Biennale**

## **Reading *Viva Arte Viva* through Posthuman Theory and Indigenous Critique**

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## Abstract

In the times of the global climate crisis, there seems to be a turn towards the Indigenous in the academia and contemporary art world. It can be linked to the theoretical movements that attempt to reposition Western power-knowledge. Postcolonialism had been addressing the lack of representation of people of colour in the knowledge production processes and exposing the power relations rooted within it. Consequently, it seeks to reposition Indigenous knowledge to the centre of knowledge production processes. Posthumanism, one of the major contemporary turns in Western thought, acknowledges the violence committed through humanism and advocates for the inclusion of missing people and missing knowledge in knowledge production processes. It rethinks and attempts to displace the binaries that define humanism and resulted in exclusion and marginalisation of other forms of knowledge. As a consequence, we can witness more and more contemporary art exhibitions where Indigenous knowledge, which is not defined by the binaries between nature and culture, reason and spirituality, is framed within the posthuman concepts. *Viva Arte Viva*, the central exhibition of the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, can be seen as an example of such curatorial strategies. It attempts to rethink humanism through redefining its constructed binaries and looking for spaces in-between, and, thus, stages artworks about Indigeneity within this framework. However, Indigenous scholars argue that the lack of representation of Indigenous peoples in the discussions about Indigeneity results in the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of Indigenous cosmologies and, thus, the exploitation of Indigenous knowledge. The analysis of individual works that talk about Indigeneity in the *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition helps us to see the blind spots of such forms of inclusion.

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## Introduction: Curating the Indigenous

*'There seems to be a turn towards Indigenous in times of crisis in Western culture. This happened in the 1920s with the anthropologist Franz Boas because of industrialisation. Happened again in North America in the 1960s, as a part of counterculture because there was a crisis of religion and belief. It is happening now because we have the ecological crisis. We are destroying our environment, and people are looking to Indigenous people for different ways of living in the world. My hope is that this can be more true learning from one another, rather than an exploitation, which has happened a lot, exploitation of knowledge...'*<sup>1</sup>

Candice Hopkins, an independent curator from Carcross/Tagish First Nation.

While looking at the Indigenous for artistic inspiration may not be a new phenomenon, the recent turn to Indigenous, the inclusion of Indigenous art practices into global contemporary art shows can be related to contemporary Academic discourses and turns in Western thought that attempt to reposition Western power-knowledge and open up spaces for other forms of knowledge production processes. Postcolonialism especially made us rethink our colonial past and the power relations it established between Western and non-Western cultures. Consequentially, it opened more space for the inclusion of non-Western knowledge systems from around the world, including Indigenous knowledge, in the process of legitimising it. Moreover, posthumanism, one of the more important turns in contemporary Western thought, challenges the binary and universalistic thinking still prevalent within Western thought and academia that led to exclusion of many human and non-human stories, and restriction of their agency, and as such attempts to include the missing human and non-human voices, missing non-Western knowledge in the knowledge production processes. In that regard, posthumanism, in a way, echo Indigenous cosmologies that are based on relationality, communality between humans and non-humans. These values and non-binary thinking systems are highlighted in the context of the global climate crises we are facing.

This phenomenon in contemporary is yet to be better discussed in academic discourse. However, the broader questions about the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge were addressed by posthuman thinkers, such as Rosi Braidotti or Donna Haraway. In turn, the questions of appropriation and cherry-picking of Indigenous knowledge to fit the Western narrative, of the lack of acknowledgements and

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<sup>1</sup> Goethe-Institut São Paulo, "Um Sagrado Lugar (A Sacred Place). 2017", *YouTube* video, 17:26, June 28, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTPauQb0IKI>

representation are raised by Indigenous scholars. Canadian Métis scholar Zoe Todd wrote about this posthuman turn in philosophy and its relationship with colonial thought in her essay ‘An Indigenous Feminist’s Take On The Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word For Colonialism’<sup>2</sup>. In her text ‘Indigenous Place-thought and Agency amongst Humans and Non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)’<sup>3</sup>, Vanessa Watts, Mohawk (Bear Clan, Six Nations) and Anishinaabe scholar, provides a deeper analysis about the two different knowledge systems and the tendency in the Western thought to reduce the Indigenous knowledge to a symbol or a metaphor. It is also important to note, that the emergence of these practices in contemporary art received more attention in the professional art press, especially after the central exhibition of the 57th Venice Biennale *Viva Arte Viva*, curated by Cristine Macel.

Therefore, the **case study** will be the *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition, consisting of nine trans-pavilions. While the curatorial statement attempts to persuade the reader and the audience that this exhibition is staged to be apolitical, I argue that the event of Venice Biennale, its origin story and goals are political in nature, and thus, require an analysis that is considerate of political implications it is framed by and simultaneously produces. Venice Biennale is a major global art event that is referred to by some as the art Olympics. First opened in 1885, since 1907 it included an international competition that cantered around major geopolitical powers in Europe and North America. Moreover, it can be paralleled with World’s Fairs that materialized the humanistic idea of progress, science and culture and, thus, ‘legitimizing’ Western domination by claiming that industrialization and modernity is the peak of human reason. They were meant to represent the recent achievements of participating nations while framing them into a unitary idea of human reason and progress. While the Venice Biennale today is still arguably very Eurocentric, decolonial and feminist thought, and other emancipatory movements, affected the political and curatorial strategies within the institution. As such, a non-disclosed goal of Biennale, that is to showcase the contemporary art trends from around the world in one major exhibition, is not only dealing with Biennale’s historical and ideological predicament, but also with contemporary critique and emancipation strategies, and thus, is inherently political.

Consequentially, the curatorial strategies in the Biennale can be argued to reflect the most recent turns in Western thought that influence contemporary art practices and social climate. Having that in mind, all nine trans-pavilions in the *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition in one way or another were tied with

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<sup>2</sup> Zoe Todd, “An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word For Colonialism,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, no. 1 (2016): pp. 4-22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12124>.

<sup>3</sup> Vanessa Watts, “Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!),” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013): pp. 20-34. <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/19145/16234>.

contemporary issues we are facing today, and their framework in the exhibition was closely related to posthumanism. Each trans-pavilion challenges binary logic that is prevalent in humanistic framework, such as the dichotomies between reason and spirituality, between culture and nature, and attempts to redefine it by reversing the binaries and exploring the in-between states. One of the trans-pavilions was named ‘Pavilion of Shamans’, and it showcased artworks inspired and/or based on spiritual practices, Indigenous and not, explored the binary between reason and spirituality, and framed the latter as a healing and emancipating practice. Other pavilions also can be analysed in a similar fashion. The Pavilion of the Common, which is claimed to explore ‘the notion of the common world and the way to build a community as a means of countering individualism and self-interest, which represent a worrisome threat in today’s troubling climate,’ starts with the video work of Juan Downey *Circle of Fires*, that was created during artist’s produced during his explorations in the Yanomani’s territory in the Federal Reserve of Amazonia.

While the whole exhibition is very colourful, vibrant and many traditional, folkloric art practices and crafts from around the world were included in the exhibition, it remained very Europocentric. However, I must stress, this work, by no means, does not attempt to define what Indigenous is and what it is not. As such, I have chosen the individual examples in the exhibition, where Indigeneity in the artworks was highlighted within the framework of the exhibition. One of the more memorable pieces of the show, Ernesto Neto’s work in a collaboration with Huni Kuin people ‘Um Sagrado Lugar (A Sacred Place)’ was the main accent of the Pavilion of Shamans. It was a massive, colourful and interactive installation whose photographs ended up in many reviews of the main Biennale’s exhibition. By creating a structure mirroring a traditional Huni Kuin meeting space and inviting Huni Kuin people to participate in conversations and perform their rituals, it claimed to produce a space for sharing knowledge between Western and Indigenous people of Amazonian Forest. In the times of climate crises, when a lot of land that is heavily affected by the devastating consequences of the climate change is still inhabited by various Indigenous peoples around the world, their spiritual knowledge grounded in their ancestral lands became of utter importance for the West to learn from. However, is this piece in the *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition, or within the posthuman framework in general, actually create a safe space where the Indigenous knowledge can be shared on equal grounds, instead of being appropriated and misinterpreted?

As such, my **research question** is:

What does the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale central exhibition *Viva Arte Viva* tell us about how the Indigenous is staged in the narrative of contemporary art, and consequently, how is the Indigenous reframed by posthuman theory and by the Indigenous critique?

Subsequently, **sub-questions** divide the analysis into two parts:

1. How does posthumanism claim to open up a space for the inclusion of non-western, and more specifically Indigenous, forms of knowledge, by revaluing humanism and its constructed binaries? Consequentially, how is it reflected in the '57th Venice Biennale central exhibition *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition?
2. How does the Indigenous critique of posthumanism serve as a means of revealing the blind spots and power relations in posthumanism and contemporary art exhibitions? Consequentially, how does the analysis of individual works help us to see these blind spots in the way Indigenous cosmologies were staged in the *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition?

## **Methodology**

The research questions require a multidisciplinary approach that would be productive for both, analysing how post-humanism discourse is reflected in the exhibition as well as how the critique of it can be helpful in revealing the blind spots and power relations still prevalent in contemporary art exhibitions. Therefore, Curatorial Analysis will be applied as the main method in my research. Since it is a broad method, I will be mainly using the Cultural Analysis method developed by Mieke Bal as a basis. Curatorial Analysis is basically a form of discourse analysis from a Cultural Analysis perspective. It stands at an intersection of institutional examination with cultural analysis at the core of the concept, thus, it allows one to focus on curation and exhibitions as a form of discursive practice.

Therefore, in this research I will use Bal's explanation of discourse as she states in her book *Double Exposures: the Subject of Cultural Analysis*<sup>4</sup>:

“Discourse” does not mean here yet another invasion by language; on the contrary, using such a term for the analysis of museums necessitates a ‘multi-medialization’ of the concept of discourse itself. Discourse implies a set of semiotic and epistemological habits that enables and prescribes ways of communicating and thinking that others who participate in the discourse can also use. A discourse provides a basis for intersubjectivity and understanding. It entails epistemological attitudes. It also includes unexamined assumptions about meaning and about the world. Language can be a part of the media in a discourse, not the other way around.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mieke Bal and Edwin Janssen, *Double Exposures: the Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York, New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 3.

Who is speaking in this discourse then? Bal further discloses three agents that take part in exhibitions (or ‘expositions’) as *‘first person’*, the expositor, tells a *‘second person’*, the visitor, about a *‘third person’*, the object on display, who does not participate in the conversation.’<sup>6</sup> The ‘first person’, however, should not be reduced to a curator, or a singular subject, but it rather is a participant of a discursive practice that stages the ‘third person’ for the ‘second person’ to see. The process of staging the artworks can be further complicated when combined with the notion of the performativity of art, highlighted in her recent essay ‘Exhibition-ism: Temporal Togetherness’<sup>7</sup>. Here, Bal stresses the importance of performativity and how it may be a key to revealing more complicated meanings of contemporary artworks and exhibitions. She treats artworks and exhibitions as a spectatorial event, a performance:

‘[...] performance is directed – in the sense in which a theatre or a film director indicates to performers how to enact their roles – by the work’s performativity. In this way, the two concepts of performance and performativity are inextricably connected.’<sup>8</sup>

The performativity of art and exhibitions is full of contextual clues that are dependent on and shift with time, space and audience. Therefore, the main components of the performativity of art could be divided into the broader notions of *Time*, *Space*, and *Spectator*. If we treat an exhibition as a spectatorial event, the exhibition narrative dictated by the ‘first person’ is situated in and supported by the discursive space where the exhibition is situated, the time when it was perceived, as well as by the audience itself who is perceiving the narrative. Thus, when combined with the above mentioned ‘three persons’, these three notions can make the distinguished lines between the roles of each ‘person’ blurred, as well as be helpful to unveil and more elaborately explore how the exhibition and, thus, the artworks displayed are framed and the discourse they are situated in.

*Time*. According to Bal, performativity is inevitably related to time, more specifically temporality, since ‘performance [exhibition] takes place in time. It occupies durations, and its effects – its performativity – necessarily occur during, and in the wake of that duration.’<sup>9</sup> The artworks and exhibitions are experienced in the ‘present’, thus the issues it addresses or raises are also experienced through today’s perspective. Since the central exhibition of the Venice Biennale aims to showcase the newest trends in the contemporary art world while staging artworks in a coherent narrative, the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> Mieke Bal, *The Contemporary Condition. Exhibition-ism. Temporal Togetherness* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



works in the exhibition should be understood in the context of contemporary thought and societal, political and environmental predicaments of today. As such, I will analyse the *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition through the lenses of posthuman theory, the way it is reflected in each of nine trans-pavilions in the exhibition, and how the Indigenous knowledge is staged within them. In the times of climate crisis, where the posthuman theory not only critiques the constructed binaries rooted in the humanistic thought, and attempts to displace them, but also acknowledges the exclusion of other forms of knowledge these binaries resulted in, the turn towards the Indigenous seems expected. Thus, the Indigenous critique and decolonial theory within it will help to understand how the individual artworks were framed within this exhibition and expose the blind spots and power relations of this turn to Indigenous. The individual artworks, some of which were made years before the *Viva Arte Viva*, will be analysed within the framework of the 2017 Venice Biennale central exhibition.

*Space.* According to Bal, '[t]he relation with a space is contextual and discursive, not just material and interactive.'<sup>10</sup> Thus, a place is a support *and* a part of a narrative. Following this discursive aspect of space, a curated exhibition is also framed within the discourse/narrative of the space. In *Viva Arte Viva* case, historical and social contexts of Venice Biennale, as a major contemporary art event, becomes important in both, analysing the exhibition and its curatorial concept, and in revealing the power relations that still exist in such contemporary art exhibitions.

*Spectator.* While it may be directly linked to the 'second person', the viewer, the name of spectator makes one an active part of a spectacle, instead of just having a passive role as a viewer. The spectator interacts with artwork and perceives it. According to Bal, '[p]erception is an act of the present. [...] Occurring in the present, perception needs memory. Since it is the subject's interest that motivates the perception-selection, an image that is not infused with memory images would make no sense.'<sup>11</sup> Thus, the audience is also a part of the framework the exhibition is situated in. While the Venice Biennale is a major international event that attempts to showcase the relevant contemporary art from around the world, according to the statistic on their website, the majority of the audience is still European and North American.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, '[t]he question: "who is speaking?" will not lead to a name, a scapegoat, or a moral judgment; it will, hopefully, lead to insight of cultural processes.'<sup>13</sup> Thus, this form of Curatorial Analysis is a beneficial method to explore the correlation between contemporary thinking and

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>12</sup> "Biennale ARTE 2017: Biennale Arte 2017 in Numbers," La Biennale di Venezia, November 26, 2017, <https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/biennale-arte-2017-numbers>.

<sup>13</sup> Bal, *Double Exposures: the Subject of Cultural Analysis*, 20.

contemporary art exhibitions. In the first part of my analysis, it will allow me to use posthumanism as theoretical lenses to analyse the conceptual framework of the whole *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition, and, thus, the ways it attempts to redefine the humanistic binaries and include other forms of knowledge. Moreover, in the second part of my analysis, I will employ the Indigenous critique as a theoretical framework to critically examine the ways individual artworks that talk about Indigenous knowledge were staged in the narrative of the exhibition. Furthermore, it will help to understand the role of curation in contributing to a discursive role of art practice in contemporary thinking.

Curatorial Analysis will require a close examination of all the documentation of the exhibition, including catalogues, curatorial statements, reviews, photographs of the exhibition and artworks displayed, videos, etc. The first part of my analysis will focus on the curatorial statement of the exhibition and its catalogue. The close study of the text will allow me to better understand the curatorial concept behind the whole exhibition and critically assess it employing posthumanism as my theoretical framework. The second part of my analysis will require to focus on documentation of each chosen individual artwork as well as on the way they were presented in the exhibition catalogue's texts. Moreover, I will use additional texts, research and reviews about the artworks and the exhibition to complement and support my arguments.

## **Theoretical Framework: Staging Indigenous Knowledge**

The recent (re)emergence of Indigenous art in the global contemporary art world can be linked with main theoretical movements that address and attempt to reposition Western power-knowledge. As such, postcolonialism had been addressing the issues of the lack of representation of people of colour in the knowledge production processes and been exposing and critiquing the power relations embedded in it. As one of its branches, the postcolonial critique acknowledges the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge as an issue with human rights and recognises Indigenous representation as a point of political contention, it seeks to position Indigenous voices at the centre of knowledge production processes.

Yet, the definition of Indigeneity might seem rather ambiguous and open. As such, I will use the definition provided by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. While at first, it was critiqued to be rigid, after the complaints it was updated to be a more open and inclusive term. According to the UN,

‘It is estimated that there are more than 370 million Indigenous people spread across 70 countries worldwide. Practicing unique traditions, they retain social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. Spread across the world from the Arctic to the South Pacific, they are the descendants - according to a common definition - of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. The new arrivals later became dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means.

[...]

Considering the diversity of Indigenous peoples, an official definition of “Indigenous” has not been adopted by any UN-system body. Instead the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following:

- Self- identification as Indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources
- Distinct social, economic or political systems

- Distinct language, culture and beliefs
- Form non-dominant groups of society
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.<sup>14</sup>

This definition provides us with a geopolitical understanding of Indigenous, which is updated to work as a more open concept that acknowledges complex contemporary contexts of Indigenous peoples and their right to self-identification. Therefore, in my thesis, I will keep Indigenous as an open term without attempting to define it.

One of the central theoretical movements in the West that has sought to address the absence of Indigeneity by Western paradigms of knowledge production is posthumanism. To understand how posthuman thought addresses the issue, it is first needed to understand what is posthumanism and where it comes from.

## **Posthuman Theory**

Posthumanism tends to be a widely used, some might claim overused, term today, and one may run into challenges in attempt properly define it. Due to a lot of literature by various scholars written about this topic, in this research, the theoretical framework of post-humanism will be based on works by a couple of authors, that are often referenced in other academic and artistic sources. Thus, my theoretical framework on post-humanism will consist of texts written by Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway, as the two main interlocutors.

According to Braidotti, the posthuman predicament could be seen as a convergence of posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism: '[t]he former focuses on the critique of the humanist ideal of 'Man' as the allegedly universal measure of all things, while the latter criticizes species hierarchy and human exceptionalism.'<sup>15</sup> While both of them come from different schools of thought, they also aim to provide a space for the inclusion of different forms of knowledge production practices.

## **On Humanism**

While on a surface, humanism preaches the equality and the emancipation of people, the governance that is not blinded by superstitious beliefs but is rather based on rational decision making, probably,

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<sup>14</sup> United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, "Who Are Indigenous Peoples?" (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2006), [https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session\\_factsheet1.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Rosi Braidotti, "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities," *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 6 (April 2018): pp. 31-61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418771486>, 31-32.

the main downfall of it is its claim of universality that buries unequal and complex power relations under the surface. As noted in Braidotti's book *The Posthuman*,

‘That iconic image is the emblem of Humanism as a doctrine that combines the biological, discursive and moral expansion of human capabilities into an idea of technologically ordained, rational progress. Faith in the unique, self-regulating and intrinsically moral powers of human reason forms an integral part of this high-humanistic creed, which was essentially predicated on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century renditions of classical Antiquity and Italian Renaissance ideals.’<sup>16</sup>

The humanist ideals admire the human mind as the source of reason, culture, progress. This ideal of the ‘Man’ was the allegedly universal measure of all things. The ‘Man’ embodied the normal, and the normal was white European urbanized heterosexual man. Since the identity of the ‘Man’ consists of a very narrow set of traits that do not represent the actual, it tends to create binary relation with the Other, and results in a binary logic in general. According to Braidotti,

‘Central to this universalistic posture and its binary logic is the notion of ‘difference’ as pejoration. Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essential and lethal connotations for people who get ‘branded’ as the others’. These are the sexualized, racialized and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies.’<sup>17</sup>

These binaries can be extended to, but not limited to man and woman, culture and nature, reason and spirituality, human and non-human etc. One represents virtuous and legitimate aspects of humanity and its progress, others, defined by difference, are associated with the other and the past, and thus are deemed inferior. One of the more interesting aspects of it is its defined secularity where religion, still a powerful moral source in society, is proclaimed to be separated from the governmental forces. This furthermore enlarges the gap between the reason, as the only way to knowledge production that leads to progress and is almost exclusively accessible to white men, and spirituality, as an illegitimate to create any valuable forms of knowledge, which is left to women and cultural others. It is peculiar that

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<sup>16</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2013), 13.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

secularism was one of the factors that led to the beginning of women emancipation and feminism in Western countries, yet it still bounded femininity to spirituality, and away from the reason, a masculine quality that led to any sort of self-determination. In a similar stance, spirituality, irrationality was associated with the cultural others, including Indigenous peoples.

When reason, that is attributed to the man, is the only appropriate way of knowledge production, it fenced numerous peoples from the ability to participate in it. This binary logic created a space where Western (European) civilization was naturally perceived as superior, thus legitimizing the colonial violence committed in a name of the 'humanity' as such. Therefore, post-humanism tries to displace these binaries with in-between states that disturb the unequal power relations between them and, thus, create a space for other forms of knowledge and peoples. 'Appeals to the 'human' are always discriminatory: they create structural distinctions and inequalities among different categories of humans, let alone between humans and non-humans.'<sup>18</sup>

### **On Post-anthropocentrism**

Humanistic ideals and its belief in reason as an engine for progress accordingly established the supremacy of a human against other non-humans. An influential theory that highlighted the agency held by non-human actors is Actor-Network Theory by Bruno Latour<sup>19</sup>. It expands on the notion of collaborative human and non-human networks and stresses its role in knowledge production. However, what Actor-Network Theory lacks, according to Braidotti, is that it 'also prevented any analysis of the power relations at work between them, notably, social-economic differences.'<sup>20</sup> This critique is also applicable to anthropocentrism since whilst it admits the wrongdoings done by humans for the sake of progress, it still claims the superiority of the universal human, dismissing various other human and non-human agencies and the power relations that exist between them.

Thereby, even if Anthropocene addresses environmental issues we are facing today, it is created by and for the Western Man without much consideration of the complexities of this web of influences formed by various humans and non-humans. Donna Haraway, a known critic of the notion of Anthropocene, coined the term Chthulucence. According to her, 'Anthropocene is a term most easily meaningful and usable by intellectuals in wealthy classes and regions; it is not an idiomatic term for climate, weather, land, care of country or much else in great swatches of the world, especially but not

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<sup>18</sup> Braidotti, "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities," 35.

<sup>19</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Braidotti, "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities," 42.

only Indigenous peoples.<sup>21</sup> It projects a very cynical and future predictions defeating view, where only new human-made machines can save the Earth from human-made harm, while othered humans and non-humans are just passive observers, completely dependent on human decisions. On the other hand, a concept of Chthulucene offers a new way of living in temporality where ‘human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story.’<sup>22</sup>

This posthuman view on human and non-human relationships can potentially open up spaces for the inclusion of other, more precisely Indigenous, forms of knowledge. Donna Haraway herself uses many metaphors and examples that, in a way, include Indigenous forms of knowledge in her writing, sometimes connecting them with classical western myths, that are better known for us, without an attempt to make any of the ‘string-figures’ superiors. Thus, it can be thought of as an effort to displace the knowledge creation from the humanistic Western discourse, simultaneously including hybrid forms of knowledge production that are non-binary and are not based on the idea of ‘reason’.

Braidotti also argues that the recently developed line of inquiry referred to as hybridity studies, that she also calls critical posthumanities, such as green humanities, blue humanities or digital humanities, and various other hybrid forms of ‘studies’ have means to disrupt power relations in knowledge production and open up space for various perspectives and forms of knowledge. According to her:

‘These theoretically sophisticated transversal discourses combine attention to the earth with enduring care for the people who live closest to the earth – Indigenous populations – thus raising the ethical and political stakes. The critique of western imperialism and racism provides an added critical distance – an extra layer of dis-identification – that positions these posthuman critical thinkers closer to the dispossessed and the disempowered, adding that many of those are neither human nor necessarily anthropomorphic. Many claim non-western Indigenous humanism as their platform (Bignall et al., 2016).’<sup>23</sup>

A few examples of how Indigenous thinkers expand posthuman discourse should be given. In her article ‘Indigenous Place-thought and Agency amongst Humans and Non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)’<sup>24</sup>, Indigenous scholar Vanessa Watts compares the

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<sup>21</sup> Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016), 49.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Braidotti, “A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities,” 50.

<sup>24</sup> Vanessa Watts, “Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!),” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013): pp. 20-34.

human and non-human agencies between Western-European and Indigenous discourses. While observing the recent change in Western thinking about non-human actors and their agency, she still stresses the impact of the form of knowledge production where these human non-human relations are thought of. She claims that the remnants of thinking based on the divide between epistemology and ontology, with the former's superiority, lead to the idea of non-human agency that is still subjugated to human.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Watts claims that Indigenous cosmologies lead to a 'place-thought' model that 'is based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts.'<sup>26</sup> She addresses the distinction between body and mind that is prominent in humanism and that gifts humans with willpower that is exceptional to them and, thus, makes them superior against all the non-humans. According to her, '[i]t necessitates a separation of not only human and non-human but a hierarchy of beings in terms of how beings are able to think as well.'<sup>27</sup> While in Indigenous cosmologies, all humans and non-humans contain a spirit. 'It means that non-human beings choose how they reside, interact and develop relationships with other non-humans. So, all elements of nature possess agency, and this agency is not limited to innate action or causal relationships.'<sup>28</sup>

### **On Universalism**

Posthumanism also addresses and denies the dialectical distinction between mind and body that legitimized human's superiority in the eyes of humanism by addressing materiality. According to Braidotti, all matter or substance being one and immanent to itself, it is intelligent and self-organizing in both human and non-human organisms and is driven by the ontological desire for the expression of its innermost freedom.<sup>29</sup> This understanding of materiality provides agency to each human and non-human being, whilst also acknowledging that each knowledge is embedded and embodied, and, thus, in a way, partial, depending on specific geo-political and historical locations. Thus, not only posthumanism adopts a quantitative shift of knowledge production by critiquing the universalist humanistic approach on a Man, but also, and more importantly, stresses its qualitative aspect by acknowledging the embedded and embodied knowledge of each matter. Therefore, Braidotti introduces the notion of cartography that addresses this ontological turn in thinking:

'The aim of an adequate cartography is to bring forth alternative figurations or *conceptual personae* for the kind of knowing subjects currently

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 22, 28.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Braidotti, "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities," 34.



constructed. All figurations are localized and hence immanent to specific conditions; for example, the nomadic subjects, or the cyborg, are no mere metaphors, but material and semiotic signposts for specific geo-political and historical locations. As such, they express grounded complex singularities, not universal claims. The figure actions supported by cartographic accounts aim at dealing with the complexity of power relations. They expose the repressive structures of dominant subject-formations (*potestas*), but also the affirmative and transformative visions of the subject as nomadic process (*potentia*). In some ways a figuration is the dramatization of processes of becoming, without referring to a normative model of subjectivity, let alone a universal one.<sup>30</sup>

However, even if cartographies address power inequalities and the situatedness of knowledge systems, they, by themselves, do not fix the issue of forms of knowledge that are missing Academy's discourse, and, thus, in a way, are not acknowledged as a legitimate. While claiming that new hybrid studies that recently emerged, even if they are situated in capitalism, have the potential to incorporate missing forms of knowledge and 'missing peoples' into Academia's discourse, she is also admitting that these peoples are still absent even from these fields of hybrid studies.<sup>31</sup>

'In what way were they 'missing' to begin with? Whether we look at Indigenous knowledge systems, at feminists, queers, otherwise enabled, non-humans or technologically-mediated existences, these are real-life subjects whose knowledge never made it into any of the official cartographies. The struggle for their visibility and emergence drives the radical politics of immanence, aimed at actualizing minority-driven knowledges through transversal alliances. The people who were empirically missing – even from 'minor science' – get constituted as political subjects of knowledge through such alliances.'<sup>32</sup>

To conclude, posthumanism stresses the agency of each human and non-human while dealing with the remnants of humanism and acknowledging power relations that exist between them. It tries to dismantle the binary logic by instead turning into numerous stages of in-between, which consequently disturbs existing power relations and opens up spaces for the inclusion of other, missing, forms of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

knowledge and peoples. As Braidotti puts it, ‘the posthuman – a figuration carried by a specific cartographic reading of present discursive conditions – can be put to the collective task of constructing new subjects of knowledge, through immanent assemblages or transversal alliances between multiple actors.’<sup>33</sup> Yet, it still must be acknowledged, that those missing peoples are still missing even from the fields of studies related to the posthuman thought.

### **Indigenous Critique of Posthumanism**

Claims that posthumanism opens up spaces for other forms of knowledge, specifically Indigenous forms of knowledge, are challenged by some Indigenous scholars. It must be highlighted, that this critique does not diminish posthumanism as an inherently flawed paradigm. Rather the other way around, it applauds its main ideas that shift from humanism and its universalizing nature; however, it addresses problems that appear when Indigenous forms of knowledge are included in the Western academic discourse. Here, I will focus on two texts by Indigenous scholars Vanessa Watts and Zoe Todd, while the issue of representation will be developed using Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’<sup>34</sup> and her notions of *Darstellung* and *Vertretung*.

### **Misinterpretation of Indigenous Cosmologies**

In her text ‘Indigenous Place-thought and Agency amongst Humans and Non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)’<sup>35</sup>, Vanessa Watts talks about the difference between epistemological-ontological and place-thought forms of knowledge production, and the difference of how the non-human agency is understood within them. However, according to her, this Western-European epistemological-ontological framework not only results in unequal agencies between human and non-human but also in misinterpretation and misrepresentation of Indigenous forms of knowledge when they are included in the Western academic discourse. Indigenous understanding of the world is still viewed as mythical by ‘modern’ Western society, while their stories are considered to be ‘alternative mode of understanding and interpretation rather than “real” events.’<sup>36</sup> That is because Indigenous stories and forms of knowledge are moved from one framework to another which automatically leads to translation. However, this translation usually results in misinterpretation of Indigenous knowledge and, thus, misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples. As Watts says,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>34</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: a Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), pp. 66-111.

<sup>35</sup> Watts, “Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!).”

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 22.

‘Frameworks in a Euro-Western sense exist in the abstract. How they are articulated in action or behavior brings this abstraction into praxis; hence a division of epistemological/theoretical versus ontological/praxis. The difference in a Haudenosaunee or Anishnaabe framework is that our cosmological frameworks are not an abstraction but rather a literal and animate extension of Sky Woman’s and First Woman’s thoughts; it is impossible to separate theory from praxis if we believe in the original historical events of Sky Woman and First Woman. So, it is not that Indigenous peoples do not theorize, but that these complex theories are not distinct from place.’<sup>37</sup>

She specifically addresses newly emerged fields of studies, science studies and ecofeminist, that, as mentioned above, are considered to be a part of the posthuman paradigm and analyses how human non-human relations and, more importantly for my research, Indigenous forms of knowledge are represented in works by non-Indigenous authors. She uses Haraway’s *Situated Knowledges* as an example of an attempt to displace heteropatriarchal knowledge production that dominates the Western discourse. According to Watts,

‘Her work contributes a valuable discussion on how the localized knowledges, of what she terms as subjugated peoples, provide a space where the dominant boundaries of this heteropatriarchy can be imploded. However, Haraway resists essentialist notions of the earth as mother or matter and chooses instead to utilize products of localized knowledges (i.e. Coyote or the Trickster) as a process of boundary implosion: “I like to see feminist theory as a reinvented coyote discourse obligated to its sources in many heterogeneous accounts of the world” (Haraway, 1988, 594). This is a level of abstracted engagement once again. While it may serve to change the imperialistic tendencies in Euro-Western knowledge production, Indigenous histories are still regarded as story and process – an abstracted tool of the West.’<sup>38</sup>

Looking at the inclusion of Indigenous forms of knowledge into Academia discourse through these lenses, it is possible to track a pattern when, even with the best intentions, the Indigenous story-

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 28.

telling, a way of knowledge production, is misinterpreted, reduced to a symbolic story that still maintains the superiority of Western form of knowledge production. In this way, Indigenous knowledges are still seen as less valid because they do not follow this distinction between reason and spirituality, and, from our point of view, exist in-between it. Another danger with the misrepresentation of Indigenous knowledge that I see is that it can be read as the only way to save the West from Anthropocene, the failure of the idea of progress, thus reducing complex Indigenous cosmologies into the archetype of a ‘noble savage’.

It must be noted, that Haraway addresses this in *Staying with the Trouble* when talking about a *Never Alone (KISIMA INGITCHUNA)*, a video game made with and from Indigenous peoples’ stories and practices,: ‘However, even though the models of sympoiesis are expandable, it is critical not to once again raid situated Indigenous stories as recourses for the woes of colonizing projects and peoples, entities that seem permanently undead. *Never Alone* is not a New Age game for universal oneness, a posthumanist solution to epistemological crises, a general model of collaboration or a way to finesse the Anthropocene with Native Climate Wisdom.’<sup>39</sup>

### **Lack of Indigenous Representation**

This misinterpretation of Indigenous cosmologies when they are included in the Western discourse is directly linked with the lack of Indigenous peoples present in the discussion about Indigenous knowledge and its place within the Western thought, and more specifically posthumanism. In her text ‘An Indigenous Feminist’s Take On The Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word For Colonialism’<sup>40</sup>, another Indigenous scholar Zoe Todd takes a more direct approach to critiquing Western Academia and how it deals with Indigenous forms of knowledge and Indigenous scholars. According to her, one of the main reasons why Indigenous forms of knowledge are either underrepresented or misrepresented is the lack of acknowledgements for Indigenous scholars and activists. As she colourfully explains, posthumanism and ‘discourses of how to organize ourselves around and communicate with the constituents of complex and contested world(s) [...], was spinning itself on the backs of non-European thinkers. [...] And again, the ones we credited for these incredible insights into the ‘more-than-human’, sentience and agency, and the ways through which to imagine our ‘common cosmopolitical concerns’ were not the people who built and maintain the knowledge systems that European and North American anthropologists and philosophers have been studying for well over a hundred years, and predicating many of their current ‘aha’ ontological moments (or re-

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<sup>39</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 87.

<sup>40</sup> Zoe Todd, “An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word For Colonialism,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, no. 1 (2016): pp. 4-22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12124>.

imaginings of the discipline) upon.’<sup>41</sup> Thus, she claims that Indigenous forms of knowledge are appropriated and presented without acknowledging Indigenous thinkers, and, thus, it flattens, distorts and erases the embodied, legal-governance and spiritual aspects of Indigenous thinking.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, the question here is who is doing the talking. Even when Indigenous forms of knowledge are included into the Western Academy’s discourse, they are talked over, their cosmologies are cherry-picked and thus simplified to fit within the epistemological-ontological framework, without ‘explicit credit to the political, legal, social and cultural (and colonial!) contexts these stories are formulated and shared within.’<sup>43</sup> Even more so, according to Spivak, we must not equivocate between two categories of representation: *Vertretung* and *Darstellung*. *Vertretung* is a political representation from within the hegemonic power, while *Darstellung*, ‘as in art or philosophy’<sup>44</sup>, refers to the transformation of presentation – re-presentation. While these categories are closely connected, they cannot be used interchangeably. While one may occupy a position of representations within hegemonic powers, that does not necessarily mean that the representative will change the presentation of themselves and the people they represent, the discourse *Vertretung* exist within. As such, the question of who is talking cannot be answered by looking for scapegoats, it asks for a systematic change. There, it should be remarked that Todd does not claim that posthumanism and other turns in Western thought are ‘wrong’, instead, she claims that ‘they do not currently live up to the promises they make. I do think many people making claims regarding the promise of current turns of anthropology have very good intentions. However, these cannot always easily translate into long-term structural change.’<sup>45</sup>

Hereby, by not acknowledging Indigenous thinkers, not giving them agency and voices, we are not acknowledging the colonial violence committed and the possibility that it can happen again. According to her, [w]hen anthropologists and other assembled social scientists sashay in and start cherry-picking parts of Indigenous thought that appeal to them without engaging directly in (or unambiguously acknowledging) the political situation, agency, legal orders and relationality of both Indigenous people and scholars, we immediately become complicit in colonial violence.’<sup>46</sup>

To conclude, this critique of post-humanism claims that it does not live up to its claims to open up the space for Indigenous forms of knowledge. It acknowledges its endeavours to displace the

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<sup>41</sup> Todd, “An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn”, 7-8.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>44</sup> Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 70.

<sup>45</sup> Todd, “An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn”, 17.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 18.

universal humanistic model that is constructed by and to the ‘Man’, and thus validates colonialism, yet points out the issues that appear when Indigenous forms of knowledge are included in this framework. When Indigenous cosmologies are translated to Western discourse without Indigenous peoples present and in charge of their agency, it inevitably leads to misinterpretations and misrepresentations. This appropriation of Indigenous knowledge, under the claim that it opens up space for missing links and peoples, further continues still existing colonial violence against Indigenous peoples with a false premise of making it better. While fully acknowledging good intentions that power posthumanism, it asks for a systematic change that would allow Indigenous peoples to do the talking. According to Watts, ‘[Indigenous people] will need to continue to resist the growing tendency to both be subsumed into deessentialized epistemological spaces as well as fight against the dislocation of our thoughts from place.’<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Watts, “Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans,” 32-33.

## Curatorial Analysis of *Viva Arte Viva*: Reconstructing the Binary to rethink humanism

While the ideological roots of the Venice Biennale may lay in the humanistic and colonial ideals, as it was first established in 1895, the goal of the Venice Biennale today can be defined as to show what is happening in contemporary art now, globally. Simultaneously, it must address and deal with such notions as globalization, inclusion, decolonization, emancipation that are prominent in today's contemporary art discourses. As a former *Artforum* editor Tim Griffin noted in an article 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and The Large-Scale Exhibition', that came after the 50<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (2003), curated by Francesco Bonami, and Documenta'11, curated by Okwui Enwezor:

‘This type of exhibition, endowed with a transnational circuitry, assumed the unique position of both reflecting globalism—since these shows happen in locations throughout the world, however remote—and taking up globalism itself as an idea. Establishing a new curatorial class able to bring artists together from wide-ranging geographic and cultural points, the large-scale exhibition altered the kinds of visibility afforded artists and so fundamentally changed the conditions of artistic discussion, ultimately forwarding the position that no show could, or should, presume an all-encompassing thesis—at least not in conventional terms and form.’<sup>48</sup>

As for recent years, the Biennale has consisted of the main international exhibition, curated by an established curator, that is displayed at Giardini and Arsenale, national pavilions (86 as for 2017), that includes national pavilions in Giardini, spaces in Arsenale venue, as well as others, scattered around the Venice, together with smaller official and unofficial events and initiatives around the city. It still maintains its status as a prestigious contemporary art event that is referred to some as ‘the Olympics of contemporary art’. As well-known art collector David Teiger said in Thornton's book *Seven Days in the Art World*, ‘The Biennale is like a high-school reunion where everyone turned out to be a success. It's not the real world.’<sup>49</sup> Thus, even after conceptual and ideological changes, the inclusion of a broader range of represented nations in both, national pavilions and the main

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<sup>48</sup> Tim Griffin, “Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition,” *Artforum International*, November 1, 2003, <https://www.artforum.com/print/200309/global-tendencies-globalism-and-the-large-scale-exhibition-5682>.

<sup>49</sup> Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (London: Granta Publications, 2009), 223.

exhibitions in Arsenale and Giardini, it still can be argued that Venice Biennale still represents the view of the world and of art seen through European and American (Western) glasses.

In 2017, this task and responsibility to curate the main exhibition was awarded to a French curator, the chief curator of the Centre Pompidou in Paris, Christine Macel. The main exhibition *Viva Arte Viva* was shown at the Central Pavilion in Giardini, across the Arsenale and ended in the Giardino delle Vergini. It constituted of artworks made by 120 artists, 103 of whom were participating there for the first time. The exhibition itself was divided into nine thematic chapters, or Trans-pavilions, as referred by the curator: ‘The Pavilion of Artists and Books’, ‘The Pavilion of Joys and Fears’, ‘The Pavilion of the Common’, ‘The Pavilion of the Earth’, ‘The Pavilion of Traditions’, ‘The Pavilion of Shamans’, ‘The Dionysian Pavilion’, ‘The Pavilion of Colors’, and ‘The Pavilion of Time and Infinity’.

In the album of the 2017<sup>th</sup> biennale, it is stressed that the exhibition was inspired by humanism. While the curatorial statement portrays a very optimistic and utopian vision of what humanism can be, the curatorial statement also shows the awareness of its crisis, which is often debated by contemporary thinkers:

‘Today, faced with a world full of conflicts and shocks, art bears witness to the most precious part of what makes us human, at a time when humanism is precisely jeopardized. Art is the ultimate ground for reflection, individual expression, freedom, and for fundamental questions. Art is the favorite realm for dreams and utopias, a catalyst for human connections that roots us both to nature and the cosmos that elevates us to a spiritual dimension.’<sup>50</sup>

Thus, the results of these dialogues between artists and artworks and between the audience in the exhibition may be a step towards a ‘potential neo-humanism’:

‘The exhibition is intended as an experience, an extrovert movement from the self to the other, towards a common space beyond defined dimensions, and onwards to the idea of potential neo-humanism. This movement of the self towards the unknown, where experience and speculation are at the forefront is in and of itself a response to a conservative environment, defying bias, distrust and indifference.’<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Christine Macel, “Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte,” in *Viva Arte Viva: Biennale Arte 2017* (Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 2017), pp. 16-31, 16.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



The exhibition employs the notion of neo-humanism to redefine humanism in regard to contemporary predicaments through art. Artworks become the main means of knowledge production in the exhibition and it itself challenges humanist thinking that frames arts and sciences, reason and emotion as opposites. This binary between arts and sciences is explored in the first trans-pavilion of Artists and Books, which is staged as an introductory pavilion and in turn, together with the Pavilion of Joys and Fears, gives a tone to the whole exhibition. Moreover, all the pavilions in Arsenale, each of those seem to be reflective of contemporary societal, political, and environmental issues that motivate artists, address other binaries in an attempt to find the in-between states and spaces. The dichotomies between arts and sciences, mind and body, reason and spirituality, masculine and feminine, human and non-human, individuality and relationality. While neo-humanism is most likely a term created just for this exhibition, this attempt to displace the binaries and look for the in-between states can be easily linked with the posthuman thought. All the above-mentioned dichotomies are entangled and interlinked, thus difficult to distinguish, however, in order to better analyse the curatorial framework of the exhibition, I will divide them into three subcategories: sciences and art – reason and emotions, reason and spirituality, culture and nature – humans and non-humans.

By challenging the binary logic that constructs multiple dichotomies, the exhibition attempts to create a space for experimentation, for imagining the predicaments where these binaries are displaced, reversed, and mixed, for the artistic utopia. In the end, is not this rigid and divisive thinking contributing to the political, societal and environmental issues we face today? And one way to address them is to imagine a world without them.

### **Sciences and Art – Reason and Emotions**

**The Pavilion of Artists and Books** explores the binary between arts and sciences. The rhetoric used in the curatorial statement that refers to artist studios as laboratories or employs artistic research as a notion to describe new artistic strategies, the acts of creating art (e.g., Olafur Eliasson project) further indicates the current trend of thinking of hybrid forms of knowledge production. This search for hybridity can be compared to what Braidotti calls critical posthumanities<sup>52</sup>, such as green humanities, blue humanities or digital humanities, as she addresses that these hybrid ‘studies’ attempt to disrupt power relations in knowledge production processes and open up space for various perspectives. Therefore, an image of a book in the exhibition gains multiple meanings: while some examples of artist’s book were exhibited there as a genre (e.g. Abdullah Al Saadi,’s, Jianyi Geng’s works), it also portrayed as means of knowledge distribution and works as a more general symbol for knowledge

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<sup>52</sup> Braidotti, “A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities,” 43.

production and science. As such, it also depicts artists' studios as an archive. Consequentially, various works in the pavilion (Irma Blank's work) question knowledge production, distribution, and accessibility, as well as the part in it that is played by language.

As the pavilion questions the constructed binary between arts and sciences, simultaneously addressing the questions regarding knowledge production, its distribution and accessibility, it not only stages the artworks at the Pavilion of Artists and Books as legitimate ways to produce the knowledge but being an introductory pavilion to the whole exhibition, it also sets a tone for the whole show. It introduces *Viva Arte Viva* as the exhibition that experiments, that produces knowledge, putting arts and artists at the forefront.

The distinction between reason and emotions and instincts is further explored in **the Pavilion of Joys and Fears**. While the first pavilion challenges the idea that arts are associated with irrational feelings and thus cannot create objective knowledge, the Pavilion of Joys and Fears challenges the binary between objective reason and subjective feelings itself. The text of the exhibition touches on the idea of embodied knowledge. It rejects the cartesian mind-body dualism, which regards reason as the only way to produce legitimate knowledge, as opposed to emotion or instincts. In the exhibition text, this split is contradicted by using contemporary findings of neuroscience. Macel expresses the need to redefine humanism and its basis in reason, in order to move towards 'neo-humanism':

‘These artists re-appropriate the self, its body and emotions, just as neuroscience pushes us to do today ruling in favor of Spinoza as opposed to Decartes. Human emotions usually so frowned upon the hope that they can be suppressed, appear on the contrary for the current science as the very driving force of survival and human evolution. As the too-often forgotten source and home for our thoughts, the demand reinvention of humanism grounded on reason which, far from being isolated, is connected to the reality of emotion.’<sup>53</sup>

In this way, the focus on feelings and emotions in the trans-pavilion can be interpreted through legitimating the alternative ways of knowledge production and a response to the power of reason in Western thought. Thus, the number of artworks that are based on the local forms of art practice and knowledge creation that are scattered through the whole exhibition can be seen as an attempt to include these different, missing forms of knowledge into the Western discourse.

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<sup>53</sup> Macel, “Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte,” pp. 16-31, 20.

## Reason and Spirituality

Similarly, **the Pavilion of Traditions** addresses secularism and its influence on Western thought since the nineteenth century. By separating religion from government, Enlightenment rejected spirituality as an illegitimate way to produce knowledge. Thus, in this sense, traditions that are based on spirituality are seen as uncivilised and inferior to the future and progress-oriented reason-based academia. According to the curator, the pavilion focuses exactly on this past and present dichotomy:

‘Traditions that were once rejected in the eighteenth century by the Enlightenment and later by secular modernity, have re-emerged in the worst sense, namely fundamentalism and conservatism, sparking rejection and nostalgia for a past believed to be better. The past thirty years have seen modernism and its faith in a new man stagger and fall, inaugurating a period of “liquid modernity” according to Zygmunt Bauman. They have nevertheless provided the opportunity, in the field of art, to question tradition no longer from the point of view of customs and behaviors, often associated with religion or morality, but through the lens of the dialogue between the old and the recent.’<sup>54</sup>

It should be added that this dialogue between the old and the recent may have different implications around the world. While conservative and fundamental movements that often defend exclusionary politics and colonial violence often tend to disguise their ideas under the name of traditional values, the relation with traditions may have rather opposite meaning in the cultures that were exploited and were believed to be inferior. As the pavilion include several works stemming from different backgrounds, the dialogue held between the old and the recent reflect the complex history and seek empowerment and legitimacy rather than superiority. The pavilion showcases many craft-related artworks, where traditional crafts are used as means for such dialogue, where the distinction of past and present become blurry, as, despite such a complex history of violence, some of the craft managed to stay alive in the cultures.

‘A sign of unstable times, tainted by the feeling of a by-gone era that must open up new values, art delves into long past historical references in an urge for legitimacy, rebirth and reinvention.’<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

The **Pavilion of Shamans** continues the thematical relation to secularism, though instead of focusing on traditions and crafts as forms of knowledge production that does not fit into the boundaries of the reason, it is centred around spirituality. The pavilion frames these spiritual practices as means of care and empowerment.

Spirituality and Indigenous cosmologies were often viewed as inferior with the excuse of making Indigenous peoples ‘civilized’ through the still ongoing history of displacing people from their lands and systematically erasing their culture by forcing them to adopt the colonial culture. Thus, the need to maintain at least some of practices is a form resistance. Spiritual practices are framed as a legitimate means to produce knowledge that does not bend to the reason spirituality binary. Therefore, quite a few works in the pavilion address the colonial past and violence, including Ayrson Heráclito’s work addressing colonial violence experienced by Afro-Brazilians, Jelili Atiku work talks about colonial violence in Africa (Lagos/Nigeria), while Enrique Ramírez’s video work portrays a Chilean ceremony to exorcize evil embodied by a Spanish conquistador. The colonial history is told through the form of knowledge production created by a colonized, not a colonizer.

Moreover, the artist in this pavilion is understood as a healer figure. The same image of a spiritual healer figure in the pavilion is used to rethink our relationship with the Earth and non-humans. As expressed in the curatorial statement:

‘The shaman figure, embodied by Beuys, from whom few managed to recover, and was mostly – in retrospect – underestimated, takes on today a new dimension, at a time where the need for care and spirituality is greater than ever. This desire to transform art into an action that is both aesthetic and healing characterises several recent works.’<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, **the Dionysian Pavilion** maintains the topic of secularism and spirituality by approaching it from a feminist perspective. While using the ancient Greek god Dionysus and his female followers maenads as a metaphor, the trans-pavilion questions the connotations of femininity in relation to spirituality embedded in the European culture.

This myth illustrates how women’s relation to their bodies and spirituality was framed by the binary European tradition. A similar tradition about feminine virtues and morals can be seen in the Christian tradition that defined a large part of European culture after the Classical era. With the ideal image of a virgin-but-mother, women are stripped from the right to feel pleasure, from the right to their bodies.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 25.

Even with the secular turn, femininity is still associated with nature and irrational thinking, while masculinity is synonymous with reason and culture. Thus, this wild feminine nature must be contained under the set of religious rules that keep them civil.

Therefore, when secularism separated religion from politics, private life from the public political sphere, women in Europe have been assigned to the former, preventing them from participating in public affairs. According to Braidotti, '[i]n this polarized scheme, women were assigned to the pole of un-reason, passions and emotions, including religion, and these factors combined to keep them in the private sphere.'<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, feminist artists are reclaiming witchcraft and spirituality from its marginalizing connotation by employing it as means to talk about body politics, decolonisation and even environmental issues. They attempt to legitimize the woman's body and the pleasure it feels. The works by Heidi Bucher, Haguette Caland, Pauline Curnier Jardin celebrate femininity, women body, joy and pleasure.

All these three pavilions, which address the binary between reason and spirituality from three different, yet, interlinked angles, attempt to legitimise knowledge production processes that stem from spiritual practices and empower and emancipate the people who were othered by the humanist thought.

### **Culture and Nature, Humans and Non-humans**

The topics on climate and the Earth continue in the **Pavilion of the Earth**. The pavilion focuses on 'environmental, animal and planetary utopias, observations and dreams.'<sup>58</sup> Here, the artworks critique capitalistic utopias based on exploiting the Earth. They negate progress-oriented individualistic systems that oppress non-humans, while some works attempt to speculate the future if these practices continue. Work by Julian Charriere not only exposes these practices of the exploitation of Earth but also suggests a rather horrific future scenario for both the Earth and the economic and political situation. Moreover, going back to the roots, embracing the rural and the spiritual, that oppose these ideals of individualism and anthropocentrism which are understood as the cause of the climate crisis we face now, is presented as an alternative solution by some artists in the exhibition.

Furthermore, the focus is also shifted to non-humans by stressing their own agency, that humanism left exceptionally to humans. Thus, while human exceptionalism can still be seen as a part of the thorough framework of the exhibition, and the potential neo-humanism it advocates for, the Pavilion of the Earth is questioning this idea by shifting the focus to non-humans. Likewise, Michael Blazy

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<sup>57</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 34.

<sup>58</sup> Macel, "Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte," 22.

incorporates organic materials into his works. He plants miniature gardens in various everyday objects, thus not only giving an agency to non-humans but also highlighting the materiality of the given objects.

Similarly, **The Pavilion of Colors** approaches the notion of colour from a phenomenological stance:

‘According to well-known neuroscientific studies, colors do not exist in themselves but are the result of a cognitive function performed by the human brain and eyes as they decipher reality. Colors thus appear to be a particularly subjective source of emotion, which asks to reconsider the relevance of phenomenological approaches to art. With a fine balance between subtlety and transparency, light and spirituality, haptic experience and visual explosion, loaded sometimes with anthropological even political connotations, the Pavilion of Colors can be described as the fireworks at the end of the journey through the Arsenale [...].’<sup>59</sup>

Thus, the focus here is hefted to the materiality of the artworks and the knowledge that is embedded in them. It celebrates the colour and materiality more generally not only as an aesthetic experience but also as material that is affected by and affects the environment around it. In this way, also echoes a message heard through the whole exhibition that challenges the same Cartesian mind-body duality from a stance of materiality.

The human non-human relationship exploration continues as the **Pavilion of the Common** explores the split between individualism and community. The common here refers to the community as a notion that opposes a capitalistic, as well as humanistic, ideal of progress-oriented individualism. Since individualism as an ideal of modern society is now questioned as construct violent towards the other, both cultural others and non-humans, the trans-pavilion praises community action and community-based art practices as an alternative to counter it.

Consequentially, in the exhibition, the notion of community action is employed to talk about and even combat the current issues, including the global warming. As explained in the curatorial statement, ‘works of artists exploring the notion of the common world and the way to build a community as means of countering individualism and self-interest, which represent a worrisome threat to today’s

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 27.

troubling climate.’<sup>60</sup> The pavilion stresses the relationality between humans and non-humans, the need to look for non-exploitative ways to live together.

Therefore, all of the three pavilions discussed can be framed within the context of the global climate crisis, as they all address the negative consequences of individualism and human exceptionalism. Instead of further exploiting the Earth for the purposes of the ‘Man’, they highlight the agency of non-humans, attempt to rethink the mind and body duality by addressing materialism of each body, and look for alternative ways to live on the Earth together. This human non-human, or more broadly nature-culture binary comes from the same mind and body dichotomy and thus proclaims the superiority of reason, in a result, it deems other forms of knowledge production inferior, and, automatically, creates a space for colonial violence. Hence, Haraway introduced the notion of naturecultures, the synthesis and entanglement of both, to Western thought, which can be interpreted as being explored in these three pavilions.

### **Universalism of the Potential Neo-humanism of *Viva Arte Viva***

However, while the exhibition attempts to redefine humanism by questioning the constructed binaries that frame it, by attempting to displace them, and by looking for spaces in-between, the universal narrative, that is challenged by posthumanism, plays a very important note in the exhibition and the curatorial statement. Posthuman thought exposes the universal idea of a human as being staged around the ‘Man’ and thus excluding experiences and knowledge by the various others who do not fit within this definition. Similarly, it reduces the agency of non-humans, further perpetuating human exceptionalism. As such, posthuman thought suggests notions as embedded and embodied knowledge, that not only challenges cartesian dualism of mind and body but also recognizes the knowledge and experiences of humans and non-humans that were excluded from the main narrative, recognizes their differences without claiming one’s superiority against another. Moreover, Braidotti introduces the concept of cartographies that are staged around ‘express grounded complex singularities, not universal claims’<sup>61</sup> and aid to expose the complexity of power relations between them. As such, it advocates for the inclusion of missing knowledge and missing peoples that were excluded by humanism.

However, the ‘neo-humanism’ of *Viva Arte Viva* is a very universal concept that in turn paints the main exhibition of Biennale in an apolitical light. While the exhibition explores the critiques of humanism through its binary in an attempt to deconstruct them, it still shows humanism, even if

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 20-21.

<sup>61</sup> Braidotti, “A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities,” 34.

revised, as a very positive thinking tradition that can be inclusive to everyone. Which may feel somewhat contradictory with the spirit of some artworks and the topics, experiences explored. However, it may be explained with the apolitical stance of the whole exhibition, as the goal to put the art and the artists in the forefront results in placing the societal, political and environmental issues they talk about in a background. According to the curatorial statement, ‘[t]his type of humanism is neither focused on an artistic ideal to follow nor is it characterized by the celebration of mankind as beings who can dominate their surroundings. If anything, this humanism, through art, celebrates mankind’s ability to avoid being dominated by the powers governing world affairs. These powers, if left to their own devices, can greatly affect the human dimension, in a detrimental sense.’<sup>62</sup> While by no means the exhibition denies the experiences that were catalysts to the artworks, it leaves them in the background as to be avoided to experience the beauty of the artwork they inspired to produce. As the curatorial statement follows, ‘[i]n this type of humanism, the artistic act is contemporaneously an act of resistance, of liberation and of generosity.’<sup>63</sup> As such, this framework also stages artworld as an autonomous space where everyone is equal, simultaneously being indifferent to the internal issues and power dynamics that are reflective of the external societal and political problems.

While the introductory pavilions of Artist and Books and Joys and Fears stage the whole exhibition as the critique of humanist binaries, it also highlights its apoliticality. As such, The Pavilion of Joys and Fears continues the thematic direction of The Pavilion of Artists and Books, yet, it changes the focus from the act of creating art to an artist as an individual. It takes into consideration external influences artists experience based on the geopolitical situation, social environment, their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and translates it to internal feelings that should be universally understandable to every human being.

‘In a world shaken by conflicts, wars and increasing inequality that lead to populism and anti-elitism, subjective emotions resurface now more than ever. This forces us to reconsider the human being, not only as a reasonable being capable of building a new, free and fraternal world, but also how he grapples with his impulses and emotions, including the less noble ones of fear, anxiety or aggression. A vulnerable and fragile self comes to life.’<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Paolo Baratta, “Introduction,” in *Viva Arte Viva: Biennale Arte 2017* (Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 2017), pp. 14-15, 14.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Macel, “Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte,” 19.



This approach could be compared to the famous MoMa exhibition in 1955 *The Family of Man*, curated by Edward Steichen<sup>65</sup>. The exhibition comprised 503 photographs by 273 artists from 68 countries and was conceived as ‘a manifesto for peace and the fundamental equality of mankind.’<sup>66</sup> It was supposed to spread a beautiful and idyllic message about everyone’s equality and the general oneness of the world, emphasising that every human being, despite where in the world they are, is born and dies, feels happiness and sadness, joy and suffering. Despite its success, it also faced a lot of criticism for ignoring systematic issues that cause the suffering based on race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class etc., and, thus, making a white Westerner experience a universal experience. Probably the most well-known critique of the exhibition was expressed by French philosopher Roland Barthes in his essay ‘The Great Family of Man’<sup>67</sup> in his book *Mythologies* in 1957. There, he claimed that this concept of an exhibition is just a product of conventional humanism. First, it showcases the differences and the diversity of human species, and then, ‘from this pluralism, a type of unity is magically produced: man is born, works, laughs and dies everywhere in the same way; and if there still remains in these actions some ethnic peculiarity, at least one hints that there is underlying each one an identical ‘nature’, that their diversity is only formal and does not believe the existence of a common mould.’<sup>68</sup> When the histories are regarded as irrelevant, injustices experienced based on one’s race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class are treated as simple differences. Thus, according to Barthes, the notion of birth is empty when robbed from its context. It does not say ‘[w]hether or not the child is born with ease or difficulty, whether or not his birth causes suffering to his mother, whether or not he is threatened by a high mortality rate, whether or not such and such a type of future is open to him?’<sup>69</sup>

Similar curatorial patterns can be seen in the *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition. By leaving the unique experiences in the background and instead focusing on the feelings, be they fears or joys, the exhibition contributes to the creation of a myth about everyone’s presumed equality. Thus, instead of creating a space for a dialogue, not only it portrays the violence of colonialism and humanism as a diversity of the global world, but it also fosters an illusion that colour-blindness is a way to heal, to be represented. The works by Hajra Waheed, Mawran or Senga Nengudi are filled with embedded and embodied knowledge, they engage in topics of alienations, segregations, displacement, overwritten narratives, by exposing societal and political conditions that lead to these feelings.

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<sup>65</sup> “The Family of Man.” Steichen Collections CNA. Accessed May 7, 2021. [https://steichencollections-cna.lu/eng/collections/1\\_the-family-of-man](https://steichencollections-cna.lu/eng/collections/1_the-family-of-man).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Jonathan Cape (New York, New York: The Noonday Press, 1991), 100-102.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 102.

However, in the framework of this trans-pavilion, their experiences are reduced to ambiguous feelings that, in theory, can be caused by any other factors and, thus, become universally relatable. It creates a space where inequalities caused by various societal and political issues are portrayed as simple differences, that in the end are undermined by the emotions and feelings shared by all human beings.

Moreover, several subthemes and binaries each pavilion explores and rethinks are framed in Eurocentric narrative. From the analysis of Roman *otium* and *negotium* as the origins of artist and artistic practice in the Pavilion of Artists and Books to German artist Joseph Beuys remaining a prime example of spirituality and shamanic figure who heals in the Pavilion of Shamans. While these details may look minor in the context of the whole exhibition, yet, knowing the universal narrative the curatorial statement attempts to maintain, they reveal the target audience of such exhibition. Therefore, who is it trying to heal with this inclusion, humans (and non-humans) that were excluded by humanism, or us and the way we feel about our colonial past?

Furthermore, it raises questions if an apolitically approached critique of humanism, that rather attempts to reinvent it than rethink it and move towards something new is the best way to frame an exhibition of an inherently political contemporary art event as Biennale? Can humanist thought, arguably very un-inclusive, be inclusive and represent the societal, political, and environmental complexities as something more than simple differences? While the exhibition clearly attempts to be inclusive (‘[...] these nine episodes tell a story that is often discursive and at times paradoxical with detours that mirror world’s complexities, multiplicity of approaches and wide variety of practices.’), does it actually work? Having that in mind, how Indigenous practices were staged in the exhibition, that attempts to redefine the humanistic binaries challenging them and including other forms of knowledge production, while keeping the universalistic and apolitical narrative as a vital part of reinvented humanism?

## **Analysis of Individual Artworks: Indigenous Cosmologies in *Viva Arte Viva***

Since the exhibition critiques binary constructs that frame humanistic, and thus, Western thought, it seems logical to showcase forms of knowledge production processes that do not have the same binary structure. As such, some Indigenous artworks were included in the exhibition, that fit the themes of some pavilions, as a binary between human and non-human, between individuality and relationality and between reason and spirituality. While the Indigenous influences can be seen in more artworks in the exhibition that contribute to the general vibe, the term Indigenous was not often used in the curatorial statement and the exhibition catalogue. Having that in mind, I am in no position to define what Indigenous is. Thus, I chose a few artworks that were referred to as being about Indigeneity in the *Viva Arte Viva* catalogue that also work as great examples of how Indigeneity was framed within the exhibition. This inclusion of non-binary Indigenous cosmologies into an exhibition whose framework is still based on the European tradition may result in (mis)interpretation and (mis)representation of Indigeneity. Several subthemes of each pavilion are framed employing traditionally Europocentric narratives yet attempt to be inclusive to the art practices from around the world that might not fall under the same narratives. The problems that may arise with such inclusion can be exposed employing decolonial and Indigenous critiques.

Here, I will analyse three artworks that encapsulate the Indigenous representation in the exhibition the best. Here they were staged under the Culture and Nature and Reason and Spirituality binaries. I will divide the artworks into two more sub-categories that better uncover the ways Indigenous was staged in the *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition in Biennale. The first category consists of artworks made by Indigenous artists, the second one consists of artworks made by non-Indigenous artists that were inspired by or created in collaboration with Indigenous communities. These subcategories will allow to better analyse the artworks from the decolonial and Indigenous critiques.

### **Artworks by Indigenous Artists in a Binary Between Culture and Nature, Human and Non-Human**

Entering the pavilion of the Earth the viewer is met by the colourful and humorous drawings by Kananginak Pootoogook (1935–2010)<sup>70</sup> who is the first Inuit artist whose works are presented at the Venice Biennale central exhibition. More importantly, he is the first Inuit artist to be represented in the central exhibition of the Venice Biennale. In Pootoogook's drawings, the unique and intimate Inuit relation with the Arctic is told through the scenes of their everyday life. Large scale drawings

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<sup>70</sup> I have to make a note that *Viva Arte Viva* Catalogue had his birth year wrong: 1952 instead of 1935.

vary from self-portraits to Walrus hunt depictions, to the contact of Royal Canadian Mountain Police officers.

The drawings of Pootoogook capture everyday Inuit experiences and relations with the local Arctic wildlife. Most of the artworks displayed were made by the end of his life, as Leah Sandals notes, ‘when the contrast to his early life would have been the strongest.’<sup>71</sup> For example, Pootoogook’s self-portraits illustrate him taking pictures of the colourful flowers *Untitled* (2010)<sup>72</sup> or drawing a husky *Untitled* (2009)<sup>73</sup>. While some of the works depict a more traditional Inuit practices that may contrast with snowmobiles or cameras depicted in others. A particularly strong image that captures the moment of the walrus hunt is a drawing called *Untitled (Successful Walrus Hunt)* (2009)<sup>74</sup>. As the name suggests, the big format colourful drawing depicts Inuit hunters on a boat in the middle of a walrus hunt. The shape of the boat mimics the one of a fish. Next to the boat, there is a seemingly dead Walrus (as the title suggest the hunt was a successful one). Each of the hunters on the boat does their part of the hunt by either calling the walruses with a whistle, caring for the already hunted meat or just sipping some tea. Yet, all of their individual input fades away into the image of a big fish capturing a smaller one. Inuit culture, captured by Pootoogook, is alive and moving.

While the artist is known for representing Arctic wildlife in his works, especially many species of birds that are frequent in the Arctic,<sup>75</sup> the drawings chosen for the Viva Arte Viva exhibition portray the local Arctic flora and fauna through its contact with the human. A drawing *Untitled* (2007)<sup>76</sup> depicting Royal Canadian Mountain Police oppression against Inuit people (‘RCMP officer asking how old they are and where they were born. They were given disc #E7. Their child is scared of policeman.’) captures Canada’s colonial past and present. Not only do the Qallunaaq (white men) affected oppress Inuit people, but they also pose a threat to the Arctic. Artist compellingly tells the story of the contemporary life of Inuit people, the relationship they share with the Earth and non-humans, and how Qallunaaq affected their means of life.

Indigenous cosmologies and their relation to the Arctic is put in sharp contrast to colonialists occupying their lands and the Arctic. In the context of the Pavilion of Earth and the binaries between

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<sup>71</sup> Leah Sandals, “Inuit Art Makes a Global Breakthrough at the Venice Biennale,” Canadian Art, May 9, 2017, <https://canadianart.ca/news/kananginak-pootoogook-inuit-art-venice-biennale/>.

<sup>72</sup> Kananginak Pootoogook, *Untitled*, 2010. Ink and coloured pencil on paper, 50,8 x 66 cm. Private collection, Toronto.

<sup>73</sup> Kananginak Pootoogook, *Untitled*, 2009. Ink and coloured pencil on paper, 56 x 76 cm. Collection of John and Joyce Price, Seattle, USA.

<sup>74</sup> Kananginak Pootoogook, *Untitled (Successful Walrus Hunt)*, 2009. Ink and coloured pencil on paper, 121,9 x 243,8 cm.

<sup>75</sup> “Kananginak Pootoogook,” DORSET FINE ARTS, accessed July 14, 2021, <http://www.dorsetfinearts.com/kananginakpootoogook>.

<sup>76</sup> Kananginak Pootoogook, *Untitled*, 2007. Ink and coloured pencil on paper, 57 x 76 cm. Private collection, Toronto.

the culture and nature, human and non-human it attempts to redefine, this slightly simplistic juxtaposition of a humanistic culture and Indigenous knowledge might appear as reducing the complexity of Inuit histories and cosmologies. Moreover, we might be compelled to read the works through the framework that highlights the dichotomies to rethink them, thus seeing the Qallunaaq as the culture and Indigenous as the nature. However, as Zoe Todd mentions in her text ‘An Indigenous Feminist’s Take On The Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word For Colonialism’<sup>77</sup>, one of the main reasons for misrepresentation of Indigenous cosmologies in Western thought is the lack of acknowledgements and representation of Indigenous thinkers, and, in the context of an art exhibition, artists. As such, actual Indigenous peoples should be present in the discussions to reclaim their agency to tell their own stories. As it is noted in an article by Sandals, ‘[t]he inclusion of Pootoogook’s drawings in what is arguably the world’s most prestigious and influential art event is also meaningful to the community where he spent most of his life—Cape Dorset, Nunavut.’<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the lack of agency in Indigenous representation in Viva Arte Viva is illustrated by that Kananginak Pootoogook died in 2010, seven years before the exhibition was opened. Moreover, arguably, he is the only artist referred to as Indigenous in the exhibition catalogue. It asks for a question who is staging the Indigenous of the Pootoogook’s in the Viva Arte Viva exhibition and correlates with the fact, that there were only five black artists shown in the exhibition, the claims to celebrate diversity and universality of art. As Claire Bishop notes in her review of the exhibition, *Viva Arte Viva* was critiqued by many since it was so apolitical, neo-primitivist and ‘[s]o male (65 percent) and so white (57 percent)!’<sup>79</sup>

### **Artworks by Non-Indigenous Artists in a Binary Between Culture and Nature, Human and Non-Human**

The Pavilion of Common explores the notions of communality and relationality as opposed to individuality. The pavilion stresses the relationality between humans and non-humans, the need to look for non-exploitative ways to live together, that in turn attempts to rethink the binary between culture and nature. As an example of the sense of community instead of individuality, that progress-oriented humanism lacks, Indigenous communities and their cosmologies are included in the exhibition, particularly through Juan Downey’s (1940-1993) work *Circle of fires* (1979)<sup>80</sup>. While addressing this sense of community seen in Indigenous cultures, the curatorial statement also refers

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<sup>77</sup> Todd, “An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn”.

<sup>78</sup> Sandals, “Inuit Art Makes a Global Breakthrough at the Venice Biennale.”

<sup>79</sup> Claire Bishop, “Claire Bishop on the 57th Venice Biennale,” The online edition of Artforum International Magazine, September 1, 2017, <https://www.artforum.com/print/201707/claire-bishop-on-the-57th-venice-biennale-70463>.

<sup>80</sup> Juan Downey, *Circle of Fires*, 1979, two-channel color video installation, with sound, 10 min. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA. December 13, 2021 <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/33093>

to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro works, particularly, his book *Cannibal Metaphysics*<sup>81</sup>, which stresses that the nature-culture dichotomy model that frames Western thinking does not exist within the majority of Indigenous cosmologies.

*Circle of fires* consists of a circle of eight monitors that screen two-channel video four times. The film portrays various daily rituals of the Yanomami people, the isolated Indigenous group inhabiting the upper Orinoco River basin of southern Venezuela and north-western Brazil. Leaving his New York home, the artist, together with his wife and two children, lived with the Yanomami people for a period of time between 1976 and 1977. During this time, he produced multiple video and photography works, as well as other documentation about the Yanomami life. In all of the documentation, the artist was questioning the traditional roles and modes of ethnography.

The work derives from a larger project *Video Trans America* (1973-1977), where the artist travelled back from his home in New York to his native Chile. Downey, armed with cameras and monitors, visited various Indigenous and other marginalized communities in the United States of America, Mexico, across Central and South America, and asked them to experiment with his equipment and create works representing their culture. He screened the works of one community to another, thus creating a transcultural corridor with the help of the newest technology of the day. It created an opportunity for communication and interaction between the different marginalized cultural groups of the Americas. Yet, *Circle of Fires* shift from this concept since '[a]s Downey explains in the travelogues from his journey to the Amazon, the Yanomami were generally uninterested in tape recordings of other cultures, and the artist's interaction with the group thus centred instead on taping experiments that allowed the Yanomami to "see and hear documents from their own culture."<sup>82</sup>

As such, *Circle of Fires* is more focused on the technology and its abilities to represent a culture, instead of facilitating a way for transcultural communication. The work employs ethnography as a methodical approach, while simultaneously questioning its legitimacy and power dynamics. During his time with the Yanomami people, Downey gave the camera to the members of the tribe themselves, which, at the time of its making, gave new meaning to the anthropological term 'participant observer.'<sup>83</sup> Moreover, he showed the videos about the tribe made by themselves and him to the

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<sup>81</sup> Castro Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de, *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology*, ed. Peter Skafish (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

<sup>82</sup> Benjamin Murphy, "Juan Downey's Ethnographic Present," *ARTMargins* 6, no. 3 (2017): pp. 28-49, [https://doi.org/10.1162/artm\\_a\\_00188](https://doi.org/10.1162/artm_a_00188), 36.

<sup>83</sup> Chris Wiley, "The 57th Venice Biennale," *Frieze*, August 11, 2017, <https://www.frieze.com/article/57th-venice-biennale-0>.

Yanomami people, in order to create a space for live feedback. Therefore, Downey's works are known for deconstructing the roles of the observer and the observed.

Having that in mind, the circle was meant to evoke a "shabono," a large, circular, communal house whose central area is used as a gathering place for the Yanomami people.<sup>84</sup> The viewer is seated in the middle of it, symbolically placing one within the community, yet it simultaneously portrays a feeling of an alien observer surrounded by the Indigenous community. Consequently, the power dynamics of the observer and Yanomami people seem blurred. While the action of witnessing others' daily activities is still rather voyeuristic, the only way to see them is to come into the circle and let yourself be surrounded by the other. That creates a sensation of the observer being observed. This is clearly visible as the Yanomami turn the camera into the artist and his family.<sup>85</sup> The decision to give the cameras to the people in itself shows an effort to provide the Yanomami people with agency and control over the narrative. While the work fails to reverse the roles of the observer and the observed, as in the end the Yanomami people and their community are the ones being observed in the exhibition, it highlights the power dynamics of the two and disturbs the status quo of a Western researcher, Western artists and a Western art viewer.

As the work critiques the objectivity of anthropology, and ethnography, in the context of the Pavilion of the Common, it could also be read as a critique of the idea that the common and the community can only be found in the 'archaic' modes of society. As Macel states, 'As an artist living in New York, what can he possibly have in common with these tribes and their culture? The encounter where he films and gives the camera to the Indians, reveals the desire not only of an ethnologist<sup>86</sup> artist but of an artist questioning the issue of the common world, where conceptions of the world appear very different.'<sup>87</sup> Therefore, placing this work as the opening piece of the pavilion would suggest that attempts were made to rethink and redefine the notion of common, in Western thought.

Yet, while the work was considered revolutionary by many in terms of ethnography, it has also been critiqued for emphasizing present tense that is seen as a problematic practice in anthropological writing. As Benjamin Murphy notes,

'Dubbed the "ethnographic present," the convention in anthropological description to always write in the present tense had, with the waning of

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<sup>84</sup>"The Yanomami," Survival International, accessed September 10, 2021, <https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/yanomami>.

<sup>85</sup> Christine Macel, *Viva Arte Viva: Biennale Arte 2017*, (Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 2017), 182.

<sup>86</sup> A typo in the catalogue, assuming it was meant to say ethnographer. Ethnologist is a scientist who research animal behaviour.

<sup>87</sup> Macel, "Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte Viva Arte," 21.

structuralism, come under fierce attack by anthropologists who saw it as a symptom of a broader tendency within the field to treat foreign cultures as changeless, static isolates essentially other to the Western researcher. [...] As James Clifford notes in his succinct summary of this critique, the synchronic bias latent in the convention of the ethnographic present in fact bears a highly paradoxical relationship to time, since it “gives the sense of a reality not in temporal flux not in the same ambiguous, moving historical present that includes and situates the other, the ethnographer, and the reader.”<sup>88</sup>

According to him, in contrast to his series *Video Trans America*, where the temporality of the interactions was highlighted, his works with the Yanomami tribe instead focus on the present tense.<sup>89</sup>

As such, it freezes the Yanomami people and their knowledge in the never-ending presentness, that deprives them of their control of the narrative that was attempted to be given back by placing the cameras in their hands. It frames them as a natural history exhibition that is stuck in time, without the ability to change and to exist within the same timeframe as our culture. As the Pavilion of the Common delves into the notions of relationality and community and highlights their importance in the contemporary society and thought, the viewer is placed in the middle of the Indigenous communal gathering space to witness the Indigenous sense of community and simulate its experience, rather than critically self-reflect one’s relation to it – the action of observing the other and idealizing or patronising its modes of living.

Especially, since the Indigenous cosmologies of Yanomami people that do not share the same binary framework as Western thought in the pavilion is represented by a Chilean non-Indigenous artist based in New York. Moreover, even if Indigenous peoples regaining some agency through the means of filming is a crucial part of the work, the artwork in the exhibition was staged to fit in an exhibition reinventing humanism by questioning its binaries without Indigenous peoples present. Even if, the power dynamics between the ethnographer and Indigenous community were questioned, the agency of Indigenous peoples was limited and frozen in time.

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<sup>88</sup> Murphy, “Juan Downey's Ethnographic Present,” 31.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 36.



## Artworks by Non-Indigenous Artists in a Binary Between Reason and Spirituality

Through the shaman-healer figure, the Pavilion of Shamans attempts to rethink the binary between reason and spirituality. *Um Sagrado Lugar (A Sacred Place)* (2017)<sup>90</sup> by Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto (1964-) is probably one of the most memorable and most discussed artworks in the exhibition. The work is a result of the artist's close collaboration with the Huni Kuin Indigenous people from the Amazon forests. It started in 2011, when the artist was invited by the Research Institute and the Botanical Garden of Rio de Janeiro to the village of Aldeia Nova Aliança for a project to help to create a 'book of health', bringing together the medical knowledge of Huni Kuin.<sup>91</sup> Since then, it has resulted in other projects made together with the Huni Kuin people, including the *Aru Kuxipa* exhibition at Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary in Vienna, Austria in 2015<sup>92</sup>, that was later complemented with a book of the same name *Aru Kuxipa: Sacred Secret*<sup>93</sup>. Thus, the piece in the *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition is a result of a close long-term collaboration between the artist and Huni Kuin Indigenous communities.

*Um Sagrado Lugar (A Sacred Place)* is a large magical installation that provides a meeting space for the Huni Kuin Indigenous people and the Biennale audience. The main part of the installation is made of a woven material whose form resembles a hut. The artist takes advantage of the exhibition space in the Arsenale, as the space around the tent, such as columns and walls, is also entangled in traditional Indigenous textiles. Plants, tables, and benches outside the structure create an inviting environment and set the hut as the centre of the installation. Benches inside of the hut are placed in a circular manner resemble a meeting space and pull the attention to the centre that is highlighted with hanging textile works. Additionally, the natural, earthly flooring of the hut creates a feeling of visiting the Amazonian Forest. As the exhibition text explains, 'Ernesto Neto adopts a form of "Cupixawa", a place of sociality, political meetings and spiritual ceremonies for the Huni Kuin Indians of the state of Acre in the Amazonian Forest.'<sup>94</sup> Here, similarly to Downey's *Circle of Fires*, we see the recreation of Indigenous meeting space that is attempting to immerse the viewer into Indigenous knowledge sharing practices. As the text illuminates further,

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<sup>90</sup> Ernesto Neto & the Huni Kuin, *Um Sagrado Lugar (A Sacred Place)*, 2017. Accessed on December 13, 2021 <https://universes.art/en/venice-biennale/2017/viva-arte-viva/photos-arsenale-2/ernesto-neto-huni-kuin>

<sup>91</sup> Macel, *Viva Arte Viva: Biennale Arte 2017* (Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 2017), 352.

<sup>92</sup> "Ernesto Neto and the Huni KUIN- Aru Kuxipa: Sacred Secret," Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Press Center, June 25, 2015, <http://press.tba21.org/news-ernesto-neto-and-the-huni-kuin--aru-kuxipa-sacred-secret?id=45023&menuid=9361%3B>.

<sup>93</sup> Ernesto Neto et al., *Aru Kuxipa = SACRED SECRET* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016).

<sup>94</sup> Macel, *Viva Arte Viva: Biennale Arte 2017*, 352.

‘The Huni Kuin repeat traditional rituals aimed at making each participant aware of his connection with nature, and to thrust away any bad energies. Through drinking ayahuasca (also called “nixi pae”), a psychoactive plant considered a “planta maesta” (teacher plant) by the Huni Kuin, the latter set up veritable healing sessions conducted by the “pajès” (spiritual leaders) with the aim of healing the wounds of sick modern society. Together, the artist and the Huni Kuin Inidans invite spectators to imagine a necessary transformation in society.’<sup>95</sup>

Here, the common topic uniting all the indigeneity representing artworks analysed in this research starts to become especially visible – Indigenous communities and their spiritual, magical relationship to nature and non-humans that are being reappreciated in the times of climate crisis. Moreover, embracing Indigenous knowledge is seen as a fix for a modern (or contemporary) society whose overexpressed individualism, the lack of connection between humans and non-humans, rigid reason-based thinking that alienates and delegitimizes other ways of knowledge production, are the causes of exhausting the Earth, of creating the grounds for the climate crisis we all are facing now. These topics in the installation are complemented by Neto’s poems on the wall celebrating nature, spirituality, and indigeneity (‘spirituality/ is spreading out of me/everywhere in nature/inside of you/ e e e a ee e e a ee/ e e e a ee e e a ee’<sup>96</sup>), (kids of plants/ they cleaned the air for you/ brothers of the animals/ who came before you/ e e e a ee e e a ee/ e e e a ee e e a ee’<sup>97</sup>).

Through *Um Sagrado Lugar*, the artist attempted to create space for a dialogue between Western society and Indigenous peoples, between ontology-etymology based knowledge system and Indigenous spiritual thinking. One of the strategies employed by the artist, that was made possible by the close and respectful collaboration, was inviting Huni Kuin Indigenous people to participate in the exhibition, to perform traditional rituals for and with the audience in the simulation of ‘Cupixava’ space. Since for most of the time of the exhibition, the Huni Kuin people were not performing, the installation was left open for the audience to come, sit, relax and think about the implications the artwork raises. Yet, as an art critic Ben Davis notes, ‘[i]t [was] meant to evoke the site of a sacred ayahuasca ceremony—though it mainly ends up as a funky chill-out zone for art tourists.’<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 352.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 354.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ben Davis, “The 2017 Venice Biennale's Neo-Shamanism,” Artnet News (Artnet News, June 7, 2017), <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/venice-biennale-2017-viva-art-viva-review-958238>.

Nevertheless, arguably the most complicated part of the artwork is the actual performance done by the Huni Kuin people during the exhibition. While it has resulted from a respectful collaboration with Huni Kuin people, and artwork addresses problems Indigenous people in Amazonia forests face, such as danger to their land due to active deforestation of the Amazonian Forests. However, it cannot help but slightly resemble live displays of Indigenous people across the world during the World Fairs. In the XIX – early XX centuries, human-zoos were exhibited to either showcase ‘savage’ forms of life as a contrast to modern European society, or as a way to prove how colonialization is helping to civilise the wild ‘savage’ in the taken territories. Here, of course, Indigeneity is not portrayed as something that people need to be saved from, civilized by the West, in contrast, it is portrayed as a possible solution to the climate crisis we are facing. However, in the context of the Venice Biennale, one of the main art events in the world whose ideological roots are historically related to the concept of World Fairs, it is difficult to ignore the negative connotations of it. As Claire Bishop notes, ‘[d]uring the opening days, Neto offered viewers what was billed as an “Encounter with the Huni Kuin”—an unfortunate phraseology redolent of ethnographic safaris. Even though the installation featured a huge wall text explaining the collaboration and included numerous publications, such as the compendium of plant-based medicine *Una isĩ kayawa*, little could be done to prevent the interface between the Huni Kuin (in full traditional regalia) and their kitten-heeled, iPhone-wielding visitors from appearing comically disconnected—not least when the former initiated a procession line enthusiastically trailed by the latter.’<sup>99</sup>

Consequently, the project placed in the *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition comes dangerously close to the ‘noble savage’ archetype where Indigenous people are portrayed as not yet corrupted by the ‘civilization’ who can show us a way to come back to our roots and regain our lost connection to the nature. It is enhanced by the details of primitivism seen in the display, such as poems written on walls in an almost childlike manner. As Ben Davis comments, [s]omeone, however, might have edited the hand-written texts studding the walls around his pavilion to make them sound a little bit less like ‘noble savage’ boilerplate.<sup>100</sup>

If Neto’s and Huni Kuin project was held as an individual show (the collaboration between the artists and Huni Kuin members has resulted in a few individual exhibitions), instead of being trapped in a rather problematic universal framework of the exhibition, it would have avoided some of these implications and would have had a bigger potential of creating a space for a dialogue

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<sup>99</sup> Bishop, “Claire Bishop on the 57th Venice Biennale.”

<sup>100</sup> Davis, “The 2017 Venice Biennale’s Neo-Shamanism.”

between the two different knowledge systems.<sup>101</sup> However, here might have it became a pawn to a self-contradictory narrative of the exhibition where virtue signalling is used with the goal to reinvent humanism. In the framework where spirituality is highlighted to challenge its constructed binary with reason, and the shaman figure is portrayed as a symbol to care and healing, can the Indigenous knowledge be interpreted and represented on equal grounds? According to Watts, Indigenous understanding of the world is still viewed as mythical by ‘modern’ Western society, while their stories are considered to be ‘alternative mode of understanding and interpretation rather than “real” events.’<sup>102</sup> Indigenous cosmologies are rather portrayed as a symbol, a metaphor, than a thinking system where the binary between epistemological and ontological, reason and spirituality just does not exist. As such, if the shaman is a symbol of healing, what does it heal in this exhibition: the Earth, the Indigenous or humanism?

Huni Kuin people were present during the creation of the work and in the exhibition. The work is a result of close collaboration, however, in the *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition, their cosmologies and experiences may look overshadowed by a bigger universal narrative proposed in the curatorial statement. The one, that attempts to reinvent humanism, only silently addressing the political and colonial implications it resulted and still results in. As such, was this representation of Huni Kuin creating a space to learn? According to Spivak, while political representation, or *vertretung*, have actually happened, as the Huni Kuin people were present during the creation of the work and for some time at the exhibition, *darstellung*, or transformation of representation, the actual agency to change what is being talked about them, might have not happened, as the Indigenous cosmologies were overshadowed by the apolitical and universal narrative of the exhibition.

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<sup>101</sup> Or at least, as Bishop suggests, ‘more could have been done to stage this encounter in a way that diminished the ethnographic angle—for example, by inviting the Huni Kuin to lead dedicated workshops during the summer rather than displaying them as a drive-by during the opening.’ (Bishop, “Claire Bishop on the 57th Venice Biennale.”)

<sup>102</sup> Watts, “Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans,” 22.

## Conclusion

In the Western culture, there seems to be a turn towards Indigenous in times of crisis. As the global climate crisis is becoming more and more real, not only do we look for solutions to slow it down, but also to critically rethink the system that enabled it to happen. As the posthuman turn is critically reconsidering humanism, acknowledging the violence its binary structure committed towards human and non-human other, the turn towards Indigenous seems organic. Posthuman thought seeks to create spaces for dialogue, spaces where we could learn from Indigenous without exploiting their knowledge and committing further violence. Similar strategies can be seen employed in contemporary art exhibitions that attempt to include Indigenous knowledge using posthumanism as a theoretical framework. *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition of 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale could be seen as an important attempt to reconsider and reinvent humanism and open it to other forms of knowledge.

Posthumanism explores the constructed binaries of humanism acknowledge the power dynamics they created and the social, political and environmental issues they resulted in, to deconstruct them and look for states in-between. Similarly, the exhibition attempts to 'reinvent humanism' through exploring its binaries. The three main binaries explored in the exhibition are the mind and body dichotomy together with the binary between reason and spirituality and culture and nature. While they are very similar and intertwined since they are coming from the same cartesian binary structure, in the exhibition they are divided into more, smaller binary structures that flow from one another without clear boundaries. They are the dichotomies between arts and sciences, reason and emotion or instincts, reason and spirituality, progress and traditions, masculinity and femininity, human and non-human, living and non-living matter, individuality and relationality. The exhibition is split into nine trans-pavilions and each of them, without clear boundaries, through various artworks reflect each of the binaries, and look for the alternative modes of thinking and spaces in-between.

However, while *Viva Arte Viva* attempts to rethink humanism, it also sticks to its universal narrative. Moreover, by putting artists and artworks at the forefront and while acknowledging their individual different backgrounds and experiences, it still leaves them in the background as less important than the art itself. Through this apolitical approach, it attempts to create this universal and optimistic vision of neo-humanism, where art is the universally understandable means of knowledge production. Art results in feelings, emotions and beauty that can be universally shared without much regard to the different contexts that allowed the artworks to be created. As such, it portrays various political, social complexities that result in violence and inequalities as mere differences, while also ignoring how the same issues are reflected and experienced within the art world itself.

As such, while the exhibition efforts to include many alternative means of knowledge production in an attempt to legitimise them through challenging the binaries of humanism (such as traditional crafts inspired works from around the world, works that use the materiality and the embedded knowledge of the matter, works that employ traditional practices that are deemed as irrational to emancipate and empower), by putting the complexities of histories and in the background, the experiences and knowledge of the other remain trapped in the narrative of the Western thought. Consequentially, this framework also affects the way Indigenous was staged in the exhibition.

While several artworks in the exhibition had Indigenous references, for the analysis I chose a few where Indigenous histories played an important role in the description of the artwork in the curatorial statement and the exhibition catalogue. As such, I left Indigenous as an open term without attempting to define it myself. The three artworks that contain Indigenous histories are the drawing by Inuit artist Kananginak Pootoogook, Chilean artist's Juan Downey's video installation *Circle of Fires* that captures the life of Yanomami people in Amazon Forests, and Brazilian artist's Ernesto Neto's work *Um Sagrado Lugar (A Sacred Place)* that was made in collaboration with Huni Kuin people from Amazon forests. While all of the artworks are placed in different pavilions, Pootoogook's drawings in the Pavilion of the Earth, Downey's installation in the Pavilion of Common, and Neto's work in the Pavilion of Shamans, as such they primarily refer to different binaries between human and non-human, between individuality and relationality, and between reason and spirituality, they all reflect turn to Indigenous in the times of climate crises. Pootoogook's works tell a story about Inuit everyday life, their relationship with the Arctic, in the context of the Pavilion of Common, Downey's work explores the community of Yanomami people, their rituals and relationality with the non-human, and, in the context of the Pavilion of Shamans, Downey's work explores the Indigenous spirituality of Huni Kuin people and their relationship to that Earth, the land in contrast to humanistic reason.

One of the main points of Indigenous critique on posthumanism, that is shared by both Zoe Todd and Vanessa Watts, is the lack of acknowledgements and representation of Indigenous peoples, scholars and artists in the discussions where the Indigenous knowledge is a part of it. My analysis revealed that the similar issue can be seen in the *Viva Arte Viva* exhibition. The works that are supposed to represent Indigenous cosmologies are either created by non-Indigenous artists (Juan Downey and Ernesto Neto) or the artist has died before the exhibition, and, presumably, did not have an active role in staging his own artworks and Indigeneity in the context of the exhibition.

While Ernesto Neto's work was done in close collaboration with Huni Kuin people, in the context of the Pavilion of Shamans, and the whole exhibition it was overshadowed by the main narrative that attempts to deconstruct the binaries, that do not exist in the same way in the most of Indigenous

cosmologies, to reinvent humanism, the thinking system that systematically excluded Indigenous cosmologies as inferior. Employing Spivak, while political representation, or *vertretung*, may have happened, as the Huni Kuin people were present during the creation of the work and its time at the exhibition, *darstellung*, or transformation of representation, the actual agency to change what is being talked about them, might have not happened, as the Indigenous cosmologies were overshadowed by the apolitical and universal narrative of the exhibition.

Having that in mind, Indigenous cosmologies are included in the framework that is based upon the deconstructing the binary, that does not exist within the Indigenous thinking. As Watts claims, Indigenous cosmologies lead to ‘place-thought’ model that ‘is based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts.’<sup>103</sup> While Western modern thought keeps interpreting Indigenous cosmologies as a metaphor or a symbol, rather than living history. As such, the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of Indigenous are bound to happen when the Indigenous peoples are not present in the discussion.

The exhibition’s attempt to challenge the binaries of humanism, to reinvent it and legitimise the knowledge it has historically excluded is very welcoming. The exhibition gathered a lot of attention to the artworks inspired by traditional practices around the world, including Indigenous. However, in order to create equal grounds for a dialogue with Indigenous peoples, so we can learn from their cosmologies, we must have more Indigenous peoples, artists and scholars present in such discussions. I do think that the posthuman created grounds for the Western thought to recognise its limits, rethink the epistemological violence that has been done against the other through humanism, thus not only including Indigenous knowledges, but actually listening to Indigenous peoples is the next step that will require a systematic change.

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<sup>103</sup> Watts, “Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans,” 21.

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