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Unlearning Taxonomies: Artistic Unveiling Practices

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Abstract: The Anthropocene era seems to be described by starting from the analysis of the effects of human action. But in reality, the Anthropocene is not ended and thus was determined by an imagination projected onto a possible future. In this sense, we will try to show that when trying to define something, one must focus on the effects of the individual's activities. In fact, descriptive taxonomy does not provide an understanding of the world, but a universal abstraction of ideological characteristics. The goal of this article is to problematize taxonomies by showing that they can only be useful if they are thought of in a posteriori terms. A coherent taxonomic description must be approached by taking into account the changing relational status of things in the world. This means being able to rethink taxonomies no longer with a hierarchical and universal model, but from the network of relationships and complexity. Our proposal is not to suggest new categories, but to open them up to the event, understood as the determining quality of a process in constant becoming. Taxonomies must not only be contextualized a posteriori, but also react to an epistemological paradox that seeks to crystallize ever-evolving processes. Cosmologies from anthropology and contemporary art will be used to support this thesis.

KEYWORDS: ANTHROPOCENE; COSMOLOGIES; COMPLEXITY; EVENT; IDEOLOGY; TAXONOMIES; UNLEARNING.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of end-of-the-world narratives. After all, one could argue, there have always been textual productions concerning the end of time (Zizek 2010). However, the difference that separates previous end-of-the-world narratives from current ones stems fundamentally from the fact that contemporary dystopias are situated in the present. In other words, end narratives tell us about our present. This temporal shift has created a kind of present without future, but also a timeless present (Malvestio 2021). We could say that “we are living in interesting times”, as the title of the 58th edition of the Biennale di Venezia proclaimed. As curator Ralph Rugoff³ observed, art helps us to

observe reality from multiple, often anarchic points of view, giving alternative meanings to what we take as fact. This warning from art shows us the need to look suspiciously at all categories taken for granted. Art critiques order through transverse routes and by considering multiple alternatives. The capacity is to investigate through unknown methodologies the taxonomies that coordinate our view of the world.

This vision of art is also shared by the hard sciences, especially regarding the recognition of an absolutely fluidity order of reality. In fact, by the notion of “unknown methodology” we mean to refer to a precise scientific method that is redolent in the possibility of never arriving at a certain and ultimate conclusion.



Figure 1.

A sweat bee (*Halictus ligatus*) covered in Rudbeckia pollen, which the bee gathers to feed to her larvae. Photo by Alex Wild.

One of the most interesting notions is Nora Bateson's *aphanipoiesis* (2021). This notion refers to Charles Peirce's abductive method, seeking to investigate what lies at the heart of the formulation of a hypothesis. With *aphanipoiesis*⁴, it becomes relevant to explore the realm of invisible collaboratives that coalesce to produce the foundations of a hypothesis⁵. Indeed, the hypothesis is limited by pre-existing anticipatory patterns. «If one listens only for what one knows to listen for, that is what will be heard», Bateson tells us. In the study of *aphanipoiesis*, the hypothesis becomes an indicator of the pre-habituated perceptions through which new information will be filtered. Thus, this article seeks to lose familiarity with something in a context that allows the taxonomic description to show its epistemic narrowness. The idea of the article is that the activity of unlearning can be a basis for experiencing any kind of novelty.

What we will try to do is to use the notion of the Anthropocene to *challenge the perception of a homogeneous reality* and at the same time showing how this categorisation has been achieved by looking at human activities as they unfold. The discourse will focus on deactivating the meaning effects of taxonomies, emphasising the arbitrariness with which they have always been determined. This is due to the attempt to reduce the complexity of reality and life forms, while maintaining an ideological narrative towards the subdivision of non-human entities. Unlearning taxonomies then stands as a process of dissolving classical taxonomies, an activity that can primarily be addressed through art. As we have done in part in other articles (Zengiaro 2022, 2022a; Ambrosini, Zampieri, Zengiaro 2023), we will start by criticizing the notion of the Anthropocene as utterly superficial and reductive in order to subsequently deconstruct the idea that the world corresponds to our idea of taxonomic cataloguing.

1. The symbolic Anthropocene.

In contemporary literature, there are fixed points regarding the definition of this period, despite the fact that there is no agreed date to determine an actual beginning (Lewis, Maslin 2015). The Anthropocene is identified according to a few basic definitions. First of all, humans are recognised as a geological force capable of altering the planet's equilibrium. Secondly, this time is defined in relation to stratigraphic analyses, which allow a dating of the planetary imbalance. Ultimately, the human is indicated as the primary cause of the rapid modification of the equilibrium (Zalasiewicz, et. al. 2019). Nevertheless, in the definition of this historical period, reference is not made to a supposed constant humanity over time, but to a *certain type of human*. A new human, a being

that from one point in time became something else.

The Anthropocene has an important symbolic significance. The narratives that led to the creation of the term and those that emerged from it collaborate to create a symbolic character that has theoretical and practical implications at the same time. The Anthropocene emerges from a narrative and a construction of this historical period and, at the same time, retroactively seeks to redefine the human based on its impact on the planet. Thus, the symbolic scope of the term stands on two lines that form knots: on the one hand, the characterisation of a time determined by the human; on the other hand, the human defined by its historical-temporal or geo-historical determination (Chakrabarty 2009; 2021). Time, and the living, identify each other in a symbolic and historical relationship, both based on the effects of the actions of the human species. For this reason, the symbolic importance of the term also retroacts on a new semantic paradigm that is constituted through the relationship of the human being with the planet.

The human is no longer a biological entity, but is compared to a geological event. Human traces are read in the earth's elements (rocks, ice, atmospheric and oceanic chemistry). The reason found in human existence tries to reduce complexity to a single factor for the following reasons: 1) to identify a new entity (geo-human); 2) to homogenise the species (as a unitary event); 3) to distribute responsibility (to overcome the political and economic impasse); 4) to identify the event (by finding a possible solution).

This forces us to reflect on what kind of "humanity" we refer to when we speak of the "age of humans". The concept of humanity is a historically situated construct (Foucault 1994). In this sense, when speaking of "human" and "humanity", one must bear in mind that the human is not an essence but a process. One is not born human, but becomes human, especially from the acceptance of human normative models (Ferrando 2019). The human is a performance (Butler 1999), it reveals itself as a verb in its meaning of "humanizing" (Haraway 2004). And since the human is something that is accomplished, that is performed, then we must ask ourselves who or what our time refers to.

The Anthropocene is properly marked by waste (Armiero 2021), materialities that act as catalysts for ecological disaster (Zengiaro 2020). It means that the Anthropocene, the age of man, identifies the human not so much with what he⁶ is but with what he produces (Moore 2016). His waste is what characterises it, identifying it in the traces left by his passage. Indeed, the age of the human seeks not only to determine a time, but also to redefine "man" and

"humanity". In attempting to classify the human in the present, what we do is to look at the effects of the actions of a certain collectivity. This, if we think about it, is a new vision of classification. Classifying a living being a priori is very arbitrary, especially when we are aware of the fact that the fluidity (*queerness*) with which life manifests itself does not take into account definitions (Barad 2007). *The Anthropocene is in fact constructed through an imaginative process*, i.e., determined by the human faculty of projecting oneself in space and time. This space is not simply material, in which rubbish, disused machinery, building materials, farm animal bones, microplastics, form a layer; but it is above all a symbolic space, in which the heralding of a new terrestrial configuration has taken place. The symbolic layer emerges from its self-determination, as if the present were declaring its coming. As Claudio Kulesko (2023: 23) has rightly observed, the Anthropocene is determined a priori, in which an imaginative historical time is constructed even before this time materialises. That is, even before it becomes an ascertainable fact through the scientific method, the Anthropocene shows its existence through imaginative constructs (Meschiari 2020). In the age of the Anthropocene, it is culture and the symbolic processes that constitute it that play a major role and, at the same time, act as an ecological and existential threat. It is the culture that feeds the illusion that has set in motion the ecological and environmental disaster we are experiencing. The material layer is nothing more than a symbolic stratum crystallised in matter.

Stratigraphy tells us exactly this: we are the effects of our existential activity. This changes the symbolisation of the world in which we live. The dimension that defines this time is seen from an a posteriori perspective. If human actions determine a geological era, which in turn redefines the human and its categories, then the activities of non-humans also define what they are. In this sense, when trying to define something, one must focus on the effects of the activities of individuals. Classical taxonomy, in fact, does not provide an understanding of the world, but a universal abstraction of ideological characteristics (Bowker, Star 1999).

One of the working hypotheses that the Anthropocene shows is that taxonomies can be determined on the basis of activity processes. In other words, we can ask what an entity is by what it does and what it can do (Deleuze 1988).

Definitions that block these existential processes must be deactivated. *Unlearning taxonomies* is a practice of critical inquiry in an open challenge to any conventionally employed habit of approaching the world. Driven by the desire to activate processes

of collective imagination, unlearning taxonomies is often expressed in exercises that call bodies into action searching for alternative and regenerated gazes capable of sharing narratives around each organism, understood as a complex event. It is an activity that is not progress-oriented - directed by the anthropocentric and capitalist attitude - but rather activates interferences and unveilings. To support this unlearning, we would propose in the last section of the article artistic performances that enact this fluid form of continuity-oriented epistemology and hybridization

2. Classifying reality.

We are heirs to an epistemological paradigm founded on the belief that there is an objective reality governed by eternal, unchangeable and structural laws. The taxonomic classification introduced in the mid-eighteenth century by Carl von Linné, with all the variants that followed, is one of the main focuses of the modern scientific method. The reduction of the complex structure of reality into its simple elements is a *modus operandi* that we still struggle to escape. In the specific case of Linnaeus, who devised a system for classifying the universal living world, taxonomy is nothing more than the outcome of the aim he set out to achieve in *Systema Naturae* (1758): to reconstruct God's act of creation. The one outlined is a static situation, clinging to the creationist claim of immutability, according to which God created the Universe through a vertical descending movement that, in the Christian-Catholic version, places the most complex entity, i.e., man, in close proximity to God and thus legitimised to dominate all other species (Raffi, Serpagli 2003).

In modern science, the encounter between technique and theory is none other than, as Prigogine argues, the systemic alliance between the ambition to shape the world and the ambition to understand it (Prigogine, Stengers 1984). In fact, the experimental dialogue with nature, adopted at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, is based on the manipulation of physical reality in order to adapt it to a theoretical description: isolating the phenomenon studied allows the latter to resemble an ideal situation, physically unrealisable, but intelligible insofar as it is the result of the theoretical hypothesis at the head of the manipulation. A new rationality whose result consists in the revelation of a lifeless nature, which behaves like an automaton and, once programmed, eternally follows the written rules. According to the biological theory of creationism, existing animal and plant species are destined to always remain the same..

Fixationism is the dogma that underlies taxonomy, an unchangeable foundation that has led to the development of a classification system based on categories ordered hierarchically from the smallest to the largest (*species, genus, family, order, class, phylum, kingdom*) and the systematic use of binomial nomenclature in which the simple and universal nature has been the most successful tool for the segmentation and division of living beings. The orderly world of fissionism has thus been classified through the invention of names and criteria, which in the plant world refer to the sexual system of plants and in the animal world to a classification system of the complexity of certain apparatuses, such as the circulatory system.

When Lynn Margulis (1970), following manifold studies, correctly added multiple categories to the living world, she demonstrated the elasticity of biological inquiry. This shows that the categories into which the biological and natural worlds have been divided are constantly changing and are often blurred along the edges. Natural entities float from one category to another, failing to comply with the definitions within which we try to place them. Indeed, the world is a flux of gradations and transformations that is dissected into divisions (Caivano 2015). In this sense, it is evident that the scientific methodologies that determined the sections of life are never conclusive.

This creates a kind of constant uncertainty in the knowledge of reality, a premise on which complex thinking, understood as thinking that is able to grasp the links between processes, interactions and phenomena, is based (Capra, Luisi 2014). The reduction of the complex structure of reality has always closed the relationships between human and non-human, ecosystems generated by networks of organisms into a monolithic world, static and knowable in all its parts. This has been the outcome of this profound fear of chaos and the unknown. This fear today must drive a revolution based on the power of discomfort. We must let ourselves be carried away by the queerness of nature, in a multi-species coexistence that takes into account the complexity (*cum+plècto*, interwoven, woven together) of the world. A world that must be released from the chains of convention.

3. The complexity of the life forms

Liberation from conventions, and from closed and clear concepts, then. Complexification opens up multiple channels to instability, chaos, catastrophe, and uncertainty. Rather than a discovery, one can refer to complexity as an awareness that has broken

into many areas of knowledge, challenging classical certainties. Ernst von Glasersfeld said that all regularities, rules or laws that we construct derive from our experience which is a world generated, defined and delimited by ourselves through our activity of segmentation and conceptualization (Glaserfeld 1995). In this paradigm of generality, the individual is excluded from scientific knowledge because it is reduced to a model, an example, or the non-individual. With the turn to complexity, the range of investigation begins to take into account relationships both internal and external to the observed phenomenon, moving towards a vision of the whole. This view leads to a greater awareness of the complexity of phenomena, not only biological, but also physical and social. If every system is not inert, but is in homeostasis (the aptitude of living organisms to preserve their characteristics in the face of changing external conditions through self-regulation), if it is always open, in metabolism with the outside environment, the theories describing it must also adapt: through new processes of fluidity and incompleteness. There is no longer any point in postulating and pursuing a perfect correspondence between the elements of reality and the elements of theory because reality is not composed of elements that are structured in a linear manner and stabilized once and for all, but is made up of parts that constantly evolve and intersect in a symbiotic manner, transforming themselves through mutual influencing. If this is true, a theory can never correspond to reality because every observation and description comes from arbitrary narratives (Latour 1986; 1987; 1993). The object is always becoming and interacting, internally with its constituent parts; it is an "event" (Morin 1974). The event is something floating, accidental, it is an occurrence. An event that changes at the turn of its own actions, changing without interruption. And so a wasp, in its being a wasp, encapsulates the paradox of being both unique and multiple at the same time, and in the simple act of being, always becomes other than itself. It frees itself every single moment of the category conventionally assigned to it. *Figure 1* captures the instant of a process, which sees the insect in the act of transporting pollen. The insect thus also becomes the reproductive apparatus of the flower, the transporter, and the future plant individual.

Deleuze and Guattari perfectly describe this process of becoming. This perspective makes it impossible to separate one creature from another; it is the process of their interaction that determines what these entities are at the moment of encounter. This means that the wasp, when it encounters the flower, changes what it is because of the encounter and the activity performed.

«How could movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another? The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome. It could be said that the orchid imitates the wasp, reproducing its image in a signifying fashion (mimesis, mimicry, lure, etc.). But this is true only on the level of the strata – a parallelism between two strata such that a plant organization on one imitates an animal organization on the other. At the same time, something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp. Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further. There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying» (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 11).

4. Unlearning taxonomies

Classification often depends on cosmologies that are culturally embedded through the populations of the Earth. These are human and non-human populations, hybrid in their expression with nature and because of it (Zengiaro 2023). These cosmologies highlighted by contemporary anthropological research open the door to an interpretative multidimensionality of reality. Defining groups of objects, subjects, actions, ideas on the basis of common and exclusive characteristics is an act as ancient as *Homo sapiens*. However, as Donna Haraway argues, the discursive constitution of nature as "otherness" in the history of Western-style domination has led to its possession and reification as a method of relating to the non-human, as an impossible object that we desire but can never truly "have" (Haraway 2021). This attitude is historically, culturally and geographically localised, as in other populations the approaches are completely different (Kohn 2013; Viveiros de Castro 2015; Tsing 2015; Haraway 2016).

For example, in the language of the "original people" - the Anishinaabe - the term "Puhpowee" is translated as «the force that causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight». This word, inherited by Robin

Wall Kimmerer, manifests an opposite attitude to a language, typically Western, aimed at fragmenting, erecting exclusive and simplistic cognitive boundaries. "Puhpowee" does not classify, but rather restores the mystery of life in its relational and becoming. In the first part of *The Democracy of Species*, the author goes back to her Potawatomi origins, critically reflecting on a language that is almost inconceivable to us because of the progressive detachment we have raised between nature and culture and because of the change of perspective that this same language necessarily requires. Kimmerer introduces us to an idiom that makes-a-world because it is eager to restore complexity, based on the becoming of animate and inanimate beings. In addition, she places us in front of another surprising aspect of the languages of the origins: few nouns and a swarming of verbs, which, rather than encapsulating, are designed to express the being of creatures and things in relation to each other and to the universe. Hence, the most accurate translation of "wiikwegamaa" will not be "bay", but "to be a bay". To a certain extent, this reflection challenges the classical ways in which we have learnt to refer to reality and, at the same time, opens up avenues to cross beyond taxonomies and habitual nomenclatures, beyond which it is possible to probe languages that are also capable of expressing the "animacy of the world" (Kimmerer 2013).

Kimmerer's interpretation and the opportunity inherent in the search for new ways of approaching the world can be understood through an initial consideration of the characteristics of the act of naming and the implications behind taxonomies. First of all, naming is never a disinterested operation. Indeed, human beings assign names following the purpose of knowledge, deviated in some sense, by affixing a certain form of control and dominion over something and someone. Assigning a title to beings in the world is not only a simplifying action aimed at making everything more intelligible and manageable, but above all a way of diverting and forcing the gaze. Laurie Cluitmans, within these reflections, analyses Linné's operation by judging it as perfectly adherent to the political, social and cultural visions of the time, a sort of strategic action-guide of the wise western man who makes a gift of his own absolute way of seeing and interpreting reality, categorised, dichotomous, gendered and in which nature and culture appear increasingly irreconcilable (Cluitmans 2021: 116).

A decisive impulse towards the progressive unmasking of the implications behind taxonomies comes from Queer Studies, Decolonial and Postcolonial Studies, which we will not deal with specifically. Londa Schiebinger's *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of modern Science*, for instance, is a demystifying journey that reveals the relationships

between taxonomies and nomenclatures and the patriarchal, oppressively binary and sexualised view of the world (Schiebinger, 2005). In response to the categories, Karen Barad speaks of “queer” as a way to radically deconstruct all identities and all binarisms especially, she adds, that between nature-culture (Barad 2003).

The crossroads before which we stand seems evident. If, on the one hand, it is now clear that taxonomies represent the purely human, imperfect and oppressive way of relating to the world, on the other hand it still remains the tool, the only one it would seem, to relate to and approach what is around us. One only has to wonder if this is indeed the case. As Jamaica Kincaid states, being in a situation of discomfort (Kincaid 1999) has its advantages, so it is possible to transform these traumas from unravelling into opportunities. Into possibilities for free, anti-hierarchical and more transparent relationships with beings and subjects⁷.

If we consider taxonomies as one of the ways in which the human takes control over the world, then the learning process can be understood as a top-down operation geared towards progress and accumulation for a few. It is evident, therefore, that the a priori and uncritical use of names and titles is now more unacceptable than ever, since it tends to feed a system of exclusive, painful and distorted visions.

As an alternative to learning, unlearning is an immersive practice that unveils and creates interference directed against the baggage of knowledge and habits of which we are more or less conscious, leveraging moments of revelatory and critical investigation. In Gayatri Spivak’s words, «unlearning denotes an active critical investigation on normative structures and practices in order to become aware and get rid of taken-for-granted “truths” of theory and practice in order to tackle inequalities in everyday life» (Spivak 2004: 532). Moreover, unlearning is a process projected towards being, doing, becoming, and not aimed at any productive turning point, but also an attempt to defuse, to suspend a phenomenon of tension now taken for granted, in order to trace a space-time gap within which it is possible to fit in and collectively practice new views starting from complexity. Unlearning taxonomies means imagining and sharing exercises of discovery that are joyfully unsuccessful because they are outside pre-established obligations and objectives; it means desiring the pleasure of a life in perpetual relationship with complexity⁸.

5. The artistic practices of unlearning.

Practised and experienced close up, all life is a continuous metamorphosis brought about by encounters of creatures and matter that are not always reducible to human control. The interminable workings of complexity are the very essence of reality, and in the light of this evidence, taxonomies, understood as the only and definitive way of approaching and talking to and about the world, falter. Well, how can we relate to what is around us, when we clearly feel the weight and influence of the categories that have shaped, and distorted, our outlook for centuries? Activating unlearning practices as actions to critically and collectively defuse inappropriate models could be an opportunity to be undertaken and exercised. Critically living, in this sense, definitions and taxonomies, is at the heart of the practices of some artists active in the contemporary world, whose aim is to perform and open up gaps, taking us through the infinite possible folds of life. Committed to unveiling and breaking down the barriers that derive from definitions in which it is no longer possible to recognise oneself, some practices reveal themselves as landslides that challenge and manifest the absurdity of classificatory methodologies. Today we need alternatives, never established and stable, to inhabit and actively confront complexity.

Unlearning taxonomies means first of all unveiling in order to activate critical actions with respect to a given system. With the work *Name Garden* (2012), artist Rumiko Hagiwara positions herself in this direction. She does not compose, rather she unveils. In a winter garden, the vitality of the creatures is supplanted by plaques that passively indicate their names. The work is a detonator that, faced with the absurdity of absence, short-circuits categories in favour of the practice of a new way of seeing, sensitive to change. In the desert left by this imposed system, the work calls us to remain and to be activated by the sediments. Hagiwara work is cruel and fair: once the plants have been removed, slumbering in the cold, we are left with nothing but the ruins of aseptic and standardised titles of dead languages associated with stories of deprivation and abuse, but incapable of restoring the reality of things. Persijn Broersen & Margit Lukács clearly render and reveal the violent character of the process behind taxonomies, already denounced in a different form by Hagiwara. *Fix the Variable, Exclude the Accidental, Eliminate the Impure, Unravel the Confused, Discover the Unknown* (2021) is the synthesis of an ascending climax, a journey in which the unmasking phase is succeeded by the conscious discovery of one’s own origins. Discover the unknown: to actively experience what surrounds us, to unveil ties and live outside the desire to fix and

possess. The video installation confronts us with the evidence of creatures in motion, acted by a sense of forced limitation from which they want to break free, calling us into question as operators of an exclusive system that it is up to us to confront.

Anicka Yi’s entire oeuvre is an interminable questioning of taxonomies, understood by the artist as human operations that mindlessly and artificially erect barriers between what is and what is not human. Yi’s works are rather poetic manifestations of bodies made vital through the relationship between organic and inorganic beings. Among the latest projects, *Metaspore* (2022) presents itself as an endless practice of great intensity in which the co-existence relationships between animate and non-animate beings can be experienced. Within this living pool, the ideas of identity and power as rigid entities come into crisis, giving way to a flow in hybridisation outside our domain. *Biologizing the Machine* (2022), is a work in perpetual mutation, a layered landscape made up of corpuscles capable of giving life to a unity that is never immobile. And it is in the agitation of beings and matter that Yi finds a point of access, confronting us with the impracticality of creating categories, supporting instead experience and the effort to bring into the world new narratives about existences that live and create complexity.

Unlearning taxonomies is a profound act that often leads to confronting one’s own and others’ bodies as a practice not only of questioning taxonomies, but even of boldly seeking alternatives with which we can confront the world. Artist-dancer Cecilia Bengolea, through bodies, explores the potential of ritual for hybridization between beings and elements. *Oneness* (2019), curated by Chus Martínez, is a seafloor-like immersive landscape activated by artist’s works and the presence of performers: transcending the limits of established categories through alternative imaginaries. Eduardo Navarro’s *Octopia* (2016) is a colossal and mutable being, alive with a life constituted on the basis of the encounters and relationships that trigger it, a sprawling creature that explores new ways of being and becoming. The attempt to critically address the world as we see it, proposing different narratives starting from the action with the complexity of the world, emerges in several of the artist’s works as, for example, in *In collaboration with the sun* (2017), where man becomes an active agent and accomplice of the sun understood as a process inhabited by multiple forces.

Unlearning taxonomies leads up to the proposition of possible worlds, in which the fluidity and events of beings and materials can meet and be free in their definitions. Through her work, Anne Duk Hee Jordan offers dimensions capable of accommodating the

creatures that inhabit it, focusing on the interest of encounter and the transitions that result from this. These worlds are never taken for granted, they call into question the human being, who now has the possibility and the burden of redeeming himself by reflecting on his own and others’ agency (Latour 2014). To this pact, the artist as in *Staying with the Trouble* (2019) and in the exhibition *Intimacy of Strangers* (2021) shows that by supporting a context in which complexity and multiplicity can live beyond encasings or as in the case of *The Living Plant Archive* (2020) advances the possibility of giving life to archives to be re-practiced starting from critical and demystifying positionings of taxonomies.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we have seen that our time relying on the notion of “Anthropos” holds an uncritical form of segmenting - defining - the reality. We have thus tried to show that the human as a construct is in a flux of continuous change. Following this critical line, we wanted to show that taxonomy arises as an attempt to cage a world in flux. Such activity of capture and segmentation holds within itself the fear of not being able to refer to things in the world with clarity. However, we wanted to show how continuity can be a force that not only needs to be recognized for its epistemological relevance, but also to be more adherent to a principle of reality. Finally, we showed that these speculations we have made do not remain suspended at the theoretical level, but are enacted by art. Art, in fact, as well as semiotics and philosophy, can be a tool for challenging existing categories. The ultimate attempt of our writing is not so much to redefine categories as to leave them open to events. Opening up the boundaries can certainly be disorienting, as one can no longer mark out a territory; but getting lost, in a collapsing world, is perhaps the subtlest form of making critique of the present time with one’s own experiencing of the untranslatable catastrophe. And perhaps unlearning will become a new way of looking toward the world to come without charging it with the taxonomies that have coordinated and ravaged it so far.



Figure 2.
Rumiko Hagiwara, *Name Garden*, 2012, installation view.
Courtesy the artist.



Figure 3.
Eduardo Navarro, *OCTOPIA*, 2016, action documentation.
Courtesy the artist and Museo Tamayo, Mexico City. Photo
Enrique Macias.



Figure 4.
Anne Duk Hee Jordan, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2019, video still.
Courtesy the artist.

³Introduction to the exhibition *May You Live in Interesting Times*, 2019, <https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2019/introduction-ralph-rugoff>

⁴«*Aphanipoiesis* (n.) combines two words from ancient Greek to describe this way in which life coalesces toward vitality in unseen ways. *Aphanis* comes from a Greek root meaning "obscured, unseen, unnoticed;" *poiesis* is from one meaning "to bring forth, to make." Other words which also carry the root *aphanis* include "phantom," "diaphanous," and "phenomenon," while the root *poiesis* is familiar from the word "poetry," along with Maturana and Varela's *autopoiesis*». (Bateson 2021: 1)

⁵The same method in semiotics has also been pointed out by Bruno Latour on different occasions with respect to the negotiation of definitions in the hard sciences (Akrich, Latour 1992; Latour 1979, 1991), but also by François Bastide (2001) and Paolo Fabbri (Latour, Fabbri 1977).

⁶We use the masculine reference to direct our critical gaze on a certain type of humanity: male, white, heterosexual, normed, Western, etc.

⁷Discomfort is a notion the author uses to show how she would feel in Eden. The act of expulsion, which marks the Edenic transformation, follows the rebellion against codified rules, ordered design, unheeded demands; the time of revolt is the evolution of the narrative of "other" meanings, the understanding of what one does not know but wants to understand. The ongoing deconstruction is narrated from the fact that Eden is so rich that it causes discomfort. She says: "I am in a state of constant discomfort, and I like this state so much that I want to share it".

⁸Reviewer 1 of this essay wrote: «In my opinion, redefining categories means to use a new form of categorization, not to eliminate categories in praise of fluidity. Basic studies of semiotics (in particular Hjelmlev) and anthropology (some of them quoted in the paper) show how different languages segmentate the world in a different way: to superimpose different ways of structuring the semantic field does not mean to renounce to categorization, but to re-activate it by comparing different points of view». We may agree, but what we are doing is following Peirce's doctrine of continuity, in which he shows how knowability is not composed of ultimate and definitive explanations, just as reality is not given once and for all. *Synechism* operates precisely as a regulative principle that divides scientific hypotheses that are relevant because they are explanatory and those that are useless and non-explanatory. The first are hypotheses that explain something through something that is further explicable (infinitely so), while the latter explain through something that is not explicable in turn (making it therefore inexplicable). Therefore, we have no fear of confronting the continuity of nature, trying to define its folds, interstices, and intervals of forms in a perpetual and continuous tracing. What we investigate is the salience and pregnancy of nature in its relations of continuity, not so much the more evident ones of segmentation. «In short *Synechism* amounts to the principle that inexplicabilities are not to be considered as possible explanations; that whatever is supposed to be ultimate is supposed to be inexplicable; that continuity is the absence of ultimate parts in that which is divisible; and that the form under which alone anything can be understood is the form of generality, which is the same thing as continuity» (CP 1.178). Peirce also sought to understand how discontinuity arises from the *continuum*. Using the example of the inkblot to trace the undecidable and the tracing of the chalk line on a blackboard, Peirce seems to assert that discontinuity is always an effect of the unfolding of a continuum. And that is precisely what we are interested in, namely, the limit of the undecidable, that portion of reality in which taxonomies runaround.

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