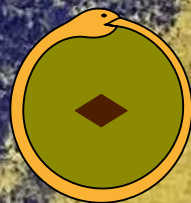
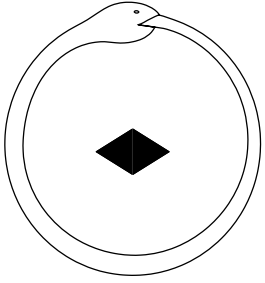


RADICAL SUBJECTIFICATION
OF THE WORLD

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro



notebooks
SELVAGEM



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This notebook is the transcript of an excerpt from the interview given by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro to the Selvagem Community's Communications Group on August 16, 2023 as part of the launch of 'Particular Particles', a Hammock Talk between Eduardo and Ailton Krenak, available [here](#).

The full interview was published in ARCA on October 19, 2023, and is available [here](#).

The cover of this notebook is a work by Carlos Vergara, "Kari'oka Series", 2023.

Science with a capital "S" is something that doesn't exist, strictly speaking. What does exist are sciences, and each lowercase "s" science has its own method, object, criteria of rationality; its own modes of observation and experimentation, of relating to and constructing the object, etc. And they are very different from one another. We can still find out there the idea that physics is the mother and model of the sciences, that it is the Science. There's a famous phrase by a physicist from the late 19th century, I don't remember if it was Lord Kelvin: "What is not physics is social service". In other words, science that isn't physics and doesn't have a translation into mathematical language isn't science.

If that were the case, there wouldn't be much left, because few disciplines, lores or fields of research really lend themselves to being translated into the language of mathematical physics. Traditional knowledge intersects in many ways with the knowledge produced by modern scientific disciplines in various areas, especially in the sciences of life. Not to mention the field covered by the social sciences, in which traditional knowledge is, in many ways, much more advanced than Western sciences. But the global epistemic orientation of the majority of the world's Indigenous peoples has, without doubt, headed in a different direction to that taken by the modern sciences since the 17th century, since Galileo.

It's another way of relating to the world. By adopting the idea of scientific knowledge, which involves the radical separation of subject and object, so as to avoid projecting characteristics of the subject onto the object, we consider that objective knowledge exists when it is possible to reduce what you know into mechanical processes, or rather, mathematizable processes. For the average Western modern sensibility, only things that can be reduced to mathematizable processes, preferably physical-chemical interactions, are considered a legitimate object of science. Things that cannot be (reduced) will be placed in the sphere of "politics", for example, or of "morals". Politics and morals are domains that would – that's how we imagine it – escape this possibility of reduction. Yet, there is a very frequent dream, especially on the part of technophile ideologies, that is to say, technocratic ideologies, that one day it will be possible to mathematize the morals, to reduce politics to equations and to identify human consciousness as energetic states of a neural network – something that has not been achieved so far and which possibly won't be achieved any time soon, perhaps ever.

Indigenous knowledge is somewhat the opposite. Indigenous science, in the most general sense of the word science, is knowledge that tends to consider the world rather from a political and not exclusively from a physical point of view. Relationships with other living beings, with the environment in general, that is to say, with what we call "nature", do not differ radically, ontologically, from inter-human relationships, that is to say, ethical-political relationships. In the Indigenous peoples' case, it is possible to say that all *significant* relationships are political; what one cannot think of (and act upon, act with, interact with) as a political relationship becomes, in a way, insignificant. For us it's the opposite: science (mathematical physics and its derivatives) is the gold standard of knowledge. Therefore, what I can't translate into an equation or into an interaction between particles and forces isn't "really" scientific.

Indigenous knowledge conceives of the whole world as one big society, while we conceive of human society as a world within the world, an empire within an empire, as Spinoza said. Only humans have a conscience, only humans have a culture, or, as it was said in the old days, only humans have a soul. We were created in the image and likeness and

so on... only us. I always joke, saying that this thing about human beings created in the image and likeness of God... I suspect that God says this to everyone: God says it to alligators, to turtles, to lions, to microbes... To everyone, but humans think it's just for them.

Indigenous knowledge is political knowledge and aesthetic knowledge. And ours is a mechanical and physical knowledge. In what sense? In the sense of the type of knowledge that is valued as the *via regia* to the truth of the real. Where does the distinction arise between the natural sciences, the “hard sciences” and the – what? Soft sciences? The hard sciences are the true/truth's sciences, the sciences of matter. The sciences of the spirit, the sciences of politics, of culture, are pseudo-sciences, as a recent book on pseudo-philosophy of science puts it, a book that is truly a prodigy of ignorance and prejudice¹.

The shaman, who is the Indigenous “subject of knowledge”, operates to a certain extent unlike our scientist (or unlike what laypeople imagine to be the defining attitude of the scientist). The shaman must determine, or find, the hidden subjective core of objects, of beings in general, discern their condition as agents, their center of intentionality. Our epistemological vulgate, on the other way around, understands that “doing science” means finding what there is of objective in the world, including in those we admit as subjects, that is to say, other humans (and some other privileged animals). For us, the form of the other, of what there is to be known, is the Thing, whereas for Indigenous peoples, the form of the other, which the shaman confronts, which the Indigenous thinker considers, that form is the Person. The shaman is interested in determining the intentional power behind the event – behind the illness, behind the encounter with a spectrum, the drought that befalls their people, etc. – what kind of personal agency exists there. On the other way around, for us it is necessary to remove intentionality from the world in order to understand (and dominate) it.

Back in the day, everything had, as they say, “soul”. But the club of owners of this property has dwindled. Science canceled the souls of stones, plants, then of the animals and the dead. Soul ownership

1. *Que Bobagem! Pseudociências e outros absurdos que não merecem ser levados a sério* [What nonsense! Pseudo-sciences and other absurdities that don't deserve to be taken seriously], by Natália Pasternak and Carlos Orsi.

is now restricted to living humans. One day, who knows, we may be able to prescind from the soul (that is, the assumption of an intentional interiority) in the case of humans. Soul, culture, cognition, ideology, whatever you want to call it. The modern ideal of knowledge is a description and explanation of the world that does not resort to the idea of intention, subject, mind or spirit. The ideal of modern science – of the modern science ideology – is the absolute desubjectification of reality. I see Indigenous knowledge betting on exactly the opposite, on the radical subjectification of the world. Which doesn't mean that everything is subjectifiable, just as for us not everything is (yet) objectifiable. If you're not a doctor and you're not working with the person's body, you're going to treat the person as the owner of a "mind" (soul's modern name). If you're a doctor doing an operation, you're essentially going to treat the person like a veterinarian treats a horse, because from a surgical point of view, it's exactly the same thing. If you're having a normal conversation with someone, you're going to treat them as if they were a person like you and therefore you are going to project, you are going to speculate about what they are thinking, what their intentions are, what they are thinking about what you are thinking and so on. "What do they have in mind, why are they doing this?"

There is a difference, a radical bifurcation in human knowledge, in the way human societies have explored the world, the environment that surrounds them, that is, on the one hand, the radical emphasis on matter, conceived as inert, indifferent and passive and, on the other hand, an interpretation of other-than-human beings based on the way human relationships are interpreted. For example, shamanism, mythology – which are correspondents, analogs to our science, to our philosophy – is much more sympathetic to an aesthetic perception of the world, an aesthetic and political appreciation (of it), while for us, aesthetics or art are a province. For science's modern ideology, art is a kind of ecological reserve of what Lévi-Strauss called "wild thought", which is human thought before, or outside, its domestication through the pursuit of income, profit and domination. Art can only exist within that reserve, it is possible there, in short "this is artist stuff". The fundamental opposition

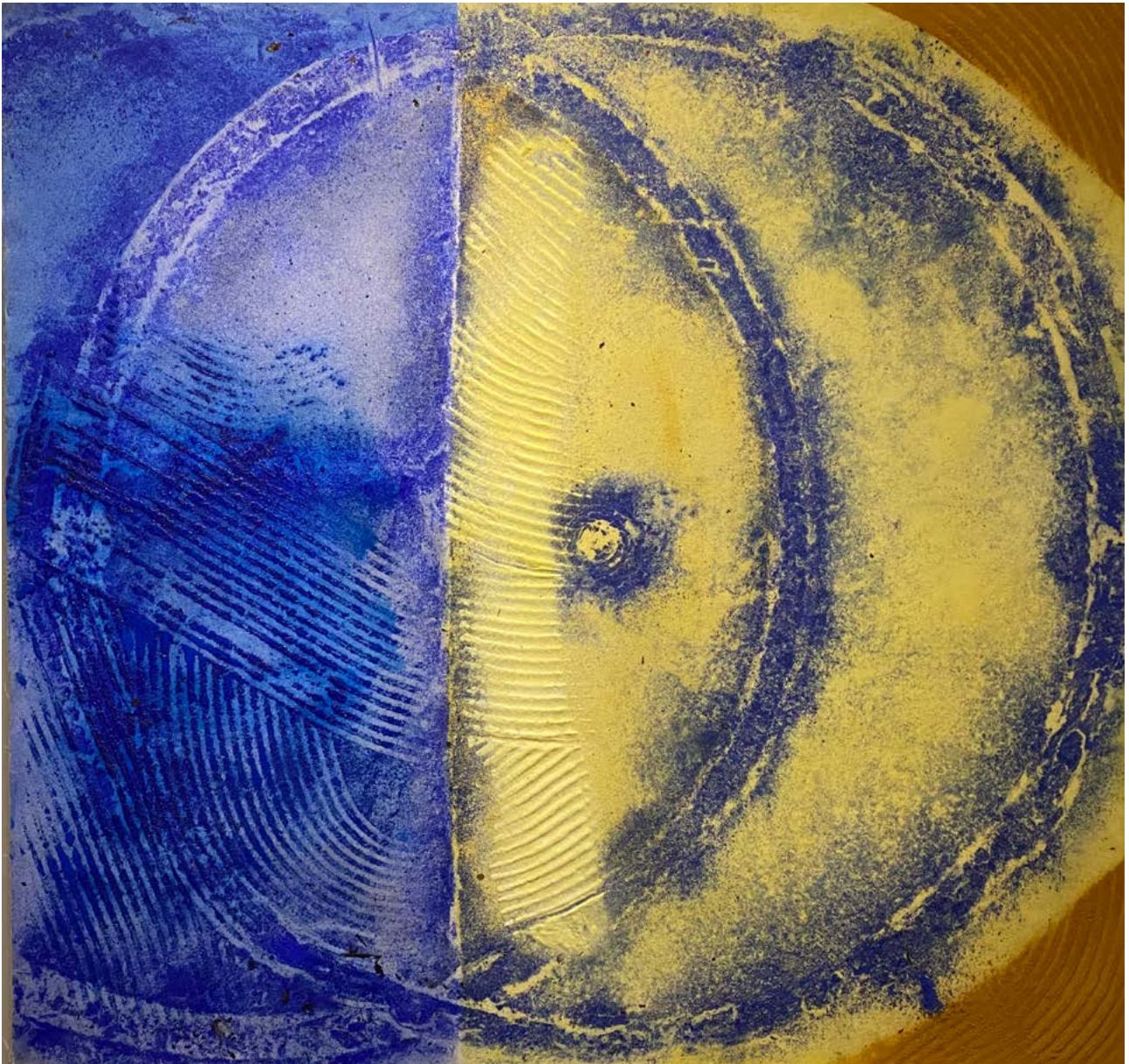
between the artist and the scientist: art is one thing, science is another; politics is one thing, science is another.

And the proof that for us politics is one thing and science is another is that we know perfectly well, from the point of view of the relevant sciences (climatology, geochemistry, etc.), what is happening to the planet but we have no idea how to solve it politically. We know exactly all the things that are happening, the accumulation of CO₂ in the atmosphere, the warming of the oceans and the rise in sea levels, the melting of glaciers, the carbon cycle, the phosphorus and nitrogen cycles, the rate of extinction of biodiversity and on and on the whole catastrophe goes. From the scientific point of view, the state of the planet is perfectly equated. But we have no idea what to do about the state of the planet. Politically, we have no idea how we are going to get out of this. We know we have to stop using oil (petroleum). How are we going to stop? Who are we going to convince to stop? Will we convince the New PAC²? Will we convince Shell? Are we not going to explore for oil at the mouth of the Amazon River? For us, there is an unbridgeable gap between science and politics. From the point of view of Indigenous peoples, there is no such gap. Knowledge is immediately political. Animals are other political agents within the world we live in. We need more clarity about what we understand as “scientific”. There is, in fact, a certain set of modern (and several extra-modern) practices of observation, experimentation, deduction and generalization that have extremely beneficial effects, indispensable in many ways. And there is other knowledge, with other epistemic presuppositions, that has other effects equally necessary, equally beneficial, but which operates on other planes of human existence. Try to solve a depression problem, a family problem, a personal life problem, a love problem with the resources of biology to see if it works. At most, you will become addicted to some kind of drug... In fact, if you want to use a pharmacopoeia, many of the best ones have been developed by Indigenous peoples. It is the phytopharmacopoeia, and the Indigenous peoples of America are the planet's greatest specialists in them. Countless drugs that act on the conscious-

2. Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento (Growth Acceleration Program), a Brazilian Federal Government programme that encompasses a set of economic policies.

ness (and on the subconscious) have come from Amazon, from the Americas in general; even tobacco came from here. So, from tobacco to ayahuasca and peyote, it's all inventions created by these people who we say have no science. Who has discovered these psychedelic drugs that psychiatric medicine is discovering may be fundamental? When did they discover that cannabis works for a bunch of pathological conditions? And – excuse the infamous pun – the evidence of the *baseado*³ has been rediscovered by “evidence-based” science... Ayahuasca, mind you... Mescaline, psilocybin... The Indigenous pharmacology is very sophisticated; they also have science, only their science is oriented towards another horizon. There are more things between heaven and earth than supposed by those who think themselves the rulers of the roost, the masters of knowledge – and are not.

3. Brazilian slang for joint, cannabis.



Carlos Vergara
Kari'oka Series
2023

Monotype and painting, acrylic and natural pigments on raw canvas
137 x 143 cm

EDUARDO VIVEIROS DE CASTRO

Anthropologist, writer and professor. A reference in studies focused on Indigenous peoples, especially in the context of Amazonian cultures, being responsible for theoretical contributions such as the concept of “Amerindian perspectivism”. He is the author of *A inconstância da alma selvagem* (Cosac & Naify, 2002), *Metafísicas canibais* (CosacNaify & n-1 Edições, 2015) and *Há mundo por vir?* (Cultura e Barbárie, 2014), among other works.

CARLOS VERGARA

Visual artist with an extensive and consistent oeuvre, which he has been producing since the 1960s. His works are housed in various institutions, such as the Inhotim Institute, Museums of Modern Art of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the Niterói Museum of Contemporary Art, the Pinacoteca de São Paulo, the Gulbenkian Foundation (Lisbon), among other important collections. *The Hammock Talk – Particular Particles* episode was recorded in his studio in Rio de Janeiro.

TRANSLATION

JOANA FERRAZ

Dance artist and publisher, interested in the relations between thought, memory, dream and movement. Coordinates with Marina Matheus the dance platform and publishing house Acampamento. Holds a BA degree in Communication of the Arts of the Body (PUC - São Paulo) and is currently studying for a MA in Choreography and Performance at JLU, Giessen university, Germany.

TRANSLATION REVISION

MARINA MATHEUS

Marina is a dance maker, researching and practicing conversations between dance, literature, anthropology, philosophy and yoga. Alongside Joana Ferraz, the artist coordinates the dance creation platform and publishing house Acampamento. Marina also coordinates the English translation group of the Selvagem cycle of studies.

The editorial production work of the Selvagem Notebooks is carried out collectively with the Selvagem community. The editorial coordination is by Alice Faria and the design by Tania Grillo. The coordinator of English translations is Marina Matheus.

More information at selvagemciclo.com.br

All Selvagem activities and materials are shared free of charge. For those who wish to give something back, we invite you to financially support the Living Schools, a network of 5 educational centers for the transmission of Indigenous culture and knowledge. Find out more at selvagemciclo.com.br/colabore

SELVAGEM Notebooks
digital publication by
Dantes Editora
Biosphere, 2024

