



School of
Sustainability
Arizona State
University

Transdisciplinarity & Ontological Flexibility

David Manuel-Navarrete

davidmn@asu.edu

International Workshop

Reclaiming Sustainability through HumanitiesScience Pathways: Transdisciplinary Co-Production of Knowledge on Climate-Energy Futures

Date: December 1-2, 2022

Venue: South American Institute for Resilience and Sustainability Studies (SARAS)
Maldonado, Uruguay



Levers to
trigger
discussion



Can we teach ontological flexibility?



Why does ontological flexibility matter for sustainability transformations?



Warm-up exercises to flex the ontological “muscles”

Ontological flexibility

Rooted in **Indigenous paradigms and methodologies** (e.g., Zapatistas, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Shawn Wilson, Two-eyed seeing, Bagele Chilisa, Pedagogy of Mother Earth, ...)

... and **Decolonial/Pluriversal** scholarship (e.g., Walter Mignolo, Boaventura Sosa de Santos, Arturo Escobar, Gloria Anzaldúa,...)

Ontological **flexibility, competence, agility**... gaining traction in International relations (e.g., Tamara Trowsell, Cristina Yumie Aoki Inoue), or evaluation science (Jennifer Billman)

Potential for sustainability science & knowledge co-production towards sustainability transformations

Can we teach Ontological flexibility?

Interrogate

Continuously interrogate our ontological stance

Open to
changes

Be open to changes in our ontological stance

Respectful

Be knowledgeable and respectful of the ontological stance of others

Commit

Commit to not privileging our ontological stance over that of others

Billman, Jennifer A.H. (2022). Framing Evaluation in Reality: An Introduction to Ontologically Integrative Evaluation

Why does ontological flexibility matter for sustainability transformations?

What is real?

Matter & objects

Relationships

Consciousness



Primordial condition of existence

Separation

Relational

Unity

- Not an inclusion-based project that seeks to add voices to the pot, but engaging across and through pluriversal worlds in meaningful ways

Why does ontological flexibility matter for sustainability transformations?

How did you become a transformations practitioner?

Through **Onto-epistemological crises**:

- Realizing that something is off
- Meaningful interactions with non-Western cultures

- Manuel-Navarrete, D., Goldstein, B. E., & Balakrishna, R. (2022). **Becoming a Transformations Practitioner**. *Social Innovations Journal*, 15(5). Retrieved from <https://socialinnovationsjournal.com/index.php/sij/article/view/4970>



VIGNETTE # 1

Making room for

Onto-epistemological diversity

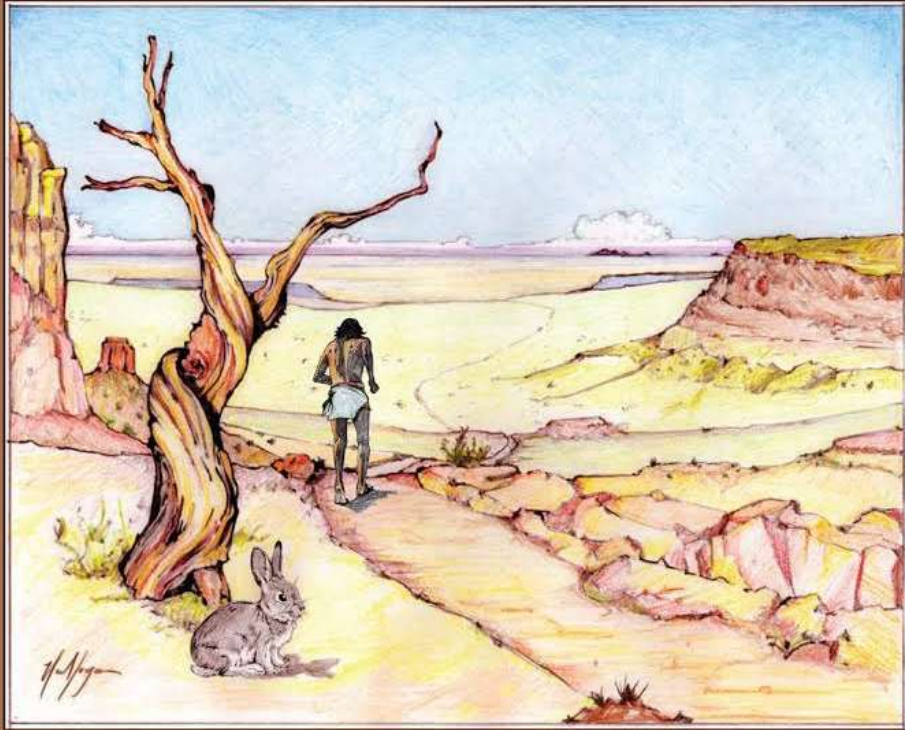




A whimsical illustration of a safari scene. A yellow and white van is parked on a dirt path. A lion is perched on the roof rack, a giraffe is leaning its head out of the back window, and a zebra stands in the foreground. In the background, there is a building with signs that read "Safari Clinic" and "Country Court House".

Vignette #2

HOPI RUNNERS



CROSSING THE TERRAIN
BETWEEN
INDIAN AND AMERICAN

MATTHEW SAKIESTEWA GILBERT

Vignette #3

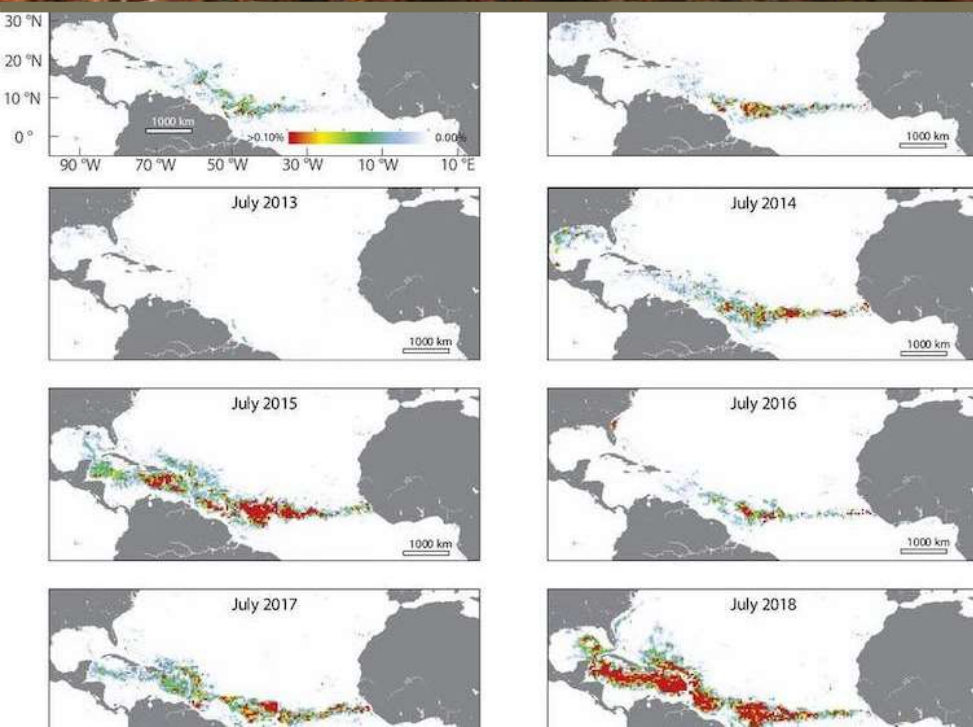
Excerpt interview to
Matthew Sakiestewa,
Hopi & University of
Arizona Professor





Vignette #4: Sargassum in Quintana Roo

- Norma Muñoz (Interdisciplinary Research Center of the Mexican Polytechnic Institute) is leading research on health effects of the macroalgae:
- **“People are not well-informed about the [health] effects from Saragassum. They say ailments are sent by God”**





Ontological Flexibility in the Anthropocene

- ▶ “Natural scientists extend their worldviews to society and attribute to Homo sapiens the responsibility for these changes. From this perspective, Humanity then becomes the doom-bringer, but also the saviour: it is through the newly formed hope of creating a planetary stewardship in modern technology and science that humanity can overcome these huge challenges (Neyrat 2018: 59–67). On the other hand, this forces us to look at those whose alterity is actively denied by this project, and whose very existence has been historically oppressed and actively made invisible by a particular ontology.”

Tornel, C., & Lunden, A. (2022). **Editorial to Re-worlding: Pluriversal Politics in the Anthropocene.** *Nordia Geographical Publications*, 51(2), 1-9.



Vignettes

- #1: Animals do not disappear
 - #2: There are animal cities
 - #3: Hopi Runners
 - #4: Sargassum & God
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