Epistemology and ancestral knowledge: an approach from the ancestral system of knowledge of the Ticuna people*

Epistemología y saberes ancestrales: una aproximación desde el sistema ancestral de conocimiento del pueblo Ticuna

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Abstract

Knowledge is expressed in multiple ways and, insofar as human action is mediated by language, may be conceived as a set of practices. In this framework, knowledge is understood as *know-how*, while science is constituted as a set of culturally situated practices that enable the resolution of problems and addressing of issues that arise from the lifeworld of diverse communities in specific historical moments and spatial contexts.

This article advances an epistemology of ancestral knowledge, conceptualized as knowledge justified through intersubjective validation arising from a dialogue of knowledges and its practical enactment. Drawing on an analysis of the ancestral knowledge of the Ticuna people, it proposes a pragmatic epistemological approach that challenges the excesses of classical Western epistemology. Such an approach contributes to the reconfiguration of contemporary responses to global challenges, including climate change, water governance, rainforest conservation, intercultural dialogue and recognition, energy sustainability, equity, and social justice.

Keywords: epistemology, science, ancestral knowledge, knowledge, know-how, Ticuna.

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Resumen

El conocimiento se expresa de múltiples maneras y, en la medida en que la acción humana esta mediada por el lenguaje, puede concebirse como un conjunto de prácticas. En este marco, el conocimiento se entiende como un saber hacer, mientras que la ciencia se constituye como un conjunto de prácticas culturalmente situadas que permiten la resolución de problemas y el abordaje de problemáticas que surgen del mundo vital de diversas comunidades en momentos históricos y espacios específicos.

El presente artículo desarrolla una epistemología del conocimiento ancestral, concebido como conocimiento justificado a través de la validación intersubjetiva que surge del diálogo de saberes y de su puesta en práctica. A partir de un análisis del conocimiento ancestral del pueblo Ticuna, se propone un enfoque epistemológico pragmático que cuestiona los excesos de la epistemología clásica occidental. Este enfoque contribuye a la reconfiguración de las respuestas contemporáneas a desafíos globales, tales como el cambio climático, la gobernanza del agua, la conservación de la selva tropical, el diálogo y el reconocimiento intercultural, la sostenibilidad energética, la equidad y la justicia social.

Palabras clave: epistemología, ciencia, conocimiento ancestral, conocimiento, saber hacer, Ticuna.

1. Introducción

The Ceiba tree knows it is time to offer the jungle what deserves to be learned.

The cotton tree scatters its kapok-clad seeds so they can perform a *fouetté en tournant* in time with the gentle wind, as if following Balanchine's instructions. Thus, at the moment of apotheosis, the seeds are held in the firmament, united with the revolutions of the stars, before descending peacefully to the streams, once again scattering the hope of life.

In its Byzantine dome, a family of eagles has built a nest. The savannah, beyond its borders, contains *Yoi* and *Ipi*, who want to test their courage by casting lots to capture the birds, with no other goal than to satisfy their pride. And as in Jacob's dream, they decide to build a ladder that will take them from the whispering gallery to the nest.

Their race for glory pits them against the stumbling block of envy, and one of them is condemned to inhabit the jungle canopy when his companion removes the device that allows him to traverse the trunk of the Ceiba tree while avoiding its thorns.

Yoi's melancholy hastens the return of the harpies, jealous of his future. Upon seeing the young man, and after careful consideration, they decide to condemn him to knowledge. They teach him their knowledge of the jungle daily.

He learned how to heal himself with plants; how to use trees, according to their permission, to build houses, arches, canoes; he learned to depend on the hanging garden of the Ceiba tree and the lakes of bromeliads clinging to its branches; he learned to confront the tricks of the goblin; he learned to inhabit the mainland and the margins of the islands of the great river; he learned the use of the bow to hit the target in hunting, which is not an everyday occurrence, but an event; he learned to inhabit the *maloka* and the use of the circle of speech; he learned the use of coca and tobacco to recover himself; he learned that there are sacred places that are not inhabited by humans but only entered; he learned that there is a place to share with the veiled gods, to purify oneself and achieve harmony; he learned that there is a place for the *chagra* and its rest; he learned that children do not go to the river or the snake will enchant them; he learned how to make tiger pineapple chili, how to prepare fish in the leaf and cook it in the embers; he learned to happily share unpaid work through the minga; he learned to inhabit another possible jungle through art in wood and seeds; he learned to weave concepts and numbers with the fibers of the jungle; and he learned the language of birds and invisible rhythms.

Now he has access to the secret knowledge of the jungle. Skilled enough to descend with the grace of a monkey, painted entirely in *huito*, he decides to teach his knowledge to the *düum*, inhabitants of the jungle.

Upon completing his mission, he becomes one with the jungle and turns into a shadow. His spirit still resides in the dome of the great Ceiba tree, supported by its flying buttresses and stilts, flooded and visited by the fish that carry its seed along the great river.

The Ceiba tree knows it is time to offer the jungle what deserves to be learned.

2. Epistemology: The warrior and the bow

Episteme is usually translated as knowledge, understanding, or apprehension, both personal and interpersonal. It subsumes a conception of stability and cognitive order, providing the "security of a constant world" (Cassirer, 2022, p. 378). Hence, it also related to what is commonly called science, through which the human mind is stabilized in relation to the world.

Experience, and more specifically perception, constitute the primary domains in which this condition of normality or stability arises. Concepts typically provide unity of the multiplicity of representations derived from perception as a form of knowledge (Kant, 1781). It is therefore assumed that knowledge and unity are correlative.

However, this objectivity existed in culture prior to the normalized development of *episteme* and science. Pre-theoretical experience was already orderly and meaningful. The elements that provide unity were mythical, religious, and artistic concepts. Nevertheless, the grammar of this prelogical conceptualization entailed a certain complexity:

> *The ethos of Mythos can be understood from the idea of chaos, in Milton's words: "a black ocean without limits, without dimensions, where length, breadth, depth, time and space are lost." Myth does not require the systematic exposition of reasons to grasp its logic, if it has any. Myth, perhaps because of this very particularity, is totalizing; nothing escapes mythical interpretation. Its fundamental character is to cover with symbols and images a reality that, for this reason, becomes evident beyond a theoretical position that accounts for it* (Cassirer, 2022, p. 379).

Episteme, by contrast, aims at the search for simplicity. This depends on overcoming the mythical stage of knowing and establishing truth and justification as the foundation of knowledge.

> *The philosopher speaks what is true, enunciates the harmony hidden beneath the manifest harmony, and enunciates it in such a way that the truth of his word must be universally and necessarily recognized by all who do not evade public discussion. The fact that the truth of being, to which mortals are exposed from and forever, is expressed in this "logical" way is, then, the miraculous event, literally, the "Greek miracle," to which textbooks have always referred to describe the occurrence of truth precisely in Greek lands and nowhere else* (Ronchi, 2000, p. 50).

Episteme is, in principle, classificatory. Language seeks a synoptic vision beyond the multiplicity of ordinary experience. Nature presents itself in its phenomenological multiplicity, and science confronts it through the artifice of theoretical grammar. Theory represents the aspiration to a complete and coherent vision. Regularity, linked to number and its precision, generates the idea of uniformity of nature and of law. Number extends across all domains of being, and its logic determines structural laws of intelligibility. Numbers are, therefore, relations and relations of relations.

However, the subsumption of phenomena to number establishes a horizon of a general methodology that continues to resonate today. Numbers count, their power —their "magic"—lies in the possibility of the limited prefiguration of symbolic thought. Cassirer states in this regard:

> *We cannot anticipate events, but we can prepare for their intellectual interpretation through the power of symbolic thought (...) The scientist knows that there are vast areas of phenomena that have not yet been possible to reduce to rigorous laws and exact numerical rules. However, he remains faithful to this general Pythagorean creed: he thinks that nature, taken as a whole and in all its particular fields, is number and harmony* (Cassirer, 2022, p. 398-401).

Science is not merely a collection of facts, but a constructive endeavor. The adjustment of theories, models, and facts is a craft that requires tact and skill. In this sense, science is analogous to *techne*; there is no science without technique. The *techne* of science consists in hitting the epistemic target, like the warrior with the bow (Sosa, 2011).

Understood in this way, epistemology aims to construct different ideal artifacts to understand forms of cognitive success, conceived as a harmonization between humankind and the world—that is, tools for hitting the epistemic target.

First, among such artifacts, cognitive success can be related to the type of agent that can be described as successful. This status may be attributed to an individual, a people, an institution, or even an artifact. Among artifacts are artisanal and technological objects, as well as theories, models, and algorithms —in short, extended agents or ideal artifacts (Fonseca, 2020; 2023).

On the other hand, epistemology seeks to promote the acquisition of true beliefs and to avoid error in the cognitive processes of such agents. This is directly related to the concept of truth. Epistemic success is relative to the object known, and from this relationship a justified —that is, true —belief should emerge for the agent (Steup and Neta, 2024). From this arises the need to determine of by virtue of what an epistemic state, act, or process is permissible, and thus to assess its cognitive or epistemic success.

It can also be inferred that cognitive success emerges from relations between things, that is, from the justification of causal relations between objects. This may be described as a form of causal reasonableness, grounded in the possibility of explaining concepts through other concepts.

There are of alternative approaches, or artifacts, for accounting for epistemic or cognitive success. One of these is epistemic contractualism, according to which a cognitive state counts as epistemic success insofar as the practice of holding it serves widely accepted practical interests (Dogramaci, 2012).

Similarly, a cognitive state may count as epistemic success because it tends to generate a significant benefit (BonJour, 1985; Audi, 1993). These benefits are directly related to achieving a comprehensive understanding of reality. Consequently, the benefits is not merely epistemic —finding the truth and avoiding error — but also practical, enabling the agent to live effectively (Gibbard, 2008). A relevant element in this perspective is cognitive diffusion, closely linked to the so-called ratchet effect, which refers to processes of epistemic transmission within species and cultural systems (Lycan, 1988; Tomasello, 2019).

Finally, a cognitive state may be considered epistemically successful if it fulfills a constitutive goal of human life. In this sense, epistemic success is intrinsically linked to the success of human activity (Korsgard, 2009).

Episteme is expressed in many ways. To know is to be aware of who or what knows. To know is to apprehend the other. To know is to speak truth. To know is to relate. To know is to reflect on what one is permitted to know. To know is to recognize what is useful to know. To know is discern what benefits the subject or the community. Ultimately, to know is to live effectively, or even happily.

3. Practices and knowledge

When it is state that knowing is expressed in many ways, and if we do things with words, it may be more appropriate to say that knowing is a practice. The concept of practice, particularly from the perspectives of Wittgenstein (1956), Kuhn (1962), and Brandom (2005), refers to actions related to contexts of validation and the historical background of disciplines. The norms that delimit science emerge from the particular practices of the forms of knowledge. Practices are normative insofar as they are made explicit and standardized. Therefore, scientific normativity does not necessarily refer to universal typologies; rather, it arises from historical moments that are subsequently assimilated and recognized (Guillaumin, 2008, p. 117). Science can thus be understood as a set of cultural practices capable of postulating and solving problems that arise in the lives of diverse communities (Esteban & Martínez, 2008, p. 13).

Practice-based epistemology can be modeled on formal semantics, but also on other types of rational systems that satisfy diverse epistemic agendas (Fonseca, 2024, p. 248).

> *In particular, we want to suggest that science cannot be understood as pure theoretical rationality, the kind that is reduced to a list of criteria that allow us to select the most empirically supported theories. It is necessary to consider a broader rationality, a practical rationality that particularly concerns the evaluation of our actions as part of patterns of behavior regulated by practices* (Martínez & Huang, 2011, p. 2).

Scientific research, depending on the phenomena or objects of inquiry, develops different forms or styles of thinking —namely, epistemic models or devices for addressing its objectives. These styles may be understood as normative instruments, tools that guide which elements of reality can serve as sources of knowledge and which variations of such phenomena deserve understanding. In this way, they contribute to the formulation of possible solutions for their normalization, as well as interventions in these forms of reality for the benefit of earth, heaven, the divine, and mortals.

From this perspective, the sets of implicit practices required for the construction of these devices and systems of representation are central to epistemological studies and to the construction and evaluation of scientific theories. The behaviors and practices of actors within the language game of science are fundamental for the development of subsequent theories. What is learned from experience —as a set of ways of acting in the world— becomes knowledge, that is, explicit patterns of explanation or understanding of reality. This also fosters dialogue among different styles of this practice, facilitating the exchange of scientific traditions and, in turn, the emergence of intersubjective criteria for validation.

In this sense, appealing exclusively to criteria of epistemic normativity focused on the individual subject is insufficient. The collective nature of practice requires an analysis of the coordination of mental states, that is, of the social construction of scientific knowledge. Epistemic virtues and habits have a social character (Fonseca, 2023). Thus, the epistemic normativity that guides possible paths for constructing scientific knowledge is grounded in the causal chain of practices —that is, in the history of knowledge practices and in how certain artifacts, as products of social interaction, have enabled the organization of both individual and communal episteme, as well as everyday practices (Fonseca, 2024, p. 257).

4. The Hybris of Knowledge

Excessivity is the stumbling block from knowledge suffers.

> *By this I mean the imaginary according to which an observer of the social world can place themselves on a neutral observation platform that, in turn, cannot be observed from any point. Our hypothetical observer would be capable of adopting a sovereign view of the world, whose power lies precisely in the fact that it cannot be observed or represented. The inhabitants of point zero (Enlightenment scientists and philosophers) are convinced that they can acquire a point of view from which no other point of view can be adopted. This pretension, reminiscent of the theological image of the Deus absconditus (who observes without being observed), but also of Foucault's panopticon, clearly exemplifies the hybris of Enlightenment thought. The Greeks said that hubris is the worst of sins, for it entails the illusion of being able to surpass the limits of mortal existence and become like the gods. Hybris then implies ignorance of spatiality and is therefore a synonym for arrogance and excess* (Castro-Gómez, 2005, pp. 18-19).

A general grammar may be understood as one of its symptoms. The Enlightenment sought a common root for different languages in order to subsume them into a single mother tongue (Böhme, 1989). In this sense, the attempted linguistic unification of the Spanish Empire in the sixteenth century led to the prohibition of indigenous languages in the colonies (Tanck, 1985, p. 37). At the same time, research on the "the New World" was framed as an object of knowledge that could be incorporated into a univocal grammatical structure, allowing only one language, one way of life, and a single style of knowledge production. The early development of linguistics thus treated indigenous languages not as living systems tied to ways of life, grammars, and knowledge practices, but as a collectible resource for validating scientific methods of the time —such as those of botany —for subsequent commercial purposes (Alcina, 1988).

This general grammar presupposes a vision of science that becomes its shadow:

> *Science is nothing other than a well-crafted language, and particular languages are an imperfect science, insofar as they are incapable of reflecting on their own structure (...) The language of science would allow for the generation of exact knowledge about the natural and social world, thus avoiding the indeterminacy that characterizes all other languages (...) Believing themselves in possession of a language capable of revealing the "in-itself" of things, Enlightenment thinkers (both in Europe and in America) assume that science can faithfully translate and document the characteristics of an exotic nature and culture* (Castro-Gómez, 2005, p. 14).

The denial of regional logics —also known as grammars or language games (Wittgenstein, 1953)— constitutes the core of epistemic error. Denying multiple forms of knowledge and replacing them with a single style —Western scientific and technical rationality —fostered the legitimacy of the substituting ways of life and logic that, in subsequent centuries, established the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism (Sarmiento, 2009). Epistemic imposition thus became an element of the hegemony of political power over Indigenous communities. Not only was their territory expropriated, but also their knowledge.

Epistemological purity and such epistemic expropriation are based on the assumption of the existence of higher forms of knowledge. Knowledge was thereby constituted as a form of violence, closely linked to the identification of cognitive purity with racial purity (Castro-Gómez, 2005, p. 186). Texts such as *El Orinoco ilustrado* (Gumilla, 1984) reflect the attempt to establish a correspondence between the historical origins of indigenous peoples and the alleged invalidity of their knowledge. In the Jesuit's view, the narrative of the origin of indigenous peoples under the sign of Ham —the mocking son of Noah—,would determine a moral stain that extends to their supposed incapacity for civilization.

The evidence supporting this speculative interpretation lay in the presumed poverty of Aboriginal language, attributed in turn to the linguistic dispersion associated with the Tower of Babel. When updated, this hypothesis leads to the conclusion of the supposed weakness of languages and ways of life lacking the abstraction capacities attributed of Western languages. The hierarchy and subordination of styles of knowledge are thus linked to the degree of linguistic abstraction (Mignolo, 1995, p. 125).

> *Indeed, many 18th-century European theorists believed that the decisive step that marks the exit from barbarism and the entrance to civilization is the development of an abstract language. While the savage remains immersed in a "sensory" language that enables him only to understand empirical objects, civilized man has managed to develop a language that allows him to understand universals. This is why only civilized peoples have developed science, because scientific knowledge, as Plato said, is a knowledge of universals. And this is also why, for Enlightenment philosophers, the most advanced peoples are those who have managed to develop legal codes based on general principles and not just on specific norms (Castro-Gómez, 2005, p. 191).*

Alphabetic writing was thus conceived as the key to accessing knowledge. The scaffolding of memory through writing was understood as the first step toward a fully analytical and scientific language. However, beyond later debates on the priority of oral or written language (Derrida, 1971), the assumption effectively resulted in the imposition of literacy through Latin and Spanish as paradigmatic grammars.

Thus, any form of knowledge and know-how required epistemic whitening through systematization in these languages, which, it must be noted, never achieve the objectivity and epistemic efficiency of abstract or formal languages that may derive from or even transcend natural language (Fonseca, 2020).

Epistemic expropriation thus became a material process, centralizing indigenous knowledge under state control for its subsequent distribution—that is, the commercialization of useful yet unrecognized produced by communities for the supposed benefit of humanity.

> *The operation performed on me was as follows. The black man squeezed the juice of some of the leaves of the Guaco herb into a glass, made me drink two spoonfuls of it, and then injected it into my skin, making six incisions: one on each foot, another between the index finger and thumb of each hand, and the last two on both sides of my chest (...) To satisfy myself beyond any doubt about the effectiveness of the Guaco herb, I picked up the snake with my own hands, which seemed a little restless, but without the appearance of biting, and once I had lost my fear, I picked it up again twice in the presence of the aforementioned Mr. Joseph Mutis (...)*
>
> *As a result of what they saw me do, the other inoculated individuals also decided to pick up the snake; but it made such movements that it became irritated and finally bit Don Francisco Matis on the right hand, drawing some blood. This incident somewhat dismayed us and we continued to suspect something fatal might happen, but the black man displayed great serenity, and even the bitten man himself did so after the latter rubbed the wound with the leaves of the herb and assured him that he was safe. In fact, nothing came of that bite. Matis immediately ate breakfast with a full appetite, worked all day on his painting, and slept the night without experiencing the slightest change, leaving everyone entirely convinced of the goodness of the remedy and eager to spread it for the benefit of humanity* (Vargas, 1983, p. 202).

Pedro Fermín de Vargas's account of the healing of the painter during the Expedition places greater emphasis on the authority of Mutis than on the knowledge of the scorned "black man." Like the hypocrites in the Book of Acts, the question is never asked how this healing was accomplished, but rather in the name of whose authority it was done.

The case of cinchona, as noted by Castro-Gómez, is particularly ilustrative. The dispute over its discovery between Mutis and López Ruiz reveals the importance of nominal appropriation for purposes of comerce

and ambition, rather than for the advancement of scientific practice founded on a disciplinary ethic aimed at obtaining knowledge. The Spanish Empire did not primarily pursue theoretical development or the understanding and intervention of phenomena, but rather their commercial exploitation to prevent scarcity.

> *The highly useful cinchona, a treasure granted solely to Your Majesty's dominions, in whose hands it is to distribute it to other nations on the same footing that the Dutch distribute Ceylon cinnamon—cinchona, I say, which some European physicians unjustly hold in a certain horror, for not having taken care to separate the true and recent from the false and despicable, introduced through ignorance or ambition—will be handled with greater confidence, ease, and success when my observations are made public, which, for the anticipated good of mankind, I will publish in some of the European academies where new discoveries are being propagated. A remedy so admirable that it vies for superiority among the few known antidotes, and which Divine Providence has placed in Your Majesty's hands for the universal good of humanity. It is very fearful, Sire, that cinchona will be in short supply, because experience shows it every day. Your Majesty, do not allow that the ambition of those who trade in this precious commodity multiplies the miseries that we rightly have (Mutis, 1983 (1763), p.129).*

Precisely *hybris*, ambition, has rightly multiplied our misery. Knowledge of cinchona, rubber, and coca is not an element of cohesion in life, but rather, discord and death. And the guardians of knowledge, which is not discord, have not been listened to; therefore, what is worth knowing is not known. Reflection must therefore enable a return to lost paths, otherwise:

The heavens above your head will be of metal, and the earth beneath you will be of iron. And you will grope at noon, as a blind man gropes in the dark (Deuteronomy 28:23-28, Reina-Valera, 1995).

5. Epistemic virtue: The circle of speech

In the face of excess, virtue emerges, and in this case, epistemic virtue. The first of these is to put the world to one's ear.

For this reason, hearing—the sense fully developed at birth and also the one that has provided the most information about intrauterine life—is considered a determining sensory element in the formation of consciousness, a system that contributes to building a perceptive being, which exists as long as it is capable of listening, regardless of whether it is the wind or a branch breaking. To hear, to listen, is to sense, and sense leads to thinking (Andrés, 2008, p. 14).

To hear is to enter silence.

> *Silence is a word in my vocabulary. Having worked in music, I've used it more than men in other professions. I know how one can speculate with silence; how to measure and frame it. But now, sitting on this stone, I experience silence; a silence that comes from so far away, thick with so many silences, that in it the word would take on a roar of creation. I've been here for more than an hour, without moving, knowing how useless it is to walk where one will always be at the center of what is contemplated (...) Beside it, (the river), which is granary, spring, and road, human agitations are of no use, nor are individual haste taken into account* (Carpentier, 1953, pp. 122-123).

The circle of understanding is the circle of speech. The delay in understanding oneself arises from not engaging in the sharing of one's word with another so that it may return renewed. However, for speech to emerge, it is necessary to inhabit silence — to remain silent and return to oneself — so that thought may first dwell, and then give way to what is said, if it deserves to reside in the spirit.

> *Anything that does not involve entering into what language evokes is babbling, halting speech, spelling. Speech, therefore, requires understanding—understanding of the word being spoken. And also of one's own words. We all know what it means not to understand one's own words. Something like this is said when there is too much noise in the environment. By this, one refers to something essential, namely, that one does not understand one's own words because one cannot see how the other receives them. This does not mean that one must listen to one's own words, but that one must ensure that the other can hear them. What matters is that they reach the recipient (...) Obviously, when we speak of hearing and seeing in relation to reading, it is not a question of having to see in order to decipher what is written, but rather that one must hear what is written. To have the ability to hear is to have the ability to understand* (Gadamer, 1993, pp. 69-70).

Understanding is thus intrinsically linked to hearing, speech, and dialogue. Knowledge is knowledge insofar as it emerges from a dialogue of knowledges, from situated epistemic agencies responding to diverse lifeworlds. Life, in this sense, is a project that unfolds in the transition from being (*ser)* to being-in-context (*estar)*. Knowledge is situated as being and achieves universality through its lived realization in time and space. Dialogue, therefore, captures this becoming of being in its reflection, which is knowledge.

> *The term life is not defined, but rather transits between being and being-is. It constitutes the central term of a natural consciousness. And as it mediates between the purely given that is, and the determinable that is, it traces the parable of biography, not only one's own, but also that of stones, with the episodes that occur, but which could always have been different, and which are only corrected with the possibility, not the actualization, of a "know-how" (Kusch, 2000, 3, p. 403).*

Knowing, then, is a way of living. The word lives in its use and in its exchange; it is not solely one's own but also belongs to the other. Thus, knowledge and learning are neighbors. Knowledge is living because it engages with what exists and with the traces that existence leaves in language. It is merely about dealing with an object of knowledge, but with a living subject. Research and science, therefore, take place among subjects who live and know.

> *From the perspective of fieldwork, this last aspect evidently means that, by virtue of the type of anthropological work, the observed ceases to be a mere object and becomes a subject, given that it refers to something existing. In turn, insofar as it exists, it has a project or possibility of being. […] But as this occurs, the relationship between the researcher and the researched, that is, between the observer and the observed, which was once subject to object, becomes a subject to subject relationship* (Kusch, 2000, 3, p. 210).

Human beings exist insofar as they know themselves. In this sense, they are not only describable entities but also projects —unfinished beings who can never attain complete knowledge of themselves. The exchange of knowledge is therefore an exchange of ways of life.

> *But there is no more effective work to solidify this search for the American than travel and research in the same field. From the beginning, I thought it wasn't about rummaging through everything in the study, but rather gathering living material in wanderings through the lands of the Americas, and eating with its people, participating in its festivals, and probing its past in archaeological sites; and I also had to take into account that natural way of thinking that is gathered in the streets and neighborhoods of the big city. Only in this way can we gain firmness in the difficult task of securing a foundation for thinking about the American* (Kusch, 2000, 2, p. 5).

In this sense, bringing our world — our America —to our ears, may requiere listening to echoes of Indigenous thought as a founding act.

> *My intention is to create a kind of mystique of being South American. To achieve this, we must remain grounded here and now and avoid literary or philosophical fads at all costs and face our naked condition of having been born in America. I have faith that, in this way, we will finally be able to simply resolve our problems. It's about bringing America to our consciousness; for this, there is nothing better than indigenous thought. I believe, on the other hand, and this is at the heart of my short course, that we all carry the indigenous within, whether we come from Buenos Aires, New York, or Berlin* (Kusch, 2000, 1, p. 307).

And in this call to the Indigenous that we all carry within us as our origin, the path toward universal thought is undertaken in the transition from being to being. This occurs precisely through the forgetting of the situated, from which thinking, creating, ordering, separating, situating, and defining emerge —and nothing more.

> *The function of philosophy will be not only to make us aware of our condition of subordination, but also to find a way to overcome this condition (...) Not just a philosophy of our America and for our America, but simply a philosophy of man and for man wherever he may be* (Zea, 1989, pp. 118-119).

Therefore, the false dilemma between orality and writing, understood as an original epistemic gap, can be overcome. In this pause —dwelling in concepts and understanding through dialogue— it becomes possible to conceive of a circle of knowledge grounded in the word as a project, that is, as an intersubjective validation of what is known.

Ancestral knowledge can be stabilized through writing—not necessarily limited to natural language. It may take de form of an artificial writing of knots, a new system of syntax and semantics, a new logic, an eidetic artifact of its own. This project seeks those possible worlds that, by retracing lost steps, allow us to say:

> *I am the master of my steps and I place them where I want* (Carpentier, 1953, p. 268).

6. Conclusion: The Rainforest knowledge

The forest is a super-organism. It is an open book that narrates the origins of the world and becomes a spiritual guide for life. It connects humankind on earth with water and sky; with the divine and with mortal beings:

> *But on earth means under heaven. Both co-signify standing before the divine and include belonging to the community of humankind. From an original unity, the four—earth, sky, divine, and mortal—belong to a unity* (Heidegger, 1951, p. 3).

Although it is often labeled as inhospitable, the jungle constitutes a model of how humans should inhabit the world, for humans beings are necessarily connected to other beings. To be human consists in knowing how to be on the earth. In the act of inhabiting, humans make room by cultivating and sheltering the earth so that the time of its fruits may come. To inhabit, therefore, is to care and to build. Within this relationship of balance, the human who cares also receives a response, being preserved from harm and violence, for they are equally sheltered by the earth, the sky, and the divine —its neighbors. Thus, human beings and the jungle remain united in peace and, therefore, in the freedom to be. The quaternity of inhabiting, as human knowledge and practice, is fundamentally relational.

> *The earth is that which, serving, sustains; that which flourishes and bears fruit; spreads out into cliffs and waters; opening into the form of plants and animals. When we say "earth," with it we are already thinking of the other Three, but, nevertheless, we are not considering the simplicity of the Four. The sky is the curved path of the sun, the course of the moon in its different phases, the wandering brilliance of the stars, the seasons of the year and the passage from one to the other. It is the light and twilight of the day, the darkness and clarity of the night, the hospitable and inhospitable weather, the passing of the clouds and the deep blue of the ether. When we say "sky," we are thinking with it of the other Three, but we are not considering the simplicity of the Four. The divine are the messengers of divinity who give us signs. From the sacred dominion of divinity, God appears in his present or withdraws in his veil. When we name the divine, we are thinking of the other Three, but we are not considering the simplicity of the Four. Mortals are men. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death as death. Only man dies—and permanently so—while on earth, under heaven, before the divine. When we name the mortals, we are thinking of the other Three, but we are not considering the simplicity of the Four* (Heidegger, 1951, p. 3).

This relationship is one of care —a form of just and proper treatment—among earth, sky, the divine, and humankind itself. Perhaps precisely because of the inevitability of death and the awareness of it, mortals must assume the responsibility of safeguarding the earth and the sky, and of preventing the concealment of the divine.

To care is to know—and to know-how. Those who know understand that to safeguard, that is, to dwell as mortals on earth, does not mean to exploit or to harm:

> *Saving the earth is more than exploiting or even spoiling it. Saving the earth is not taking possession of the earth; it is not making it our subject, from where only one step leads to limitless exploitation. Mortals dwell to the extent that they receive heaven as heaven; to the extent that they let the sun and the moon follow their journey, the stars their path, the seasons their blessing and their injury; to the extent that they do not turn night into day, nor make day a restless race* (Heidegger, 1951, p. 3).

Human beings are thus knowers and guardians of the quaternity. They dwell among things like a bridge. The bridge, as a neighbor, transforms being by making room, without usurping the earth, the sky, the divine, or mortals. Humans then know and guard when they make room and inhabit space. This occurs when they establish limits— not merely as external boundaries, but as a condition that allow things to begin to be what they are.

Therefore, the guardian dwells, builds, and inhabits first through thought. By turning inward, one returns to oneself among things and, from this dwelling, becomes capable of thinking. This thinking requires knowledge and know-how, for, like all thinking, it is prospective, prefiguring the care of the quaternity.

What deserves to be learned is what deserves to be questioned and thought about, not only what deserves to be understood. In this way of thinking, earth, sky, the divine, and mortals may dwell together.

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