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**“EL PAISAJE ES UNA RELACION”: INTERRELATIONAL
ECOPOETICS OF THE SOUTHERN CONE**

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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My dissertation illuminates the ecopoetic work of three distinct poets from the Southern Cone region of South America and contends that their ecopoetry demonstrates an awareness of the interrelational reality of nonhuman-human relationships. More in particular, my dissertation focuses on the importance of place and ethics in Spanish American ecological thought. Using the support of ethical ecological thinking from such critics as Bruno Latour, Timothy Morton, and Ursula Heise, I study the poetry of the Argentine poets Juan L. Ortiz (1896 - 1978) and Alfredo Veiravé (1928 - 91) and the Chilean poet and artist Cecilia Vicuña (1948 -). Principally, I take an ecocritical approach and determine that each of these poets significantly contribute to a grossly understudied reading of Spanish American poetry: ecopoetry. With the historical backdrop of before, during, and beyond a critical era in global environmentalism movements — a time centered in the 1960s and 1970s — known in this study as the environmental turn, I frame these poets’

work chronologically as affected or not affected by the growing globalization of environmentalism. More importantly, my dissertation explores the ways in which these poets present the interconnectedness of nonhumans and humans as essential to a complete understanding of humanity's role in both the preservation and destruction of global and local ecosystems.

DEDICATION

Priscila, para siempre

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First and foremost I acknowledge and thank my wife Priscila for her strength and patience, her love and loveliness, and her constant encouragement. I thank my children Lili, John, Samuel, Eva, and Mateo for their hugs and motivation. I publicly thank my Heavenly Father and his son, Jesus Christ for the love of my family and friends. Other than thanking my family, including my parents, grandparents, and siblings, I must thank my dissertation committee and my Rutgers's colleagues. My advisor Jorge Marcone has been my mentor, and most importantly, my friend throughout my time at Rutgers. Without his guidance, good humor, and tutelage, I would have been completely lost. Marcy Schwartz and Margo Persin have been the perfect committee members, and their constant encouragement, support, and excellent reading have carried me through the arduous process of writing this dissertation. Finally, I thank my fellow graduate students, professors, and the Department of Spanish and Portuguese leadership and secretarial staff, especially Rosy Ruiz and Jennifer Flaherty, at Rutgers for providing the supportive environment that I needed to succeed.

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EPIGRAPH

*aquí buscad, buscadme
entre piedra y océano,
a la luz procelaria
de la espuma*

.....

*aquí estaré perdido y encontrado:
aquí seré tal vez piedra y silencio.*

Pablo Neruda, "Yo volveré"

INTRODUCTION

Revealing Presentations: Southern Cone Ecopoetry of the Late Twentieth Century

*dice compañero léase ecocompañero
 ..“..compromiso..”.... ecompromiso
 ..“..constitución
 hay que luchar x una econstitución*

Nicanor Parra, “Ecopoemas”

In New York City, on the first Earth Day in 1970, the Chilean poet Nicanor Parra had a revelatory moment when he learned of what he calls the global “alarma ecológica.” Though it was not the first time he had heard of *ecologismo*, it was the first time he had realized the severity of the humans’ effect on nonhumans in a broad sense.¹ During this Earth Day experience, while he felt the emotional and philosophical impact of environmental crises, he also came to see the potential of poetry to speak an environmental message. To illustrate when he began to see how poetry and environmentalism were related, he often refers to a phrase that he saw written in chalk on a New York City wall or street that first Earth Day:

Yo venía precisamente, había pasado por El Día de la Tierra, y quedé impresionado: “Be Kind to me [I’m a river]...” Y quedé impresionado no tan sólo por el planteamiento filosófico, sino que al mismo tiempo por la transparencia poética de ese texto. (“Alarma” 119-20)²

This phrase that piqued Parra’s philosophical and poetic interest regarding environmentalism did so by recognizing a river’s worth as equal to that of humans. Even if through anthropomorphization, the phrase asks for compassion and equal treatment for a nonhuman actor in the natural world. Its poetic transparency, of which Parra speaks, is in its obviating any complex explanation of the reason why

one would need to be kind to a river. The implicit message is: a river has inherent worth and does not deserve human caused damage. It deserves kindness and to be cleaned and repaired if it so requires. By implying that the reader always already knows the “why” behind a river’s inherent value, the phrase, as Parra reads it, also raises the question of the value of nonhumans in comparison to humans. Along the lines of Deep Ecology philosophy³ – summed up as the affirmation that, regardless of human needs or wants, all life has inherent value – the French philosopher Luc Ferry writes in *The New Ecological Order* that this sort of ecological thinking is a non-anthropocentric valuation of the world or, better yet, of every thing that is a part of the world (xxiii –xxvi). As Parra points out in the quote above, recognizing nonhumans’ inherent worth is both philosophically and poetically powerful enough, at least in his case, to change how one relates to the nonhuman world and to language one uses to represent that world.

Parra’s revelation regarding his ecological perspective caused him to look back on his own poetry and see how his newfound outlook had or had not evolved. Through his retrospection he sees that earlier poems of his, such as “Defensa del árbol” from *Poemas y antipoemas* (1954) have an ecological underpinning to them, after all (“Dios” 100, 109). If one looks at his poetry from 1970s on, however, beginning with the anti-poetic *Artefactos*, one can see how his Earth Day experience influenced his later writing and thinking. As he points out in the same interview with Leonidas Morales quoted above:

Yo veo al poeta ahora como fabricante de pancartas. Ponte tú, un tipo de pancarta: ‘El error consistió en creer que la tierra era nuestra, cuando la verdad de las cosas es que nosotros somos de la tierra’. Yo creo que vale la

pena enunciar este pensamiento. (119)⁴

Good examples of this *pancartismo* are Parra's *Artefactos* and other visual poetry like "Armas nucleares no" — a picture of a fly swatter with a label that says "Armas nucleares no: Basta y sobra con un matamoscas."⁵ The best examples of his environmental *pancartismo* come from the 1982 deliberately-titled collection, *Ecopoemas*. In his interview with Morales, Parra quotes two of the collection's poems, "Catastrofista," and "Peatones" which reads in part: "héroes / anónimos / de / la / ecología" (lines 1-5, *Obras* 2:176). More than a decade after his Earth Day experience, then, he continued his affirmation that he was indeed an *ecologista* writing *ecopoemas* as a *Poeta Ecológico* ("Convierte" 164-5, "Otro" 177).

The Environmental Turn and Latin American "Ecopoetry"

Around the time of Parra's revelation, many academics and intellectuals were beginning to understand the gravity and negative effect of human influence on natural systems around the world. Several now-famous works of environmentalist-friendly literature like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and R. Buckminster Fuller's *Operating Manuel for Spaceship Earth* (1968) were produced less than a decade before the first Earth Day and in 1972 the tide-turning report *The Limits to Growth*, commissioned by the Club of Rome appeared the same year of the first and now historic meeting of the UN Conference on the Human Environment. This shift in discourse and concern for the environment has often been referred to as the environmental turn. Though this turn was happening primarily in the Global North, Parra and others were bringing it home to the Global South. Knowing that Parra is a

trained mathematician and scientist one can see how he was converted to the cause after having seen hard data confirming humanity's role in the problem. It is Parra's perspective as a poet, however, that does not easily connect with him being an *ecologista*. He addresses this in an interview with Marcelo Mendoza Prado by clarifying that he became aware of his environmentalist leanings first as a "ciudadano vulgar y silvestre nomás," though he sees his poetry as his individual "acción ecológica" ("Dios" 109, 119). Indeed, much of his poetry reveals an environmentalism attuned to the ironies of anthropocentrism. Utilizing irony to treat such serious subject matter as environmental crises, Parra differs from more solemn approaches to the same topic by other contemporary Spanish American poets like Homero Aridjis from Mexico or Pablo Antonio Cuadra from Nicaragua.⁶ Regardless of Parra's ironic approach, his treatment of the relationships among humans and nonhumans in his later poetry is explicit regarding the damage humanity has done to our environments and the politics behind our responses to that damage.

Confirming Parra's ironic yet direct *pancartista* approach to environmental crises, literary critic Nial Binns makes a distinction between Parra's poetry and the poetry of celebrated poets such as Pablo Neruda. Whereas Neruda's ecologically attuned poems are based on recreating an "espacio infantil" to bring back the wonder of contact with the natural world and to therefore put its destruction and pollution in perspective, Binns affirms, Parra's similarly attuned poems are decidedly antipoetic and do not idealize "nature" but matter-of-factly represent the human-affected world as "desnaturalizado" (149, 156).⁷ According to Parra, such an

approach to environmental crises tries to maintain distance from trivializing serious problems and from endorsing environmental dogma (“Dios” 118-120):

Somos ecólogos, pero al mismo tiempo somos antiecólogos. Porque la ecología puede producir una contaminación espiritual: el dogmatismo. Hay que pensar también en la ecología de la mente y tener una válvula de autorregulación del espíritu, porque si nos metemos nada más que a ecologizar hasta el infinito, nos vamos a volver locos. (“Otro” 177)

By all accounts, Parra’s cautious approach to environmentalism is a well-measured and rational response to global environmental crises. When it comes to his poetry that deals with these crises, he follows a similar line. His *pancartista* approach to poetics via environmental crises often makes his poetry political by focusing on the particular societal products of and responses to negative human-to-nonhuman relationships. Yet such a focus on political issues could threaten to ignore the source in favor of the surface. That is, while other examples of Spanish American poetry that treat ecological themes are more visibly concerned with the philosophical and ethical implications at the root of human-nonhuman relationships, Parra’s poems from *Ecopoemas*, for example, are more explicitly concerned with the political results of these relationships. This is not to say that these poems are shallow, only that they reflect a practical reaction to publicized environmental crises. When asked in 1989 by Juan Andrés Piña about how his environmentalism fits or not with his position on the political spectrum, for example, Parra makes it clear that his environmentalist political position is “anti establecimiento industrial-militar” but that it is not inspired by “razones sentimentales ni de justicia social,” but by “razones de supervivencia” (50). Despite how Parra’s involvement in environmental

causes or concerns has politically affected his poetry, his call for an “autoregulación del espíritu” by way of Taoism suggests that, in the end, his environmentally concerned and *pancartista* poetry is centered on a philosophical approach (“Otro” 183).

In a sense, the emergence of Parra’s environmentalist discourse in his self-labeled “ecopoetry,” reflects what Ferry calls the “premodern postmodernity” of contemporary environmental philosophies. That is, without the cultural weight that a rejection of Modernity carries, many critics would not take a second glance at the ontological crises produced in human-nonhuman relationships (xix-xx). Perhaps this is why Parra claims that there are two sides to understanding and solving the environmental crises. One side is the Taoist and the other is the environmental: “El taoísmo es la autorregulación del mundo interior, y la ecología es la autorregulación del medio ambiente. Antes de llegar a la ecología tiene que haber un despertar individual: el taoísmo” (“Otro” 184). Recurring to non-western philosophy and literature is certainly not new in Spanish American poetry and making a distinction between philosophical and scientific epistemologies could qualify as a premodern postmodern worldview.⁸ Nevertheless, among other distinguished Spanish American poets and peers, such as Octavio Paz and Pablo Neruda, who could be said to share this same perspective, Parra is the only one to specifically label himself as a *Poeta Ecológico* (“Otro” 177). Even within the political left Parra was breaking ground with his newfound passion for *pancartismo* on behalf of the environment. He tells Mendoza Prado, for example, of how his colleagues in the *Unidad Popular* party responded to his initial enthusiasm after returning from witnessing the first Earth

Day by declaring to him that environmentalism was only the “nueva máscara del imperialismo” (“Dios” 108). Because of the then Cold War policies’ influence on national and international politics and economies, Parra’s *compañeros* were certainly justified in their concerns about the dubiousness of movements coming from the Global North, but Parra was interested in something beyond a left/right political dichotomy. As he puts in one of his *ecopoemas*, already quoted above:

El error consistió
en creer que la tierra era nuestra
cuando la verdad de las cosas
es que nosotros somos de la tierra. (1-4)

While opposite ends of the political spectrum fought each other to control material resources for the better of humanity, Parra found that such conflict would never accomplish the unified society each side claimed it would produce. He claimed environmentalism as his new “political” party because unification of humanity needs to begin by recognizing our obvious common ground: the earth (“Convierte” 167).

Of course, Parra is not the only one of his peers that is or was concerned about environmental crises or human-nonhuman relationships. As already discussed, he was the first to call himself an *ecopoeta* and to be sure, he was certainly near the forefront of the environmental turn in Spanish America. Nevertheless, at this time other Spanish American poets had expressed or were already expressing a distinct environmental sensibility of their own in their work. Several critics like Nial Binns and Roberto Forns-Broggi have analyzed many of these poets, as already noted in the case of Pablo Neruda and Homero Aridjis. In

addition to the chapters on Parra, Neruda, and Aridjis's poetry in his book, *¿Callejón sin salida?: La crisis ecológica en la poesía hispanoamericana*, Binns carefully analyzes the work of José Emilio Pacheco and Gabriela Mistral. Forns-Broggi, on the other hand, has organized what reads as a first-draft canon of Spanish American ecopoetry in his article, "¿Cuáles son los dones que la naturaleza regala a la poesía latinoamericana?"⁹¹

Both Binns and Forns-Broggi study Spanish American poets from the twentieth century and neither claims to give an exhaustive treatment of the subject. While they focus mostly on poets alive and working before and during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, they do not discuss at length the connection between this body of poetry and the environmental turn in discourse. Binns, for example, previews his study with a brief historical overview of global ecocriticism and ecology and their connection to Spanish America, and he makes observations related to Parra's and Aridjis's poetry and their progressive ecopolitical activity, but he conceptualizes the differences between *ecopoetas* and non-*ecopoetas* as being somewhat determined by literary movements. Avant-garde poets, he explains, looked to overcome local geographic and cultural barriers through a cosmopolitan aesthetics, trying to universalize their poetry by utilizing a "discurso del desarraigo" while others planted their work firmly in the local geography and culture to make place a protagonist in their poems. While the former group rejected a local-based sense of place, the latter embraced it (39-40). The poets in his study are examples of those who have made clear the way to overcome the "colapso ecológico" by recuperating "un sentido de <<arraigo>>, una reapropiación de ese *oikos* extraviado, pero sin

renunciar del todo a las libertades modernas” (39). Essentially, Binns study illuminates a portion of Spanish American ecopoetry that expresses a way to recuperate the “*sentido de arraigo*” that was lost because of modern alienation (71).

Forns-Broggi, on the other hand, attempts to show continuity among generations of poets in the twentieth century by how they receive inspiration from the natural world (“Dones”). And like Binns, he points out the lack of ecocritical studies of Latin American literature. Underscoring the influence of colonial history on the presence or not of environmentalism, and consequentially ecocriticism, in Latin America, Forns-Broggi quotes the Chilean sociologist, Fernando Mires, who connects Latin American indifference to environmental problems with internal colonialism or “endocolonialismo.” That is, certain Latin American social practices and beliefs like aspiring to follow the Global North model of growth, believing in unlimited natural resources, and viewing the urban city as a country’s only economic and cultural center have given these societies a certain exiled-in-place attitude, alienating them from their own ecosystems (“Dones” 210; Mires 65-67). Nevertheless, Forns-Broggi is quick to point out, of course, that poets have been some of the few members of Latin American societies that have shown early sensitivity to environmental challenges. He gives as an example the work of Mexican poet, essayist, and Nobel laureate, Octavio Paz along with his compatriot Homero Aridjis and Nicaraguan Ernesto Cardenal to highlight the “don de reparo” that nature gives to poets and therefore allows them a better “percepción de su realidad” (212). Forns-Broggi suggests that Paz, Aridjis, and Cardenal had revelations at some point during the environmental turn, perhaps like the one Parra had, but not as

clearly articulated, regarding the connection to poetry and repairing the rift between humans and the natural world.

The power and importance that Binns and Forns-Broggi place on certain Latin American poetry in regard to how it can illuminate ways to overcome ecological imbalance is in line with Parra's own beliefs in the power of an ecological phrase to open our minds to other ways of seeing our relationship with nature. Parra's "ecopoetry" however approaches this belief in a very post-environmental turn sort of way. That is, his "ecopoetry" is born from a reaction to environmental and political crises he sees from 1970 forward. Much of what Binns and Forns-Broggi find in their studies is also related to how poetry reacts to modern human-driven destruction of the natural world. There are, nevertheless, other ways to view poetry's power to reveal the "realidad" of human-nonhuman relationships that Parra felt and that Forns-Broggi and Binns saw in poetry. These ways deal with ecopoetry as poetry that illuminates the relationships among humans and nonhumans and not simply the products of those relationships under processes of modernization where those relationships are thought of as binary. This approach is one that seeks to view human-nonhuman relationships as interrelationships in which the nature/culture and human/nonhuman dichotomies are erased because of the relationships' interdependent and reciprocal qualities. The environmental turn may have led many to articulate how these relationships were suffering because of human ignorance and neglect but in the case of ecopoetry it only provided a different discursive urgency to the ecopoetic message. Parra may have been the first to declare himself an "ecopoeta" but he was not the first to write *ecopoesía*, and

certainly not the first in the Southern Cone, as we will see in the following study.

Revelations and Presentations of Ecopoetry

In addition to singling out Octavio Paz's poetic observation of urban degradation of the natural world, Roberto Forns-Broggi emphasizes Paz's essay writing on poetry and its role in saving the environment (211-12). Specifically, he points out Paz's comments in one of his last books, *La otra voz: Poesía y fin de siglo*. In the last chapter of the book, Paz claims that poetry can have a singular function in regard to its influence on humanity by halting our "estúpido y suicida derroche de los recursos naturales," which waste has also contributed to "la universal destrucción y contaminación de lagos, ríos, mares, valles, selvas y montañas." This function of poetry, Paz explains, is neither descriptive nor proscriptive; it is a function based on an indirect influence restoring "realidades enterradas" by suggestion, inspiration, and allusion: "No demostrar sino mostrar" (137). Poetry's power to influence us in this way manifests itself dialogically by binding opposite ideas and disparate things together, whilst revealing their similarities. Hence it can show the true "fraternidad universal" between all things (138). In other words, poetry contains the reflective potential to reveal the points of union among all subjects and objects of life, thereby providing the way to forge — by way of "la imaginación" — an interrelationship that erases or eliminates the artificial dichotomy between humans and nonhumans (138-9). Despite the fact that Paz's principal concern in his comments about poetry's powerful influence on the future of the planet centers on the future of the human species, his human-focused ideas

are directed toward an ecological collective under the “nature” umbrella, which includes humans.

Paz is not the only contemporary poet that has tied poetry with the power to influence human-nonhuman interrelationships. American poet Gary Snyder is one of the most well known environmentalist poets around the world and in his writing has connected the work of a poet and the natural world by way of drawing a comparison between poetry and the energy cycle of an ecosystem. In “Poetry and Place” Snyder sees an analogy between poetry and the self-sufficiency of an ecosystem through the regeneration of nutrients since “[a]rt is an assimilator of unfelt experience, sensation, and memory for the whole society,” and like certain fungi that transfer energy from death to life, the poet “gives what she or he has done as nourishment [...] reaching into personal depths for nutrients hidden there, back to the community” (173-4). That “death” from which the poet creates “life” is the ineffability of experience. Poetry, then, can reveal and transfer feelings and ideas; it recycles our existentialist questioning, including the questioning of our human-nonhuman relationships.

Going a step further, and because of Snyder’s personal ties to the idea in Zen teachings that all things are connected, the English literary critic Jonathan Bate explains that Snyder’s analogy may go beyond the question of symbolic comparison. Bate infers that Snyder would say that “metaphor is a way of understanding hidden connections, of reunifying the world which scientific understanding has fragmented” (247). And so, instead of existing on separate planes of reality, however parallel they may be, the abstraction of human representation and the materiality of

the physical world can be interconnected by way of poetry as *poiesis* in the Heideggerian sense of “bringing forth” connections that were theretofore concealed from and/or by humans (Bate 253, Heidegger 317). According to Bate this type of *poiesis* can successfully interconnect the human and nonhuman worlds and in doing so it produces “ecopoetry.” Along with this interconnecting sense, ecopoetry is not a description of experience but an experiencing itself (42). Bate’s conceptualization of ecopoetry is a kin, then, to Paz’s call for poetry to indirectly “mostrar” the reality of human-nonhuman relationships as interrelationships. Ecopoetry, then, is not simply so called “nature poetry” or poetry that praises or has “nature” as its subject matter. In other words, a poem about a bird is not an ecopoem by default. Ultimately, ecopoetry is a mode of the interrelationship between human and nonhuman, and so, as Snyder puts it, poetry can be part of the ecosystem that tends toward climax, bringing forth “life” from the “death” of “memory, internalized perception, blocks of inner energies, dreams, the leaf-fall of day-to-day consciousness.” Ecopoetry “liberates the energy of our sense-detritus” because “[t]he community and its poetry are not two” (173-4). In other words, ecopoetry enhances one’s sense of place by revealing one’s connections to a place and its nonhuman residents. Fittingly, Snyder’s and Bates ideas regarding ecopoetry support Paz’s insistence that the “supervivencia humana” is tied to the “supervivencia de la poesía” (139). And this idea of ecopoetry as a presentation and revelation of human-nonhuman interrelationships is the concept we will use in our study of the work of Argentine poets Juan L. Ortiz and Alfredo Veiravé, and the Chilean poet and artist Cecilia Vicuna.

Ecopoetry conceptualized as poetry that reveals and presents human-nonhuman interrelationships as they really are can be as diverse as these same human-nonhuman interrelationships. In fact, treating these interrelationships as diverse, dynamic, and heterogeneous is a hallmark of ecopoetry. One of the principal aspects of reflecting the diverse reality of human-nonhuman interrelationships is understanding the idea of “Nature” not as a monolithic subject but as “natures,” systems made up of many participants. In the following chapters we will see various approaches to poeticize “natures” over “Nature”. Ortiz’s poem “Ah, miras al presente,” for example, represents this diversity through identifying the many sometimes invisible participants or “actors” of an ecosystem that are being forced out by slash-and-burn agricultural practices. Vicuña’s recycling and repurposing of her time-sensitive *precarios* statues, including combining photographs of the *precarios* alongside poetry, at different points in her career demonstrates how the diversity of contexts also affects human-nonhuman interrelationships. *Historia natural*, Veiravé’s book of poetry from 1980 both satirizes and celebrates the scientific yet anthropocentric observation of “nature” by framing his poems within the structure of an encyclopedic natural history. By combining the categorization-structure of a natural history from the scientific revolution with an overtly subjective poetic voice masking as a natural historian, *Historia natural* upends the notion that “nature” can be artificially divided or submitted to human subjectivity.

Veiravé’s poems in *Historia natural* demonstrate that part of the reason that categorization of “nature” is meaningless is the complexity of the ecological systems that make up what is typically thought of as “nature.” Their complexity is based on

their interrelational quality. That is, the web of interrelations — or “mesh” as Timothy Morton conceptualizes it — extends out both horizontally and vertically, both physically and metaphysically (*Ecological Thought* 28). In *Historia natural* the interrelations connect humans and nonhumans alike by way of both scientific and humanistic inquiry. The reciprocity that *interrelational* as a term implies is also present in Ortiz’s and Vicuña’s work. Ortiz’s “Deja las letras...” approaches reciprocity as a quality that always already exists in human-nonhuman interrelationships but that is often obscured by modern, urban life. Along similar lines, Vicuña’s work constructs the interrelational and interconnected mesh as made up of many complementary unions among humans and nonhumans, and among ideas and objects. *Kon Kon*, her poetic documentary that we will study at length in Chapter 3, presents these interrelationships through a multimedia, multigenre, and multi perspective poetics that we will call *ecophrasis*.

As we will explore more thoroughly in regard to Ortiz’s and Vicuña’s work in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 respectively, *ecophrasis* is the neologism that I propose for the *ecopoetic* approach that attempts to let “home” (eco) “speak” (phrases) for itself. “Home” here means “place,” which in turn means a set of interrelations within a reasonable proximity. For each poet “home” represents something different and it is through his or her poetry that “home” takes shape. With Ortiz’s “Fui al río” and “El jacarandá” we will read how his speaker discovers that humans are a part of and not apart from the landscape. *Ecophrastically*, Ortiz is true to a statement he made early in the twentieth century when commenting on poetry and how to present the landscape: “El paisaje es una relación” (1069). In other words, “paisaje” or “place” is

not separate from the observer; rather, place and person are interconnected. The desired effect of ecophrasis is to express this interconnection. As far as Ortiz's poetry is concerned, as we will discuss, expressing interconnectedness concerns not only the poetic message but the poetic method as well. Vicuña's ecophrasis is quite different from that of Ortiz. Her approach is by way of her multidimensional talents as a poet, artist, performer, and filmmaker. She similarly presents place as an interconnected set of interrelations but she does so by combining visual, aural, and sometimes material perspectives. *Kon Kon* is certainly her most complete example of ecophrasis and, as we will analyze in Chapter 3, by interconnecting genres, media, and discourses to present the dynamics of place in the face of environmental crises, her work shows how the human arts can articulate the importance of maintaining human-nonhuman relationships as interrelationships. Nevertheless, the dynamics of place, even through ecophrasis, can be difficult to express.

In Chapter 2 we will see how several of Veiravé's poems express how place can be dynamic on both a global and local level. He incorporates this conversation about place dynamism into his poetry via ironic views on provincial *costumbrismo* and globalized modernity mixed with lyrical nostalgia for "home." One of these poems, "Mi casa es una parte del universo," uses the perspective of the first full image taken of Earth from space as a way to represent the reality of a global community while the speaker then zooms in on his home in a small Argentine town and in doing so shows how both global and local communities can fit into the same sense of place. And it is this local-yet-global sense of place that defines much of Veiravé's ecopoetry after the beginning period of the environmental turn in global

political discourse. It will be apparent in our study of each of these poets that sense of place is an essential element in Southern Cone ecopoetics because it ties them geographically, culturally, and historically to their Southern Cone communities. As we will see in the following study, their ecopoetry reveals and presents both “sense” and “place” by way of an interrelational ecopoetics that is focused primarily on the quality of human-nonhuman relationships. Beginning with Ortiz, our reading will take us through the work of three poets that have been marginalized in part because of their decision to live and write from outside the cultural and geographic center of their countries. In some ways, however, because of their marginalization they have been led to create ecopoetry that addresses often overlooked problems, such as the destruction of ecosystems and its connection to the destruction of human communities. In Ortiz’s case, the marginalization of him and his work contribute to how many poets and critics read him as one of the major overlooked and under-read Spanish American poets of the twentieth century.

¹ It should be noted that the Spanish terms of “ecologista” and “ecologismo” are false cognates. Translated into English they mean “environmentalist” and “environmentalism” respectively.

² Even though Parra talks about this experience as being in the late 60s, the very first Earth Day occurred on April 22, 1970 – his remembrance of the day matches well with his description of the absence of cars in downtown Manhattan (“Earth Day”).

³ The creators of Deep Ecology, Arne Naess and George Sessions give a “set of principles” to lay out what is “basic to deep ecology” in Naess’s article “The Deep Ecological Movement.” The first guiding principle reads as follows:

The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes. (49)

⁴ This quoted “pancarta,” in fact, appears as part of his *Artefactos*.

⁵ *Artefactos* is not actually a book but a box full of post cards that have different messages written with text, photographs, and drawings.

⁶ See Niall Binns's chapter on Aridjis in his book, *¿Callejón sin salida? La crisis ecológica en la poesía hispanoamericana* and Steven F. White's article on Cuadra titled "Ecocrítica y chamanismo en la poesía de Pablo Antonio Cuadra."

⁷ See George Handley's ecocritical take on Pablo Neruda's ecological sensibility in his book, *New World Poetics*, which compares the work of Neruda, Walt Whitman, and Derek Walcott.

⁸ Octavio Paz's *Ladera este*, Pablo Neruda's *Libro de preguntas*, and Mario Benedetti's *Nuevo rincón de haikus* are a few examples of Spanish American poetry's affinity for non-western influence.

⁹ Other notable contributions to ecocritical analyses of Spanish American poetry are Steven F. White's two ecocritical volumes on Nicaraguan poetry and music: *Arando en el aire: La ecología en la poesía y música de Nicaragua*, and *El mundo más que humano en la poesía de Pablo Antonio Cuadra: Un estudio ecocrítico*.

CHAPTER 1

Spanning the Abyss: The *Ecopoiesis* of Juan L. Ortiz

*Pero quien ha dado tanto de beber
debe completar su destino,
aunque el mundo no lo comprenda ni merezca.*

- Roberto Juarroz "33"

*In the age of the world's night, the abyss of the
world must be experienced and endured. But
for this it is necessary that there be those who
reach into the abyss.*

- Martin Heidegger "What are Poets for?"

In June of 2011, the renowned Argentine literary critic, Beatriz Sarlo, chose the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of her compatriot Jorge Luis Borges's death to hypothesize what Argentine literature would have been if the legendary creator of alternative realities and imaginary worlds had never existed. Her Capra-esque formulated commentary, entitled "Si no hubiera existido Borges" and published in one of Argentina's two most-circulated dailies, *La Nación*, gave Sarlo the opportunity to both appreciate Borges's legacy and at the same time "reshuffle" the canon, as it were. She offers, for example, that without Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares would not have reached his potential, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada's fiction would be more important than it is, and Argentine literature never would have realized its now famous level of self-awareness.

As far as a gap that would be left by the absence of Borges's verse is concerned, Sarlo proposes Oliverio Girondo as the poet who would have inaugurated *lo nuevo* in Argentine letters and whose avant-guard style would have been the poetic center of the country. Also, she contends, no one would have re-read

the minor poet Evaristo Carriego. To the reader familiar with Argentine poetry, that Sarlo mentions Gironde as the natural headliner in twentieth-century national poetry in the absence of Borges comes as no surprise. Gironde was from the same generation as Borges and his avant-guard, surrealist stretching of Spanish influenced his and following generations of poets, within and outside of the country. This designation notwithstanding, Sarlo continues to mention another poet who, with his singular aesthetic, has rarely been mentioned by anthologists — especially those that are anthologizing outside of Argentina — as a complete substitute for a canonical poet such as Borges. This poet's work, Sarlo proposes, would replace Borges's urban lyric with the spaces and places that would shift the national poetic imagination: "Y en lugar de las orillas porteñas, el barrio y las calles rectas hasta el horizonte, estaría el paisaje fluvial y fluyente de Juan L. Ortiz."¹

Referring to poetry specifically – i.e. not ignoring writers such as Horacio Quiroga or Ricardo Güiraldes – and to the twentieth century exclusively, Sarlo is not denoting, for example, that literary traditions tied to land and location such as *costumbrismo*, or the much debated *poesía gauchesca*, would be more lauded without Borges's oft-cited arguments against it.² Rather, Sarlo is recognizing the place-making value of Ortiz's poetry for Argentina and its letters. Her swapping Ortiz for Borges is telling for two underlying reasons: first, Ortiz's poetry, until the mid-1970s, was considered at the margins of Argentine literature, according to critics and fellow authors like Juan José Saer ("Juan" 11-12); and second, the characteristic of Ortiz's poetry that she highlights here is its ability to represent the natural world as a poetic anchor for contemporary autochthonous literature.

Through this brief and perhaps casual recognition, Sarlo is both reevaluating Ortiz and his work by bringing them in from the periphery – literally and literarily – and repositioning the center of Argentine poetics by linking Ortiz and his non-urban lyric to a national sense of place as part of a national identity.

Other critics like the Argentine Jorge Perednik have previously gone more into depth over the margin-vs.-center debate with regard to Ortiz and his work, which has become one of the few repeated lines of analysis within Ortiz criticism.³ Ortiz's close friend, countryman, and fellow poet, Francisco "Paco" Urondo, once questioned him about his marginalization and possible canonization. Ortiz balks at the prospect of a belated inclusion of his work into the central or official poetic of the country, qualifying such a possibility as "muy grave" (126). Though his answer underscores his well-known humility, it also speaks to his aversion to the publishing establishment in Argentina.⁴ The question of where to place Ortiz and his work within the Argentine canon is rooted in why the margin vs. center debate has surfaced in the studies of Ortiz's work to begin with. One of the most important reasons, needless to say, is the contrast of the exceptionality of his work to its exposure or lack thereof within the mass-publishing market – now as well as during his lifetime – in Argentina. In conjunction with this center/margins contrast is what is known as the "Juanele" myth of Ortiz.

The "Juanele" myth paints the humble poet as a sort of mystic, guru-hermit figure who wrote poetry only for himself and a very limited public. Though Ortiz was and is admired by important Argentine poets and artists such as Saer, César Aira, Oscar Edelstein,⁵ and even one of the other subjects of this current study,

Alfredo Veiravé, he considered many of these as close friends and principle readers and so it is no wonder that they are his most vocal advocates. Saer himself declared Ortiz as Argentina's best poet of the twentieth century ("Una poesía en expansión") and lauded poets including Roberto Juarroz and Rafael Alberti even made tribute to him, while highlighting his marginality ("33"; "Testimonios entrerrianos" 45). Those who have perpetuated the "Juanele" myth, nevertheless, tend to hyperbolize particularities of Ortiz's character and life story. Indeed, the myth is called "Juanele" because only those who did not personally know Ortiz would often call him by that name (Perednik 58). A few examples of the myth's particularities include his hermitic lifestyle, his role as cultural and literary guru, and his poetry-for-poetry's-sake philosophy. His conscious decision to remain in Entre Ríos, and out of Buenos Aires, most of his life is what others have interpreted to be his hermiticism; his warm friendship with and sincere interest in local authors and artists often younger than himself make him a cultural and literary guru, and his low publishing ambitions is his poetry-for-poetry's-sake philosophy (Freidemberg 82-83). On the other hand, Ortiz's eccentric habits of smoking homemade cigarettes with a homemade *boquilla*, welcoming an extraordinary amount of cats into his home, and, later in life, combing his rather long and silver hair up, forming a whipped bouffant top, certainly contributed to his mythification (Dujovne Ortiz 4). And the fact that he did not publish his poetry on a large scale until he had accumulated over seven hundred pages and two hundred and eighty poems is a direct contributor to the mythic idea that Ortiz's work is one long project.

The trajectory of Ortiz's work has been rather consistent in style and subject matter, which has only gone to strengthen his mythic image of a poet dedicated to an ideal. Of course, another possible fuel to fire his myth is his abiding political subversiveness. His lifelong affiliation with the communist party from early in his life has made him a favorite of young and rebellious poets and journalists such as the martyred montonero Urondo.⁶ Reflected throughout his poetic work in the images of the disenfranchised poor at the margins of civilization, and throughout his life in his travels to communist nations including China, his political ideals, though not put up to public scrutiny by the media and literary establishment as were those of Pablo Neruda, gave him a progressive yet mature aura. Though isolated geographically, he was not necessarily isolated politically.

As if to justify Sarlo's perspective, the "Juanele" myth in some ways is similar to the myth that often surrounds Borges's life and work – the same myth that he considers in "Borges y yo." Just as "Borges" is separable from Jorge Luis Borges, "Juanele" is distinguishable from Juan L. Ortiz. Though Borges outwardly dialogued with his public, literary self through his writing, Ortiz never appears to have given the exaggerated myth about him a second thought. He did, however, give a significant amount of thought about the place of the poet in society and the relation between that place and the poet's work. According to Ortiz in an interview with fellow poet Jorge Conti, poets have had a communal function in various societies and in many ways were "la voz de un pueblo." Poets performed work that fulfilled a necessary *practical* function — like any other job — though their work became a *spiritual* necessity for the community as well ("El silencio" 61-62). Connecting both

the practical function and the spiritual necessity into one role the poet as “la voz del pueblo” becomes a facilitator among humans and nonhumans by helping humans recognize our interconnections with the other members of the natural world. Poets can bring about this recognition because, according to Ortiz: “El pueblo es la naturaleza,” and because “La poesía intenta hacer participar al hombre de lo natural. La reivindicación poética implica la reivindicación del hombre” (“Las arrugas” 44). This role as facilitator does not mean that the author should be disregarded in any reading of his or her work; on the contrary, Ortiz believed that one cannot separate the work and its author. During the same interview quoted above and responding to a question regarding how a poet should live, Ortiz tells Conti that a poet has a responsibility to live according to his or her time, talents, and place in society:

Yo diría, en cierto modo perogrullescamente, como pueda vivir... Teniéndose, esforzándose en ser fiel a sí mismo, es decir, fiel a eso que por razones azarosas del modo de distribución de la energía social, o potencia social, o de dones y a veces hasta relacionado con su inserción en la sociedad, le ha tocado a él asumir... El poeta tiene en ese sentido una responsabilidad y su vida debe ser una respuesta. Es decir que, en lo posible, debe ser tan auténtico como él pretenda o quiera que sea su poesía. Que responda a lo que él siente más profundamente y quiere también para los demás... La unidad de vida y poesía debe darse [...] a través de algo que está operando en uno y de lo que uno es responsable y que va transformando la vida y la poesía... sin esfuerzo, naturalmente. (71-72)

To Ortiz, making poetry was a way of living or being. And by recognizing the connections between the author and his or her work, yet seeking to focus on or at least to emphasize the work rather than aggrandizing the poet, Ortiz points to the

poetic process or *poiesis* as more than just the enunciation of a poetic text. *Poiesis* is a way of being.

That Ortiz wanted to write and be read is self-evident in his lifelong dedication to poetry and his willingness to publish his work on his own, eschewing the big city literary lights of Buenos Aires and the more central publishing networks in favor of printing copies of his work for literary friends and, subsequently, for their friends. According to Ortiz, his aversion to literary circles of Buenos Aires was a response of both taste and necessity. He puts his trajectory as a poet in contrast to that of other poets who gathered inspiration from their work in literary circles:

Me pongo un poco, gratificado, en el papel de una florecita, que tiene que darse, porque viene de abajo; y todo lo que hace la flor para su realización, con todo lo que necesita la flor para esa realización, las instancias de la tierra, las otras florecitas o plantitas o briznas (porque las florecitas también requieren compañía) es una necesidad natural... (“Conversación” 147)

Though looking from the outside in, both physically, because of his choice of residence far from Buenos Aires, and professionally, because of his aversion to literary circles, Ortiz found his motivation for and satisfaction from his work on a more intimate scale. Perhaps his dedication to poetry without a publishing endgame, while still being able to maintain a remarkably high level of quality, is what has attracted fellow poets to his work, effectively dubbing him a “poet’s poet.”⁷ In his focus on *poiesis* as a way of being, what becomes most important is the relationship between the poet and that which inspires his or her poetry. And what shines through Ortiz’s poetry is his deep interest, even love, for what we will call the human and nonhuman “actors,” in the actor-network-theory sense, of any chosen

living environment. French philosopher and scientific sociologist Bruno Latour, one of the early proponents of actor-network-theory (or ANT), explains that an actor, in the relational sense of the theory, is “not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it.” As Latour goes on to illustrate, by using the term “actor” he can demonstrate how, just like in theatre, actions within a social network are not directly connected to just one person. That is, an actor-network is an ensemble that includes actants and the audience as well (*Reassembling* 46). In this participatory and never-completely isolated sense, both human and nonhuman actors of place in a ortician landscape are always already connected. By recognizing the “other” as one of many actors on par with the poetic voice in a shared web of interrelations, Ortiz brings attention to the interrelational aspect of his ontology. Ortiz’s “others” are actors because they are part of a fabric of dynamic interrelations. What we shall find in our reading of Ortiz’s work is that poetry both produces and is a manifestation of a human-nonhuman interrelationship. In this way, the poet both forms part of the ontological ecosystem of place and stands outside of it.

A “Nature” Poet

*Por qué cantáis la rosa, ¡oh poetas!
Hacedla florecer en el poema;*

- Vicente Huidobro, “Arte poética”

To read over the titles of his poetry books is to get an idea of Ortiz’s abiding poetic interests. Out of the dozen books of poetry that he wrote, only two, *El ángel inclinado* (1937) and *La mano infinita* (1951), lack titles that reflect natural aspects

of landscape.⁸ His interest in the natural world does not automatically make him an example of an ecological thinker in and of itself, of course, nor does his love of native flora and fauna qualify him as an author that has deviated from the Argentine poetic mainstream. In fact, as the Argentine scholar José Isaacson makes clear in his introduction to the anthology *Geografía lírica argentina: Cuatro siglos de poesía XVII-XVII-XIX-XX*, there are very few natural features of Argentina that Argentine poets have not praised (13). Notwithstanding Ortiz's connections to a national poetic tradition that seeks inspiration in the landscape, or his choice of natural things as poetic subject matter, the important distinction in his work that we shall analyze is its ecopoetic quality that goes beyond any picturesque naturalism or "blood and soil" geopolitics.⁹

As pointed out in the introduction, poetry that praises nature and ecopoetry are not mutually inclusive. In Ortiz's case, the strong ecopoetic characterization of his poetry is defined by the complex quality and beauty of his focus on the *interrelationships* between the human and the nonhuman worlds. That is, his poetry surpasses a two-dimensional treatment or representation of elements in the natural world by seeking to represent the experience of living in a landscape. This approach makes Ortiz's poetry a multi-dimensional presentation. Perednik argues something similar when he bristles at the idea that Ortiz is a "poeta paisajista" because it implies that the poet writes about nature as an abstraction or as a static backdrop. He points out that Ortiz is most interested in the "complicado intercambio entre elementos" in the natural world (61-2). This focus on these sorts of interrelationships goes toward making Ortiz's *poiesis* an *ecopoiesis*. Again, by

ecopoiesis I mean that *poiesis* that is the “making” or “creation” of a “home” as a “fabric of interrelations.” *Ecopoiesis* in this sense is the impetus behind any poetic work that attempts to understand and uncover the interconnectedness of humans and non-humans.

It is by focusing on the interrelationships among many parts and participants of our world, rather than just one or the “other,” Ortiz’s *poiesis* becomes *ecopoiesis*. His writing is not about Nature (with an “N”), but is more akin to a translation of his many ontological experiences with natural things and beings. Where the former approach suggests a natural world that is homogeneous and monolithic, the latter suggests an extremely heterogeneous and multifaceted natural world made up of a plural nature, or “natures.” This approach often makes his poetry come off as hermetical and complex – though he has expressed that he hoped it would not (Gola, *Las vueltas del río* 15). By extension, one could even characterize his poetry as mystical, yet Ortiz’s *ecopoiesis* often grounds itself by recognizing the physical and social inequalities that occur alongside the mystical and spiritual in the world around the poet. He reveals the power disparities among humans, and between the human and the nonhuman worlds as means to our ecological alienation, as Roberto Forns-Broggi and others have underlined (35).¹⁰ By juxtaposing the beauty of place and the ravages of social circumstance, Ortiz underscores the irony of modern-day abject poverty that is embedded in, and thereby cruelly enhanced by the aesthetically pleasing and ontological rich natural world, effectively placing his poetry in the continual debate in Argentina regarding the choice of living under civilization or barbarism. Expressly, in Ortiz’s poetry, the abject poverty under

supposed civilization is accentuated by the aesthetic and ethic beauty of the so-called barbarous natural world. In his poems, these juxtapositions break up the binary thinking of civilization vs. barbarity. They point to a concern for making and maintaining interrelationships with the “other,” whether the “other” be human or nonhuman. For the poet to do this he employs several strategies that we will identify in this chapter through our close reading of a few key poems.

Ortiz’s poem “Deja las letras...” from *De las raíces y del cielo* (1958) is a good example of how he tries to erase any sense of a dichotomy between “civilization” and everything else, thereby opening up interrelational aspects between the two artificially separated sides. Part of forming interrelationships with nonhumans, as we will discuss regarding this poem, is to find a way to get beyond any fabricated boundary of humanness by accepting a participatory role within a larger framework. Along with “Deja las letras...,” we will read perhaps his most well known poem, “Fui al río,” in which the speaker goes about overcoming any false separation between the human and the nonhuman actors of a landscape.

Indeed, Ortiz’s vast oeuvre contains many poems that are concerned with the interrelationships among nature, human nature, humans in nature, and nature in humans. In the moderately long poem, “Ah, miras al presente...,” from *La orilla que se abisma* (1970), Ortiz unfolds the hidden layers of the damaging relationship between a society with anthropocentric economic demands on the natural world and an ecosystem-landscape by elegizing the interconnections that are lost as a result of unsustainable agriculture. At the same time he reflects hopefully on possible political systems that can reconnect people with place. Eventually,

however, he acknowledges and laments that the reality of an ever-expanding gap between the two brings about a sense of loss — an argument not uncommon in contemporary discussions on the climate crisis (Vanderheiden 108-09). A careful look at the aforementioned selections as well as his poem “El jacarandá,” also from *La orilla que se abisma*,¹¹ nevertheless, will reveal that what is fundamental to Ortiz’s *ecopoiesis* is first, an reorientation of humanity with regard to our locus in the natural world; second, the recognition of the abysmal space that exists between the human and nonhuman worlds; and finally, the recognition of an ecologically ontological network through such methods as *ecophrasis*, the manner by which “home” is “spoken” through poetry and other means to span the same abyss by reconnecting the two artificially separated worlds. Indeed, one of Ortiz’s overarching leitmotifs is to uncover the connections — among humans and nonhumans alike — that are already always there, thereby making these connections visible before they are lost.

The Threads and Mesh of Ecopoetics

*La vida herida grita y es inútil nuestro intento de eludir el grito
en el adorable y reposante refugio de nuestra soledad o de nuestra comunión con las
[criaturas secretas del mundo.*

- Juan L. Ortiz, “Sí, el nocturno en pleno día”

Ortiz most often creates imagery that immediately brings the reader out of doors. His poetic vision moves around and above the landscape of his poems and by doing so he distinguishes his system of revealing interconnections among humans and nonhumans from a perspective that has definite, known, or fixed limitations.

Ecopoetically and similar to Cecilia Vicuña, Ortiz utilizes the concepts of *red*, *trama*, *laberinto*, *tejido*, and other weaving-like imagery when he presents physical and metaphysical interrelationships as open-ended and lacking a center, as it were. This no-limits, multidirectionality distinction serves to underline the connections among all of the actors, both human and nonhuman, of the world, both immediate and remote, and to highlight their participation, even in their quality as objects. It is akin to the phenomenological principle known as “intersubjectivity” theorized by the philosopher Edmund Husserl and interpreted by ecocritic David Abram.

Intersubjectivity, a sort of consensus objectivity, or where subjectivities overlap each other and create what we think of as objectivity where they coincide, suggests the equal participation of any and all actors of a place (Abram 38-39). Better yet, Ortiz’s web is more similar to what British ecocritic Timothy Morton points out in his book *Ecology without Nature* as “interobjectivity” because in a woven structure of associations, each subject is better thought of as an object (129). That is, intersubjectivity claims to erase the subject/object binary yet it still privileges the subject, whereas interobjectivity considers so called subjects as nodes in a field of interrelationships, making them objects. More recently, Morton explains interobjectivity as “the way in which nothing is ever experienced directly, but only as mediated through other entities in some shared sensual place” (*Hyperobjects* 86). This sensual space is the woven interobjective space in Ortiz’s ecopoetry.

One could understand the concept of equal and reciprocal relationships made through the interconnections among the actors of a place as paradoxical because any representation of such a woven structure would have to be produced or

perceived by one of its actors or nodes. The concept would self-destruct on account of the single perspective giving it a center. Ortiz shows that he understands this paradox by juxtaposing concepts of union and connectivity with those of infinity in his poetry. He uses such terms as “abismo,” “misterio,” “más allá,” and “eternidad” to diminish his claim on any authoritative representative power. Namely, he puts a limit on his *poiesis* by conceding subjective authority to most of the world he is representing to the “other” *ad infinitum*. Therefore by introducing the recognition of the impossibility to completely erase the space between humans and nonhumans, the various “nodes” in the fabric, Ortiz’s ecopoetry maintains a poetic vibrancy that seeks to interconnect the world without the hope of a holistic union as many who use the term “Nature,” or even ecology and, particularly, ecosystem, often imply. For several ecocritics like Morton, this dynamism is the definition of an ecologic aesthetic because it produces something less than an enclosed system and more of what he calls a “mesh” (*Ecological Thought* 28). In *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Morton makes a direct connection between the *mesh* and *interobjectivity*:

A mesh consists of relationships between crisscrossing strands of metal and gaps between the strands. Meshes are potent metaphors for the strange interconnectedness of things, an interconnectedness that does not allow for perfect, lossless transmission of information, but is instead full of gaps and absences. When an object is born it is instantly enmeshed into a relationship with other objects in the mesh. (83)

As we will read in our analysis of “El jacarandá,” Ortiz includes the space, literal and figurative, between objects as part of the mesh that he weaves with his poetry. Just

as a mesh is a mesh because of its combination of thread and space or “gaps,” as Morton points out, Ortiz’s poetry is mesh-like because it both makes and recognizes connections between objects, creating threads and revealing gaps or *abismos*. These gaps, however, do not serve to justify making distinctions between humans and nonhumans, nor would such distinctions be relevant in the mesh.

If we read Ortiz in order to analyze his poetry for the mesh aspects on one hand, and the “abismo” aspects on the other, we can confirm that if he makes a case for cosmic union among all things, it is in the sense of an ecological heterogeneity rather than a totalistic homogeneity. Indeed, we can better understand the concept of “Nature” that Ortiz’s poetry upends in order to reveal the mesh-like conception of the natural world, as a conflation of metaphysics, physics, and aesthetics. These four qualifications are the same that Kate Soper identifies when she unpacks contemporary conceptualizations of “Nature.” Essentially, then, Ortiz is questioning the concepts of “Nature” that isolates all that “is opposed to the “human” or “cultural,” all that corresponds to the “structures, processes and causal powers that are constantly operative within the physical world,” and all the aesthetically appreciable and observable natural world of “immediate experience” (Soper 155-56). Perhaps more importantly in terms of this current study, however, is the very fact that Ortiz questions, directly or poetically, the concept of “Nature” in the first place. And while he does not substantiate a fixed definition of “Nature,” neither does he shy away from seeking to understand the natural world through poetic inquiry. The ambiguous or mysterious character of the interconnections in the natural world as he sees it, in part draws out the philosophically curious impulse of his poetry.

Two aspects that guide Ortiz's representation of experiencing natural surroundings/environment are time and space. Spatially, the poetic voice frequently speaks to, or of, distant or infinite phenomena and/or beings, often in the sky, like in the poems "Sí, las escamas del crepúsculo..." (*De las raíces y del cielo*) when it speaks of "el éxtasis de los velos de Noviembre / fluyendo hasta la noche, y más allá?... (lines 3-4), and "Luna de Pekín" (*El junco y la corriente*). The speaker also focuses on points at close range and often on a more minuscule scale, as the poem "Junto a una hierba..." demonstrates in the speaker's isolation of a single blade of grass: "Es la más alta de todas, la más alta, / para la cortesía, al parecer, de todas las otras hierbas, / ante qué aire primero?" (*De las raíces y del cielo*, lines 6-8).¹² Regarding time, Ortiz writes from the perspective of the present as in "A veo..." (*El álamo y el viento* (1947)), from the past ("La niña venció el río...", *El álamo*) and from the future ("Mañana en Diamante," *La brisa profunda* (1954)), nevertheless, it goes without saying that Ortiz combines ideas of both time and space in his poems. In this combination we can see the principle of the mesh, in that the poetic voice moves dynamically and metaphysically throughout and, in some cases, beyond his visible environment.

Not only does Ortiz weave a net with his poetic voice's varying temporal perspectives, he also includes a variety of other actors in his lyric. The aforementioned poem, "Deja las letras..." helps us see this weaving of perspectives and actors and also demonstrates Ortiz's yearning to present and connect to his surroundings by letting them speak for themselves through a poetry that makes the poet subservient to the subject matter at hand (543). Characteristic of many of

Ortiz's poems, this poem's speaker is identified through adjectives as male and as the familiar tone in the title and in the second line of the poem confirms, this speaker intimately addresses someone identified solely as "amigo." Though this friend is identified as male as well, the fact that the speaker uses the second person to speak to this friend makes for a reading where the reader can identify with this interlocutor, regardless of gender. The reader, in effect, may alternatively, though not necessarily, become the listener via the reading. By providing this vicarious reading, Ortiz allows the reader to consider the speaker's ideas more personally, making his invitations less hypothetical and more real. And the fact that the speaker addresses the listener in such intimate terms as "amigo," a well-worn ortician trope, colors the poem's invitations in fraternal, rather than paternal, shades. Inviting his friend to leave both "las letras" and "la ciudad" behind, the speaker lovingly invites him to venture into the hinterlands of both in order to change his anthropocentric perspective. Furthermore, we read in the first stanza that the speaker articulates his place in relationship to his surroundings as a desire to be a part of them:

Deja las letras y deja la ciudad...
 Vamos a buscar, amigo, a la virgen del aire...
 Yo sé que nos espera tras de aquellas colinas
 en la azucena del azul...
 Yo quiero ser, amigo,
 uno, el más mínimo, de sus sentimientos de cristal...
 o mejor, uno, el más ligero, de sus latidos de perfume... (lines 1-7)

What is immediately apparent from the form of these opening lines is Ortiz's generous use of ellipses. Indeed, of the one hundred and thirty-one lines in this

poem, thirty-nine or slightly less than a third of them end with an ellipsis. Regarding the use of the ellipsis, “Deja las letras...” is quite representative of many of Ortiz’s poems, especially those he published after 1950. Like his ample use of the colon, quotation marks, question marks, and even commas, Ortiz’s rather abundant use of the ellipsis in his poetry is as much a part of his style as are his frequent allusions to Shakespeare and Li Po or his use of the diminutive form of words, for example.

Fellow Argentine poet and critic D.G. Helder sees Ortiz’s use of punctuation marks as part of his poetry’s musicality. Similar to the ebb and flow effect that the wandering length and alignment of his post-1970 lines of poetry have on their reading, the ellipses, comments Helder, “indican que la intensidad disminuye o aumenta de a poco, al principio de un poema como un crescendo a partir de lo inaudible, al final como un diminuendo” (129). The poem’s title, “Deja las letras...” like those of nearly sixty percent of his poems, includes an ellipsis, and so from its inception the poem initiates this particularly *vaivén* rhythm that is characteristic of much of Ortiz’s poetry. Like his other poems that include an ellipsis in their titles, this poem begins by repeating its title as its first words, *sans* the ellipsis, effectively emphasizing the beginning of the poem. In the lines quoted above, the ellipses also serve to separate four versions of the speaker’s voice. Before the first ellipsis, the speaker directly yet informally addresses the listener; before the second ellipsis he speaks inclusively of himself and the listener; before the third ellipsis the speaker begins by separating himself from the previous inclusion and then reenters it: “Yo sé que nos espera...”; before the fourth and final ellipsis of the stanza, the speaker once again separates himself from the listener and then directs their attention to a third party: the distant

“colinas.” By changing the grammatical subject and object of his voice in such a way, and by syncopating the enjambment between the verses with the ellipses and those without, the speaker introduces the *vaivén* sensation to the reader. In this way the poem’s form and style invites the listener and the reader to “look around,” which sets up an embodied reading of the poem’s geographic and metaphoric movement — a metaphorical movement that goes toward a mystical union with the essence of the immediate natural world.

Though the symbolist images of wanting to be a “sentimiento” or a “latido de perfume” for the “virgen del aire” in lines six and seven conjure up visions of transcendence, the speaker rounds off the opening stanza by indicating his very practical reasons for wanting to leave the city behind for the “colinas”: “No estás tú también / un poco sucio de letras y un poco sucio de ciudad?” (8-9). Though he repeats the connection between “letras” and “ciudad,” which connection Angel Rama would make over a decade later in his *La ciudad letrada*, from the title and beginning line it is not immediately clear what the speaker means by “letras” at this point in the poem. Nevertheless, to suggest that they can be left behind like the city is to suggest that they, like the city, are in some way built or created. Indeed, the first verse of the poem sets up the *letras = ciudad* conceptual framework for the reader. It would seem, then, that leaving the city and “las letras” behind is a unified process of physical, mental, emotional, and even intellectual cleansing.

Because *las letras* take precedence in the poem by way of the title and by way of coming first in the two sides of the *letras = ciudad* parallel, we can safely assume that leaving them behind is the first step in this cleansing. If we insist on

interpreting *letras* as “the humanities” we can see that the speaker is suggesting that we have to cleanse ourselves of omphaloskepsis or navel gazing and “look around” at the world instead. To leave behind our self-absorption is also to leave behind manifestations of such self-absorption. Of course, *letras* may refer to several things, yet if to leave them behind is parallel to leaving the city, the *letras* that Ortiz’s speaker implores his listener to cleanse himself of are the artifices of language that can repress communication, as a city with its anthropocentric design can repress the natural world. Language can be imposing and artificial in the way we organize it, even in a linguistically groundbreaking genre such as poetry. Referring to Ortiz’s *oeuvre* and to “Deja las letras...” specifically, Alfredo Veiravé, a devotee of Ortiz and his work, makes a similar deduction:

Las dificultades que ofrece su poesía a medida que va creciendo en el tiempo, radica en el acuerdo que el poeta sustenta tácitamente al organizar el poema entre lo comunicado y las palabras de esa comunicación. Poesía se transforma a veces en una inabarcable explicitación de sus temas y al mismo tiempo, poesía que quiere trasvasar estados de alma, cuya persecución o logros se han ido alejando de las cosas concretas que se veían con nitidez en sus primeros libros. Esta depuración de los temas anteriores, esta desnudez, es un anhelo en quien ha atravesado una experiencia de identificación o identidad total con el mundo de las representaciones. (*Juan L. Ortiz* 177)

Ortiz’s poetry has evolved from describing a completely concrete world to presenting “una experiencia de identificación” with the world of representation. In other words, his poetry has gone from seeing the world as full of objects to seeing the world as full of interrelationships. A “representación” can be read here as an interrelationship in the sense of what transpires between “lo comunicado y las

palabras de esa comunicación.” Veiravé underscores the paradox within which Ortiz is working as a poet: Ortiz wants to use language to get beyond language.

In much of Ortiz’s poetry, language becomes the very thing that separates humans from nonhumans, but it also becomes the way to re-connect them. This is the paradoxical movement of his ecopoetics: he moves in and out of language and the result is a “lightness” that critics such as Helder see as the “motivo formal que domina” his poetry (127). To support this dynamic levity, Ortiz employs leitmotifs of images of light dancing in the air and other different iterations of the ethereality of breathing, breath, and floating. This is the “perfume” and the “aire” that we have already highlighted from lines six and seven of “Deja las letras...” His lightness calls attention to that which one cannot see, just as that which one cannot say, as an integral part of his ecological thought. Herein we find how he shows that poetry offers a doorway to humans to reintegrate, if only metaphysically, into a nonhuman world.

Regarding the physical portion of this cleansing, the speaker of “Deja las letras...” implores the listener to escape from the city: “Sigue, sigue, por entre la bencina, sobre la lisa pesadilla / de las calles extremas, hacia la gracia de las huellas...” (lines 10-11). Gasoline or “bencina” here works as a metonym for both automobiles and pollution, essentially unifying modernity and its direct effects on the health of those who live in the city. City life is certainly nightmarish where it meets the polluted chaos of the streets. Returning to speak of *nosotros*, and juxtaposing the image of the polluted streets, the speaker hurries the listener to enter the “caminos de rocío, / invisibles,” to finally leave the city. Here these

opening lines of the poem appear to be promoting pastoral escapism, which would necessarily emphasize the separation between “Nature” and “Society.” As the poem progresses, nevertheless, the speaker takes the listener through a complex network of interrelations among the various actors of his immediate natural world. This complexity would never exist in the simplified “Nature” of the pastoral mode. “Deja las letras...” does, however, propose the possibility for physical and spiritual renewal by leaving the city life behind, which has been a central idea in some pastoral literature including classic Latin American works like Alejo Carpentier’s *Pasos perdidos*. The renewal depicted here, the reader later discovers, is not egocentric. It is tied to making connections with the human and nonhuman actors of place. If the listener would only participate in it, and become, as it were, a participating actor of the place being poeticized, he would see how the natural world is made up of both spiritual and sensuous connections among its actors. Again, the speaker invites the listener to look around, effectively creating a three-dimensional landscape:

Y ahora, ahora, torna la vista alrededor...
 Saluda como un aura a estas humildes gracias de miel,
 capaces, sin embargo, de atraer hacia sí
 a las abejas todas del día
 y de volver de margaritas a la melancolía más flotante... (lines 28-32)

“Saluda” initiates the listener into an interactive landscape. He is to look at and to speak to the actors of this place. Later in the poem, the speaker asks his “amigo” to listen, to feel, to sit, to run, to comprehend, to lose, to find, and to embrace different actors that make up the immediate surroundings of the city. As the example here

shows, not only does the speaker interact and ask his listener to interact with the actors of this place, he indicates how the other actors interact — how the “las abejas” interact with the flowers, for example.

To demonstrate the connections between each actor of a place is to identify a system. The German-American ecocritic Ursula Heise writes in her book, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, of this way to express the sense of place with regard to one’s surroundings while considering the entire planet. Connections that can function as a way to unify one with the planet is a part of what she calls “eco-cosmopolitanism,” which is “an attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary “imagined communities” of both human and nonhuman kinds” (61). Much of Alfredo Veiravé’s poetry also works through an eco-cosmopolitan lens, as we will discuss in the following chapter; however, Ortiz’s vision differs in that his poetic voice does not often directly speak of his global connections. His speaker in “Deja las letras...” shows, rather, that he is connected globally because he does not consider his surroundings to end at the horizon:

Y no oyes en este momento, di, al silencio o al amor, más allá
de las lianas que tejiera para vencer su abismo,
asumiendo justamente la muerte con los modos de un espíritu?
Sí, en los amantes invisibles está asimismo la otra flor
o el otro lado de esa flor,
llama, serena llama, que viviría de su sombra... (lines 87-92)

Here “dejar las letras” not only leads the listener and, vicariously, the reader to connect with the hinterlands just outside of the city but also makes possible connections with the world that physically and metaphysically extends beyond the

reach of any human visual or aural plane, beyond the immediate and easily accessible mesh within which the subject is threaded. As part of this poetic extension, the reader is continually interpellated by way of apostrophe throughout the poem — such as the imperative “deja,” “torna,” “Saluda” and “di” in the above examples demonstrate – and is therefore reminded of his or her participatory status, putting him or her somewhere between the speaker and the infinite. This puts the subjects of the poem, the speaker, the listener, the reader, and, implicitly, the actors of the place being poeticized in a flowing, and potentially reciprocal, relationship. In the case of the speaker’s petitions for the listener to speak (“di”), the *ecopoiesis* of “Deja las letras” becomes communal.

Toward the end of “Deja las letras...,” after weaving the multiple actors of place together — i.e. the bees and flowers, the trees and birds, the stones and sky, the butterflies and seeds, the speaker, the reader, and the listener – Ortiz turns the poetic voice back to “la ciudad” and to “las letras” to consider a way to return to them without returning to their “filth.” First, the speaker recognizes human fears of the world outside of the city by underscoring with quotes how we often put our perception of the unknown in the natural world in terms of “horror” and “amenaza” (line 94). He couples this observation with that of how we deify the “innombrable” in our natural surroundings, making “nuestras debilidades [...] dioses” (lines 98, 93). Both of these conceptualizations reflect relationships among humans and nonhumans that are obstructed by fear. Second, the speaker suggests that we are creatures of the city and of the country, thus our fears, or our “agonía” is divided between the two “worlds”:

Mas es en nosotros, mi amigo, que la agonía es dividida,
terriblemente dividida, y expedida a la ventura...
Y aquella música blanca con unos silencios de jacarandaes?
Allí y aquí, a la vez, la condena “de la rueda”,
Desde las madres del río y desde las madres de las zanjas... (lines 100-04)

Reminding the reader of their perspective, Ortiz divides this stanza by having the poetic voice propose a question that guides the reader's gaze to the city - the “música blanca” here referring to the description of the city as seen from afar in lines twenty-six and twenty-seven. Whether we are rural or urban born, we share fears that will not allow us to let go of our anthropocentrism, condemning us to an inward torture like that of the medieval wheel. “We” need to remove ourselves from a place of being condemned by our supposed rational exceptionality in order to regain and retain our threaded, integral part of the infinite net:

Hay que perder a veces “la ciudad” y hay que perder a veces “las letras”
para reencontrarlas sobre el vértigo, más puras
en las relaciones de los orígenes...
O más ligeras, si prefieres, como en ese domingo
y en esa fantasía que serán...
Hay que perder los vestidos y hay que perder la misma identidad
para que el poema, deseablemente anónimo,
siga a la florecilla que no firma, no, su perfección
a la armonía que la excede... (lines 107-115)

A careful reading of these lines reveals the poem's intertextuality to another great poet's desire to purge his poetry of “dressings.” The need to lose “los vestidos” of “las letras” in order to find them “más puras” brings to mind Juan Ramón Jiménez's famous poem about the evolution of his poetry, “Vino, primero, pura” from

Eternidades (62-63).¹³ If we consider Veiravé's reading of "Deja las letras...", previously mentioned, as a window into Ortiz's evolution as a poet, we can see the strong parallels between the two works. As Jiménez's speaker looks to return to the more pure poetry of his poetic infancy, Ortiz's speaker seeks the purity of the "relaciones de los orígenes...", and as Jiménez's speaker is elated to recover the "inocencia antigua" of his "poesía / desnuda" (lines 14, 18-19), Ortiz's speaker seeks to strip his poetry as well as his own identity in order to let it follow the "perfección" of the natural world. This intertextuality with Jiménez's poem opens up a reading of "Deja las letras..." that puts the poet into a somewhat passive role. Whereas "Vino, primero, pura" recognizes a certain autonomy in poetry by personifying it in order to relegate the poet or speaker to the role of observer, implying that he or she had nothing to do with the poetry's wardrobe changes, "Deja las letras..." links the "filth" of *las letras* to the fact that the poet is the one that has been "dressing" the poem. Ortiz's speaker accepts partial responsibility for the filth and in doing so suggests a path to ameliorate the problem by yielding his authorial monopoly, which ironically makes his role more participatory in poetic creation. By linking poetry ontologically to the natural world, "Deja las letras..." reveals its poetic center to be an exploration into the interrelationships among humans and nonhumans. Hence, "Deja las letras..." links the physical and metaphysical worlds, because poetry is a being of its own, among other beings.

To relink ourselves with these two sides of our ontology and through poetry, the speaker of "Deja las letras..." suggests that the purification process of leaving and then returning to *la ciudad* and *las letras* is necessary for humans if they wish to

take a participatory role in the interconnectedness of the mesh. It is not that we humans must lose our humanness; rather, we have to reassociate ourselves into the net of interrelations that makes up the natural world. We need to use our humanity, including our language, to benefit all life. Throughout the poem beginning with its title, “las letras” being left behind in order to be found again certainly includes poetry. Regarding poetry, the speaker admits that it is only after one interconnects within the mesh that the poem can be realized fully. It can become “deseablemente anónimo” because the poet and the poeticizing is part, and not at the center, of the ontological landscape and ecosystem or mesh. The poet’s resolve to give up ownership of the poem is brought into clearer focus in the last fifteen lines of “Deja las letras...” through his allusion to the Taoist legend of the “Taming of the Harp.”

Used by Okakura Kakuzo in his most famous work, *The Book of Tea*, as a parable to explain the mystery of art appreciation, “Taming of the Harp” tells of a mighty Kiri tree from the Ravine of Lungmen, China, that a wizard makes into a harp for the Emperor of China. The harp is “wondrous” but each musician who attempts to play its music is unsuccessful. It is only when “Peiwoh, the prince of the harpists” arrives and attempts to play it that the harp releases its music, allowing Peiwoh to sing the most vivid and entrancing songs that reflect profound secrets of the rivers, insects, grass, flowers, and other parts of the natural world. Revealing his secret, Peiwoh tells the curious emperor that he was successful because he “left the harp to choose its theme, and knew not truly whether the harp had been Peiwoh or Peiwoh were the harp” (75-76). Ortiz’s speaker in “Deja las letras...” refers to this positive collapse of subject and object in the creation of art directly after he suggests that the

poem must follow and not lead the ideas that emerge from it. Linked grammatically to the “hay que perder la misma identidad” phrase in line one hundred and twelve, the allusion reads:

[...] para ser el arpa de Lungmen
 eligiendo ella sola los temas de su música,
 lejos de los tañedores que se cantan a sí mismos
 o que no oyen con los suyos a los recuerdos de las ramas
 ni lo que dice el viento...
 ni menos ven lo que el viento, por ahí, pone de pie...
 Y aquí, además, las rimas entre los escalofríos de las briznas,
 con los hilos temblando, siempre, más allá de nuestra luz... (lines 116-23)

The key to Ortiz’s allusion here is the role of the harp in producing the music.

Though it may bring to mind the Aeolian harp that is played by “nature” because it is only played by the wind, the harp from this legend has a direct relation to the human world. Being made from a mighty tree that connected the earth to the sky, the harp is imbued with the same connection. For the speaker in “Deja las letras...” the harp symbolizes the poetic potential of human-nonhuman communication. It produces *for* Peiwoh, the harpist. Peiwoh gives the harp an opportunity to choose the themes and the harpist sings accordingly. In essence, Ortiz puts the poem in the place of the harp. The poem, then, has a direct connection to the natural world and, if allowed, will guide the poet to sing. Again, the ellipsis functions here to break up the rhythm of the poem and to suggest that which cannot be expressed through language. What the wind says is left out, what the wind brings to our attention is missing: what the “hilos temblando” produce is just beyond “nuestra luz...” For Ortiz, this pause between words and between lines of verse is where poetry, or in

other words, “la poesía anterior a su expresión” abides (“La poesía que circula” 17). Metapoetically, Ortiz’s conspicuous attention to language in this poem is also akin to what David Abram alludes to in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*:

Language is not a fixed or ideal form, but an evolving medium we collectively inhabit, a vast topological matrix in which the speaking bodies are generative sites, vortices where the matrix itself is continually being spun out of the silence of sensorial experience. (84)

Being an “evolving medium,” language is responding to our needs to express what we experience. It is also a medium of interconnectedness, despite its limits.

Accordingly, language as our communal “inhabitation” is how as humans we collectively delve deeper into our surroundings. By way of our senses and “out of the silence” language emerges. Because of language’s interconnectedness, both in how it is created and how it is used, humans as “generative sites” lose individual ownership of language and we are made anonymous.

This anonymity notwithstanding, humans cannot help but be human. Again, integrating oneself into the mesh, one cannot lose one’s humanness nor one’s humanity. That is, one cannot forget one is human nor should one forget that other humans are human, as Ortiz deftly decries in his poem “De qué matiz...” (410-11) from *La mano infinita* (1951). In the beginning stanzas of the poem, after touching once again on this idea of the power and grace of a beautiful sunset that reminds all interconnected beings of our mutual dependence on light, his speaker invites the reader to contemplate human misery. Using a first-person plural voice, the speaker

rhetorically asks all to locate ourselves ethically and spiritually in the physical world, effectively inviting the reader to actions:

La crueldad. ¿Pero nos volveremos del lado del cielo
y deberemos perdernos en él siempre
para no saber más de la crueldad?
Oh, no. No es del amor eso, [...] (lines 16-19)

The “cielo” and “luz” beckon us to connect spiritually with the actors of the natural world: “Era dulce también estar en ella, ser parte de ella, ser de ella...” (8).

Alternatively, we can see as the poem continues that the poetic voice finds a danger in favoring transcendence over physical reality. Here the speaker maintains a distance between becoming part of the mesh and losing his or her subjectivity in order to retain the dynamic character of the mesh. And this dynamic character includes the interrelationship between the human and the nonhuman in the speaker’s self. Therefore for Ortiz the question of the definition of “nature” is not one of identity, but of interrelationships.

As stated previously, to question or explore the relationships that make up “nature” is part of Ortiz’s *ecopoiesis*. This process of making and identifying connections appears to be the same as the one that the poet puts forth in “Deja las letras...;” however, in “De qué matiz...” Ortiz particularly emphasizes and criticizes our perceptions of the mesh as a two-dimensional landscape, or as a concept that limits place to the horizon. Landscape as Ortiz understands it, as we shall see in other examples throughout this chapter, reminds us of Soper’s metaphysical conceptualization of nature because it encompasses *all* that is nonhuman, both the material and immaterial (155). Yet Ortiz often includes humans as part of the

landscape, either through his speaker's subjectivity, the role of the reader, and/or even those who live but do not fully participate in their surroundings as actors of place. And so Ortiz shows that a way for humans to incorporate ourselves into nature-as-mesh is through a lacework woven with poetic, if not mystic, threads made possible by creative and destructive movements. In "Deja las letras...", for example, the speaker suggests that humans leave *la ciudad* and *las letras* to have the opportunity return to them with a renewed perspective. Disconnecting with "filthy" conditions of modernity requires a destructive movement, reincorporating oneself into modernity with a renewed perspective requires a creative movement. This action is similar to what Morton calls "critical choice." That is, even though we may see ourselves as apart from the so called fabric of nature, we must choose to permit ourselves to "enter" the net of interrelations and to renounce the dominance of our anthropocentrism (183). To Ortiz, it is important that we recognize our place in the mesh as participatory, and not organizational, nor completely determinative. Humans have a role to play and it is not the role we heretofore have been playing.

One way that humanity's role revaluation manifests itself in Ortiz's work is in his particular way of poeticizing doubt as a virtue of openness. As a poet, he does not present himself as the traditional all-wise bard who has broken "Nature's" code - just as "Deja las letras..." concludes - or as someone who believes in the baconian human quest to battle and overcome "Nature" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1-6). This quest, as described from the very beginning pages of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's influential book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, has been promoted by Enlightenment thinkers like Francis Bacon. For Bacon, they explain:

The “happy match” between human understanding and the nature of things that he envisaged is a patriarchal one: the mind conquering superstition, is to rule over disenchanted nature. Knowledge, which is power, knows no limits, either in its enslavement of creation or in its deference to worldly masters. [...] What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings. Nothing else counts. (2)

In this sense of knowledge, Ortiz freely submits to not knowing the answers to the mysteries of the natural world. These answers are not as important to him as the questions themselves. Ortiz’s speakers’ questions reflect both curiosity and doubt. An example of Ortiz’s poetic doubting finds expression in his innovative use of question marks in Spanish. By excluding the inverted question mark at the beginning of an interrogative phrase, he turns an expected declaration into an apparent doubt. He can surprise the reader: “El río, / y esas lilas que en él quedan... / quedan... / No se morirán esas lilas, no?” (“El río,” *La orilla que se abisma*, lines 1-4). Although critics like Helder are right to sustain that these deliberate omissions form a part of Ortiz’s poetry’s melodic intonations or lack thereof (130), the doubts that Ortiz expresses are not purely rhythmic in nature. They also function as a way to leave open the images created in the poems, giving the reader the sense that they are “at the edge of a figure (in the sense of a completed perception)” as the British critic William Rowe indicates in his book, *Poets of Contemporary Latin America: History and Inner Life* (225-26). That is, the images that Ortiz creates are open because they are not completely defined and because they come at the expense of the speaker’s authority. Furthermore, Ortiz’s deliberate use of several other punctuation marks affects the textual spaces within his poems, while it reinforces

the indeterminacy of doubt. As we have previously discussed, his use of the ellipsis offers a good example of this use and manipulation of textual space because it provides a hesitating silence, marking the rhythm of the necessary space between the poet and others in the mesh as he creates an “incomplete horizon of perception” (Rowe 226). Openness as incompleteness in poetry, then, provides a forum for indeterminacy or mystery, for the ineffable between the poetic voice and the other actors of a place.

If what constitutes the totality of his surroundings in Ortiz’s poetry is a mesh of connections, what makes those connections possible are, paradoxically, the ontological spaces between humanness – the quality of being human – and nonhumanness – the quality of being nonhuman. These spaces help make “nature” a concept of dynamic interrelationships, as an ecosystem, and not a concept of homogenous unity. By conceptualizing nature in this way, Ortiz allows individual actors to surface through the relationships they make, not in spite of them. Interobjectively, by allowing one’s view of one’s surroundings and of nonhumans to be filtered as multifaceted, interrelational, and fluid, Ortiz’s poetry also allows for mystery, or doubt, to strengthen bonds and to enhance human understanding of our place in the mesh. Counter-intuitively, doubt, mystery, and distance allow for intimacy and interconnectedness to occur in the mesh. As one of his most famous poems “Fui al río,” the opening poem of *El ángel inclinado* (1937), beautifully expresses, the speaker finds a connection with the river, an actor of place, only after abandoning an anthropocentric ontology, which allows for necessary space between

him and the river. The connection that the speaker finds is developed over the course of the entire poem, presented here:

Fui al río, y lo sentía
cerca de mí, enfrente de mí.
Las ramas tenían voces
que no llegaban hasta mí.
La corriente decía
cosas que no entendía.
Me angustiaba casi.
Quería comprenderlo,
sentir qué decía el cielo vago y pálido en él
con sus primeras sílabas alargadas,
pero no podía.

Regresaba
—¿Era yo el que regresaba?—
en la angustia vaga
de sentirme solo entre las cosas últimas y secretas.
De pronto sentí el río en mí,
corría en mí
con sus orillas trémulas de señas,
con sus hondos reflejos apenas estrellados.
Corría el río en mí con sus ramajes.
Era yo un río en el anochecer,
y suspiraban en mí los árboles,
y el sendero y las hierbas se apagaban en mí.
Me atravesaba un río, me atravesaba un río!

In this beautifully structured poem we see how Ortiz understands his interrelationships with actors of the natural world as along a yielding-yet-

participatory continuum. That is, the change that comes over the speaker from feeling the river near or in front of him, to feeling it run through him, to the point that he feels as if he were the river, is a change that comes about only when the speaker turns to leave and abandons his attempt to “understand” the river. He stops trying to act upon the river and lets the river act upon him. Because of this willingness to yield to the river the speaker joins it and becomes a co-participant together with it in the sensorial interconnectedness of the mesh.

Clearly dividing the poem into two, Ortiz structures the reading as a back-and-forth or *vaivén* movement between “Fui” and “Regresaba,” which we have already read in his later work, “Deja las letras...” By modulating the length of the lines from minor to major, Ortiz creates the same ebb and flow within each half of the poem and matches the image of the moving, dynamic “corriente” of the river in which the speaker has waded. The first half of the poem is the poet’s failed effort to make a connection with the river and the second half is the positive result of his abandonment of a human-centered effort, exemplified by the interpolated doubt: “—¿Era yo el que regresaba?—”. This yielding-participation often comes through Ortiz's poems in his use of animism. By recognizing the subjectivity of the “other” the speaker recognizes his own in the mesh as the river, the trees, the grass, and the path itself “runs through” him. The speaker’s interobjective participation of the trees and grass through the river reveals a multileveled mesh of interrelationships.

Referring to the multiple subjectivities in Ortiz’s poems, Veiravé points out Ortiz’s singular use of animism regarding his abiding interest in the natural world in his article, “La obra total de Juan L. Ortiz”:

Lo que habíamos llamado “animización” del paisaje, se advierte ahora, no es sino la inclusión en un mundo mayor o central de la actividad creadora de *todos* los seres que se “expresan” para poner en evidencia su existencia ignorando el concepto de “reinos separados” según la escala científica. (33)

To include all actors of place in the mesh Ortiz allows them their subjectivity.

Veiravé furthers this idea in his book, *Juan L. Ortiz: La experiencia poética*, wherein he proposes that this sort of animism is on par with humanism in Ortiz's poetry as they both intersect to construct the poet's ethical worldview (219). Indeed, as María del Carmen Marengo points out in her book, *Geografías de la poesía*:

Representaciones del espacio y formación del campo de la poesía argentina en la década del cincuenta, Ortiz's contemplation of the natural world is informed by his humanism because the way that “Juanele logra la unificación poética del mundo natural con la experiencia humana se da a través del recurso de la personificación de los elementos naturales, muchas veces inanimados” (58). The humanist or ethical filter through which Ortiz contemplates the natural world translates, quite often, into his “love” of the nonhuman other. And he frequently expresses this love in his poetry by recognizing and strengthening interrelationships among humans and nonhumans alike.

Tied closely to Ortiz's ethical worldview is his poetic aesthetic, or as Helder puts it, his “complejo estético-moral” (139). For Ortiz, humans cannot ignore our human condition of being a moral subject by looking away from the suffering of the “other.” Ultimately, the dynamism of his poetry is the result of a perpetual and infinite attempt to weave a fabric made up of ethical interrelationships among all subjects, effectively making them agents of place. And such a weaving extends itself

to those ethereal, even invisible, subjects who connect with other subjects successively, eventually creating an eco-cosmopolitan vision, as Heise proposes. Ortiz's ethical poetics of seeking to understand and integrate humanity into the mesh is reflective of a distinct ecopoiesis. This ecopoiesis produces an ecopoetry that contextualizes human-nonhuman interrelationships with a sense of place.

Visualizing the Mesh: Ecophrasis and Ecopoiesis

*[A]rt is the assimilator of unfelt experience,
sensation, and memory for the whole society...*
- Gary Snyder, "Poetry, Community and Climax"

As discussed in the introduction, Gary Snyder has conceptualized the web of interrelationships among poetry, place, and a poet's ability to recycle humanness into the environment as a something akin to an ecosystem. A major function of poetry, infers Snyder, is to refamiliarize oneself with one's ecosystem. In an article from 1948 regarding recent poetry from his home province of Entre Ríos, and many years before Snyder found this connection between poetry and life, Ortiz spoke similarly of poetry's power and function to locate us in a specific place:

Es lo que hace la verdadera poesía, ya está dicho: descubrirnos el misterio de un lugar, o llevarnos a que lo sintamos, a pesar de ella misma, muchas veces, a pesar de sus motivos, a pesar de sus debilidades evasivas o de las sombras ilustres que flotan sobre algunos poemas [...]. Sobre todo en determinados momentos silenciosamente dramáticos, muy delicados. (OC 1077)

For Ortiz, true poetry that brings forth what is hidden in a place does so by breaking down semantic barriers put up by history and tradition. It can connect us to a place

via our emotions. In this way it can better abandon the description of experience in favor of its presentation, which makes poetry ecopoetry, according to Jonathan Bate (42). What we are to understand as description here as opposed to presentation is the observation of the natural world. Description of interrelatedness is a step removed from the experience of interrelatedness. Nature writing, with few exceptions, is more description than presentation, for example. Both description and presentation are modes of representation but they differ in scope. Considering that “to describe” is also to set boundaries, to merely describe the landscape is to frame it, to limit it, or to make it distinct rather than enmeshed. To present a landscape as a interconnected place comprised of multiple actors and to present the experience that a landscape offers to a human observer/participant, however, is to open up its interconnectedness to the reader. That is, by presenting a landscape as a place *and* an experience, the poet gives the landscape independence from the poem’s linguistic limits, connecting the reader to a more dynamic, living experience. Specifically, in the case of Ortiz, poetry refamiliarizes the human perspective with a living landscape, an ecosystem, and therefore disrupts the artificially and two-dimensionally framed (as a commoditized “view” or a work of art), marginalized (as the background or hinterland), and managed idea that “landscape” has had in modern western cultures (Krauss 312, Bate 132).

One way that Ortiz presents the landscape, ironically, is connected to *ekphrasis*, one of the oldest forms of textual description or the art of description based on “the verbal representation of visual representation” as defined by W. J. T. Mitchell in his book *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (151-

2). Both the name of a literary genre and the general topic of how verbal and visual representations of objects and ideas relate to each other, ekphrasis is for all intents and purposes, an aesthetic process that has as its focus the relationship between these two systems of communication. It has held the interest of poets and philosophers because of three essential elements to its central idea regarding the relationship between visual and verbal or textual representation. The three “‘moments’ of ekphrastic fascination,” — hope, fear, and indifference — produce “utopian speculation, anxious aversion, and studied indifference” because of the semiotic tension between words and pictures (156). Each of these moments has to do with how ekphrastic poetry tests how words can or cannot approximate images. We hope they can so as to prove the power of words “to make us see” but we also fear they can because we recognize the “figurative, imaginary desire” that exists because of the relational tension. At the same time, we see ekphrasis as futile because of our “commonsense perception” that words cannot “make present” an object as an image can (152, 154). In ecopoetry there are similar tensions between how words can equate with experience, which is multisensual.

Up to this point in ecocritical discourse, ekphrasis has been tied to “vivid description,” as Timothy Morton has defined it (*Ecology without* 44). Morton’s use of ekphrasis may be connected with what Murray Krieger, regarded as one of the foremost experts on ekphrasis, claims about the attempt to turn time into space and make a poetic image “still.” Krieger posits that since language, in comparison with plastic arts, is more associated with time, it “has deeper affinities with the dark rhythms of primal existence out of which emotions grow” (104-05). Mitchell and

other critics, including Margaret Persin who writes about Spanish ekphrastic poetry in *Getting the Picture: The Ekphrastic Principle in Twentieth-Century Spanish Poetry*, point to Krieger's "still moment" theory as explaining how ekphrastic poetry converts time into space by using "the spatial art object as a metaphor to represent itself, the temporal work of art" (Persin 15). Morton explains that nature writers who go into ekphrastic detail about their surroundings in the natural world are also trying to slow down time in order to gain an ecological awareness by creating a luscious visual experience through an "outpouring of language" eventually erasing "the trace of writing" through reading (*Ecology Without* 44, 129).

Ortiz's poetry exhibits an ekphrastic tension and creation of a conflation of time and space but it differs significantly from ekphrastic poetry in that it does not have works of art as its subjects and, consequentially, does not seek to become an "image/text" combination (Mitchell 154). He does not seek to equate his poetry with another form of representation but to recreate the experience of his contemplation of the natural world. When put in terms of phenomenological distance according to Walter Benjamin, Ortiz's poetry seeks to recreate the aura of the natural world without degrading it (222-23). In order to not degrade the aura relating to contemplation, Ortiz poeticizes it by recreating the sense of distance, such as in his poem "El jacarandá," as we will discover in our discussion of it below. His connection yet diversion from ekphrasis, therefore, is demonstrated in how his poetry presents the experiencing of the natural world as a sort of living and ever-changing work of art where the observer, and therefore the reader, are invited to become a part of the "work" like the listener in "Deja las letras..." The point to which

this is possible involves the poet's ability to facilitate the metaphysical or phenomenological experience of interconnectedness that one can have with the many and varied actors of the natural world. Returning to Bate's point, this communication is not a description of experience but a presentation of experience. Because of this and other important differences between ekphrasis and Ortiz's work, I consider his presentation of interconnectedness as *ecophrasis*.

As indicated in the introduction, the neologism "ecophrasis" means: "home"(eco) "speaking" (phrases). Maintaining a somewhat tenuous relationship with ekphrasis, ecophrasis also seeks to let "home" "speak out" (Hagstrum 18 n.34). Nevertheless, as in Cecilia Vicuña's case — her ecophrastic use of several different media and genres to "let home speak," for example — ecophrasis is not always only verbal, which separates it even further from ekphrasis. If we consider, for example, "Deja las letras..." we can see its ecophrastic elements, in that its speaker seeks a yielding-yet-participatory role by letting the natural world "speak" for itself through poetry. Home, then, in the case of ecophrasis, is not to be thought of as something static; rather, it may be viewed as a dynamic, porous conception of living space that includes all actors and their interrelationships. Though Ortiz's desire and attempt to let "home" "speak" is a prevalent idea behind much of his poetry, not all of his ecopoetry is ecophrastic. Ecophrasis is subsumed as a mode of ecopoiesis and as we will see in our analysis of Veiravé's and Vicuña's poetry, there are other modes of ecopoiesis.

How Ortiz accomplishes his ecophrasis is tied to his interest in eastern traditions, which supports his anti-anthropocentricity, his insistence on poetry's

extralingual qualities, and his emphasis on the interconnectedness of all things.¹⁴

Jorge Santiago Perednik comments that when one reads Ortiz's poetry through an eastern lens, one can see the Taoist characteristics of selflessness shine through. For example:

[La] pérdida de importancia del ser humano, que deja de ser el centro del mundo para ser un integrante más, minúsculo como los otros, del inmenso orden de la vida, el respeto por las manifestaciones vitales que lo circundan, la sujeción a leyes naturales eternas, como el ritmo de las estaciones - recuerdan la filosofía del Tao, con su principio básico, la búsqueda de la armonía, y su apotegma primero, que viene muy al caso, y que afirma la imposibilidad, al menos lingüística, de significación de la verdad [...]. (65)

In terms of ecophrasis, Ortiz's eastern orientation contributes the deemphasizing of humanity's role in representing the mesh made up of natural world and its actors. Through his poetry, Ortiz unveils the woven threads of this ontological mesh that ties human expression to nonhuman being (Macho Vidal 9). Put differently, he sees no great rift between the *material* and the *immaterial*. The mesh of interrelations that is threaded with connections among physical and metaphysical material is what constitutes Ortiz's ecophrastic conceptualization of landscape. Simply stated by Ortiz: "El paisaje es una relación" (1069). Ortiz's idea of landscape in poetry is that it is not a "telón de fondo" – as some of his compatriots have treated it, according to Ortiz (1074) — but a self-perpetuating network of interrelations both physical and spiritual among the poet and the actors of a place —including the place itself. As Perednik puts it: "Para esta concepción moderna el paisaje sería un 'estado del alma,' luego este estado, el paisaje, sería consecuencia de una suerte de fluido que

las cosas emanan” (62). In this spiritually-yet-physically connected sense his poetry belongs to the same kind of *ecopoiesis* that Bate elucidates because it resonates with Heidegger’s ideas on both *poiesis* as a bringing-forth, and “building” as a gathering (Heidegger 317; 354).

Because of the ecopoetic quality of Ortiz’s poetry, the ideas of landscape and place do not presuppose physical boundaries or fixed perspectives. As we read in “Deja las letras...” these concepts are brought about by an aesthetic system of fluctuating perspectives and voices. The landscapes that the poet ecophrastically presents are both immediate and expanding, even multilayered. Argentine literary critic and novelist Noé Jitrik sees these layers as separate yet connected with one “que los ojos detectan, los versos extendidos y en permanente recomienzo, y el que se configura o traza como por debajo de un tejido que sin esa alimentación secreta podría languidecer [...]” (56). While Ortiz’s poetic voice reveals the threads of the interconnected mesh, it also reveals the spaces between those threads. Timothy Morton highlights that such spaces together with the threads are what constitutes a mesh. Essentially, these spaces allow for causality in interconnectedness (*Hyperobjects* 83). That is, the spaces allow for interrelationships to form within the mesh. Ortiz demonstrates a similar principal by attuning himself to a particular ethereal sense of space and time from which he extends his lightly woven web of place that includes multiple and varied voices, including both human and nonhuman. Along these lines we can make out Ortiz’s “ecological thought” as Morton submits:

Ecology includes all the ways we imagine how we live together. Ecology is profoundly about coexistence. Existence is always coexistence. No man is an island. Human beings need each other as much as they need an environment. Human beings *are* each others' environment. Thinking ecologically isn't simply about nonhuman things. (*Ecological Thought* 4)

The poetic speaker in Ortiz's poems not only recognizes but seeks to locate and find himself or herself in the mesh of living and non-living things. In this way he recognizes and then bridges the barriers and gaps, the intermesh spaces, between subject and object, as we can read in his poems such as "El jacarandá," which appears in one of his later works, *La orilla que se abisma* (752-54).¹⁵ In fact, in "El jacarandá," Ortiz zeroes in on the crux of this supposed ontological barrier and challenges the notion of our separateness from the world around us.

The interrelationship between the human and the nonhuman worlds that Ortiz explores in "El jacarandá" is one of immediacy and intimacy. As opposed to approaching the world through a landscape located on a plane somewhere between the horizon and an always out-of-reach space in nature, the poet presents it within the context of landscape that is the connection between him and a specific tree. Indeed, this interrelationship is the subject of the poem. Remarkably, we learn by the end of the first several lines that it is the tree that is trying to communicate with the poet, and not the other way around:

Ah, él me pregunta, me pregunta...
y quiere como adelantar, tímidamente,
una suerte de manecillas
hacia un secreto mío, o nuestro, que él desearía, al parecer,

poner de pie
y unirlo al suyo... (lines 1-6)

With his hesitations, “quiere *como* adelantar”; “una *suerte* de manecillas”; “*al parecer*,” Ortiz folds reality back on his animism and creates a hermeneutic space wherein the reader can accept the experience of encounter between human and nonhuman as both physical and mystical. These hesitations are part of the previously discussed poetic doubting that Ortiz frequently utilizes to give interpreting agency to the reader while recognizing the reality of linguistic limits. D. G. Helder understands this material/spiritual ambiguity as Ortiz’s way of making the connections between the two worlds:

La mirada poética de Ortiz desmiente el aspecto puramente material de la naturaleza, no manifestando a través de una simbología establecida y predecible lo que ésta tiene de espiritual, sino *tramando una relación* mimética entre la ambigüedad material/espiritual y el lenguaje, que entonces se vuelve ambiguo y se matiza para sugerir esa “sobre presencia.” (139 italics are mine)

Though in “El jacarandá” the encounter between human and nonhuman is intimate, the poet hints at its universality by once again including the reader as the object of the jacaranda’s questioning. Even as the speaker and reader contemplate the tree, the tree reaches for both reader and the speaker and their “secreto.” This table-turning of subject and object, while not isolating it to the level of individual actors of place, recognizes the universal human self-questioning inherent in the questioning of the nonhuman world. Yet Ortiz is not using the jacaranda tree as a vehicle to understand himself or even humanity as a whole; rather, he is presenting the

experience of contact between subject and object as a movement between objects. Like the movement analyzed earlier in “Deja las letras...” and “Fui al río,” it is an interobjective *vaivén* that displaces and ultimately disperses any binary sense of opposition by creating threads that cover the space between objects. This dynamic movement between objects also recognizes subjectivities and is part and parcel of Ortiz’s ecophrasis. We see this recognition of subjectivity here in the lines quoted above in the jacaranda’s attempt to access the speaker’s and our “secreto [...] / y unirlo al suyo” (lines 5-6).

The interobjective *vaivén* that Ortiz presents is part of his mesh-aesthetic. Similar to the dynamic cycles of an ecosystem — the fluctuating nutrient cycles, the ocean tides, the seasonal cycle, the constant introduction and elimination of actors — Ortiz’s poetry is continually diverging and doubling-back on itself. It does so in both its ideas and its form. Regarding this aesthetic, Rowe points out that Ortiz’s use of interrogatory phrases, hesitations, hermeneutic suspensions, and self doubts — by way of his use of grammar, punctuation, syntax, and even the physical layout of his poems — reflect the weaving-like movement in his relationship with the landscape, as was discussed in regard to “Deja las letras...” And because this movement is not necessarily toward any specific linear point, “the suspensions and ramifications bring about something like an incessantly extending surface, without frontiers or points of anchorage, a surface which expands so much as to become lighter than air” (227). One can read this lightness — or “delirium,” as the poet and critic Delfina Muschietti has put it (85-86) — in Ortiz’s poetry as a reflection of his own ideas about how one must write and read poetry: “No se ha de olvidar que el

poeta vive en vilo, cuidando de no gravitar, de no hacerse penetrante. Hay que buscar la poesía allí donde él puso, leve, la planta. Y de no suponerle un designio (no ponerse pesado)” (1049). Though here he is in part reacting to literary critics’ overanalyses of poetry, Ortiz is also and especially referring to the extralingual experience that poetry presents: “porque la poesía no requiere comprensión, sino devoción alerta” (1049). To require the comprehension of a poem is to weigh it down with artificiality, like dressing it up in finery, as we discussed with “Deja las letras...” Vigilant devotion suggests a lighter reading, free of the cumbersome task of finding a hidden meaning. This “lightness,” is an ecophrastic image dispersal and is woven by Ortiz as a network that can span the ontological gap like a heideggerian bridge, effectively connecting the speaker-and-reader *orilla* with the place or nonhuman *orilla* that the poem presents, while allowing the mystery or the “river” to continue to exist and to invite this spanning (“Building, Dwelling, Thinking” 354).

Though the movement between subjectivities helps to disperse any notion of a hard and fast division between them, it does not completely negate the existence of the separation-space itself. This movement is a part of an interobjective system, as discussed earlier in this chapter, because the movement between subjectivities is perceived through a mediator like the wind is perceived through the movement of the leaves (*Hyperobjects* 86). Ortiz refers to the spaces under and around the woven threads as part of the “abismo” that functions as the infinite-mystery that motivates the poetic movement toward knowing the “other.” He even views this abyss as essential in order to write poetry about a landscape that includes a complete connection between the human and the nonhuman worlds:

Porque el sentimiento del paisaje de que hablamos supone una actitud casi religiosa, por no decir mística: cierta despersonalización, cierta enajenación. Sólo así el paisaje puede llegar a ser nosotros mismos o nosotros mismos el paisaje, de modo que cuanto digamos en medio de él, en él, aun sin siquiera aludirlo, estará bañado, impregnado por su secreto espíritu. (*OC* 1073-74)

Ortiz seeks to first recognize the space between him and the landscape and then he can understand how to span that space and therefore reintegrate himself into place.

As if to take the next step beyond his experience in "Fui al río," Ortiz's poetic voice in "El jacarandá" shows his awareness of the ontological and ecological space between him and the nonhuman "other." Such awareness leads him to question how it is that the tree has come to grow so close to his window to share its life with his:¹⁶

Por qué si no ese misterio de 'helechos'
 abriendo siempre su brisa
 contra el cristal, ay,
 o teniéndola en el vacío, en seguida, ya más íntimamente,
 pero apenas, oh, muy apenas...
 en el vacío
 de una melancolía sin visillos? (lines 7-13)

The tree, like the staggered lines, reaches into the space between it and the speaker. However, as this passage shows, the connection between the poet and the tree goes beyond the visual into a sharing of breath, a common motif in Ortiz's poetry. A subtle irony follows this ecophrastic deemphasizing of the visual on behalf of other senses. The speaker is not outside enjoying a close-encounter with the tree; rather, he looks at it through a window, through which we would expect a prototypical landscape "view."¹⁷ Though he visually observes the tree, the connection that he

sees the tree trying to make is not directly physical, but more indirect like a “brisa” or a breath. And with the staggered form of the poem, the reader’s breath reaches out and is left hanging on the ellipsis enjambment, over “el vacío.” This inference of indirect connection brings us back to Ortiz’s curious statement about how true poetry connects us with place, despite itself and because of its silences (*OC* 1077). By recognizing the limits of words to completely communicate experience, and by affirming the power of poetic transcendence over words through ideas, the poet seeks to bridge the ontological gap between the human and nonhuman worlds, and to reaffirm their ecological interrelationships. In the selection above, a breath (*brisa, hálito, bruma, aire...*) is both mystical (not seen) and physical (felt); it is both spoken (from the mouth) and unspoken (silent). Ortiz’s combination of the spiritual and material, or as María del Carmen Marengo calls his “sublimación de lo material en un espíritu,” once again connects to his interests in eastern religious traditions. As he points out in an answer to a question seeking his view on God, his view on the divine is closer to the eastern idea that “cada partícula de materia está llena de espíritu” (Marengo 61). Perhaps this material duality is what Muschietti refers to when she writes about the betweenness of Ortiz’s poetry:

Superficie del contacto entre el cuerpo y alma, entre espíritu y materia, y que en la escritura de Juanele insiste en esta trasgresión que violenta el lenguaje: volverlo hálito, soplo, bruma que sirva de pasaje y contacto, de fusión de aquello que alguna vez se llamó sujeto y se inclina ahora del lado de la pérdida, de la ausencia en la presencia [...]. (86)

The striking image of the jacaranda tree tentatively reaching out into the void invites the reader to contemplate the vulnerable sadness of a lived landscape filled with isolated actors that try to connect with one another but cannot.

At this point in “El jacarandá” the speaker pulls back and counteracts his ideas by introducing a dialogical response by skeptical interlocutors to whom he addresses directly. Similar to “Deja las letras...” and, as we shall read, “Ah, miras al presente,” the speaker here speaks *to* someone and challenges their assumptions. Differing from both of the previously mentioned poems, however, here the speaker speaks to many and not to one, making this dialogue less intimate, which suggests a certain defensive tone. They (we) may object to his mystical perspective on account of our enlightened knowledge and want to argue that, “naturalmente,” the tree grows close to the window because it competes for light with *paraíso* trees and not because it is aware of him (lines 14-20); however, the speaker prefers to look at it differently:

—Eso es una “verdad” —os susurraría,
 mas me permitirías insistir en lo que invita hasta a mi sueño?:
 el jacarandá, de ese modo,
 al nivel de otra transparencia que aspiraría a tocar,
 tiende hacia ella tal un ciego, unos escalofríos de ramillas,
 para despertarla, acaso en su raíz:
 el mismo anhelo, pues, sobre los azares del espacio,
 de respirar el azul y los rocíos de la “celestia”,
 desde la memoria de los grillos? (lines 21-9)

The speaker recognizes the scientific “truth” about the tree and his observation of it even as he places this same concept ironically within quotes to highlight its frailness

as a human-centered truth. Poetry, for Ortiz, has access to the same mysteries coming from the abyss as science or other forms of knowledge do. His speaker here is suggesting that poetry can “see” something in the world that is perhaps inaccessible to other forms of “seeing.” Along these lines Ortiz has determined the desires of poetry to reveal that which is hidden:

La poesía quiere revelar ese misterio, inaccesible al conocimiento puramente intelectual o científico, y ese objeto de conocimiento se expresa, se sugiere, accede a un plano en cierto modo sensible, por medio de la palabra. Y también de la música [...]. La palabra y el sonido están penetrados, como instrumentos, de eso que hace que uno sienta la sensación de haber aprehendido el conocimiento. (“El infinito en el instante” 56)

To contrast different ways to comprehend truth is to consider “truth” to be non-anthropocentric; music, to take from Ortiz’s example above, is found in living and nonliving creatures and objects. If one is open to the possibility of knowing something through extraintellectual ways, including language and music, then one can consider how other actors of the natural world participate in truth making. In a similar vein, and as we will read in our analysis of Veiravé’s poetry, Bruno Latour writes in his critical work, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, of the scientific community’s failures because of many of its members’ exclusive claims to “truth.” There needs to be a reassessment of our relationship to the “other” in the natural world, Latour contends, and truth should be shared among the human and nonhuman members of what he calls the “collective” (38). The speaker in “El jacarandá” hints toward such an agreement by suggesting that truth can be found in imagination and in poetry. The selection above describes a different

interpretation of the tree's ontology, one that invites the speaker to imagine a different, more connected interrelationship between him and the tree.

Concentrating on the interrelationship, Ortiz's speaker probes the space separating the tree and him. Here we encounter the abyss as something that draws the tree toward it, longing to unlock the abyss's mystery, which is the same mystery that brought the tree to the poet's window. The very image of the abyss suggests both mystery, because of its unknown depths, and danger because of the possibility for one to fall in to never return. While the dangerous aspect repels, the mysterious aspect attracts; and this paradox makes the abyss an oneiric space that is defined by a simultaneous presence and absence, which continues the motif and function of the interobjective movement in the poem. As "El jacarandá" continues, the concept of the abyss develops from the initial "vacío" to the level of "transparencia" to a "nada" and an "ausencia," and finally, to a "tristeza." These images of emptiness serve Ortiz's interrogations by looking into how humans are isolated from the nonhuman world, and visa-versa:

Y qué haría la tristeza, o qué? luego,
llevando en su olvido, hasta cuándo? unos dedillos de jacarandá
que lo llamarían a la melodía [...] (lines 46-8)

Eventually, Ortiz extends this encounter with the jacaranda tree to include plants that are not as showy or that will not ever grow to the heights of where the speaker sits at the window. They offer him a different perspective, once again, especially through their interconnections or "hilos":

Qué haría, sobre todo, ella aparte
—habrá de mirar, ay, pronto, de otra palidez—

o qué haría en los hilos ya, de las hierbas y los hálitos? (lines 51-3)

Returning to the image in lines twelve and thirteen of "el vacío / de una melancolía sin visillos," the poem's speaker then develops a questioning of the abyss and regards it as a "tristeza" because of the prospect of us not being able to "hear" the other side. He finally ponders the implications of never spanning, nor even approaching, the ontological space that necessarily lies between the human and nonhuman worlds:

O es que lo imposible de las voces
—oirías, desde aquí, el crecimiento de las margaritas?—
se buscarían sufriendo, sufriendo todavía,
en la fuga de la soledad,
hasta la chispa y la enajenación, allá, para unos pétalos,
sobre las líneas de los abismos? (lines 54-9)

Here the abysses create a net of melancholic connections for the speaker, or a "dark ecology" as Morton calls it, basing his ideas on Freud:

Melancholia is an irreducible component of subjectivity, [...]. It is precisely the point at which the self is separated from, and forever connected to, the mother. Dark ecology is based on negative desire rather than positive fulfillment. It is saturated with unrequited longing. It maintains duality, if not dualism (186).

Similar to how space creates connections, so too does emotional space create fondness. The poet recognizes that the abysses separate him from the jacaranda and other nonhumans. He connects to the nonhuman through longing and desire; but, according to Morton's dark ecology, these connections are part of "the truly ecological-ethical" act (196). For the poet, making a connection with the nonhuman

world is an extravisual enterprise. But without making the effort to form these spiritual/physical networks, both sides are left to their own loneliness. Hence, the interpolated synesthetic question: “—oirías, desde aquí, el crecimiento de las margaritas? — ” That is, will we be able to make connections with the world around us if we stay where we are — physically, emotionally, ethically, even spiritually — isolated on one side of an abyss? Through his ecophrastic presentation of his interactions with the nonhuman, Ortiz invites us to ask these questions of ourselves as well as of others. This self-questioning is apparent in many of his other poems but he expresses it in ways that differ from “El jacarandá.” Specifically, as in his lengthy poem, “Ah, miras el presente...” (838-45) from *La orilla que se abisma*, Ortiz turns to an often-used recourse in so-called ecopoetry: elegy. He sees elegy, however, as from a marginal position outside of the cultural and political center, which takes into account not only the ecological realities but the ecopolitical disparities dividing humans and nonhumans. His elegiac form is one that looks forward to a utopian union where no empty stomach could prevent the reciprocity of any human - nonhuman interrelationship.

“Elegía combatiente”: Lamenting the Absence of the Interconnectivity

Siendo fiel a si misma, nuestro paisaje debe estar en [la poesía] en cualquier forma, ya que es la realidad más familiar, más envolvente, más dulcemente dominadora. Y estaría también su mérito en haber incorporado esta realidad su propia sustancia hasta hacerla una con ella y devolvérsela transfigurada, aún en aquellos aspectos que por aludir a contradicciones dolorosas y desgarramientos no menos dolorosas

*tocan de cerca, de tan cerca, ¡ay! nuestro anhelo
de armonía y de justicia.*

- Juan L. Ortiz, "El paisaje en los últimos poetas entrerrianos"

*[El guerrillero](i)nterpreta los deseos de la gran
masa campesina de ser dueña de la tierra, dueña
de sus medios de producción, de sus **animales**, de
lo que constituye su vida y constituirá también su
cementerio.*

- Che Guevara, *La guerra de guerrilleras*

Like in "El jacarandá," the speaker in "Ah, miras al presente..." questions humanity's ability to bridge and recognize the mysterious abyss that keeps us separate from the nonhuman. In contrast to "El jacarandá," however, the speaker's concerns in "Ah miras al presente..." are no longer focused so closely on the mystical or ontological interrelationship between the human and the nonhuman; rather, Ortiz's *ecopoiesis* speaks more to the physical or ecological and ethical or ecopolitical interrelationships between the two worlds. Ortiz approaches these interrelational concerns in the ways that we have heretofore analyzed but he also avails himself of an elegiac perspective, or what he calls the "elegía combatiente," through which he expresses his pathos-based ethics or ethic-aesthetic,¹⁸ and links politics to economics to ecology. Out of all the Ortiz poems analyzed in this chapter, "Ah miras al presente..." comes the closest to articulating the mesh as a multithreaded and open system of connections. Continuing with this analogy, and according to the poem, the threads of the mesh come in different colors and densities. These colors and densities of the mesh differ from each other in various ways, the least of which is that they come from both the material and the immaterial worlds. In "Ah miras al presente..." the threads of ecosystems intertwine for good or

bad with those from capitalism and socialism, poverty and wealth, from the wild and the domesticated natural worlds, and from everything else in between. Ortiz's poem contends, however, that some threads can overcome others, effectively binding them up and eliminating them. His ethic-aesthetic mourns this loss and mourns such losses in the future while signaling possible ways to recover these threads on the way to restoring a utopian mesh.

Ortiz's ethic-aesthetic regarding human-nonhuman relationships is not as explicit in "Ah miras al presente..." as it is in several of his other poems such as "Qué decís..." (485-86) from *El alma y las colinas* (1956) or "No podéis, no, prestar atención..." (236-38) from *El ángel inclinado* (1937). In particular, "No podéis, no, prestar atención...", where the speaker agonizes over how the Spanish Civil War has prevented a communion between Spaniards and their natural environment, clearly presents the dulling effect of human conflict on human-nonhuman interrelationships: "No podéis, no, prestar atención, / ni menos comulgar con las bellezas / que os acompañan [...]" (lines 26-28). Less explicitly yet more extensively than in these two poems, Ortiz's ethic-aesthetic does, however, take a central role in "Ah, miras al presente...", as expressed through the speaker and an interlocutor's contemplation of the affect and effect of slash-and-burn agriculture. The framing image of a landscape in the throws of slash-and-burn agricultural practices in "Ah, miras al presente..." is one common to many countries in the developing world. In Latin America these practices were used even in pre-Colombian cultures. According to environmental historian Shawn Miller, the slash-and-burn techniques used by the pre-Colombian cultures were in large part sustainable because they incorporated a

ten to twenty year cycle of returning to use land that had been cultivated previously by means of slash-and-burn deforestation (14-15). This sustainable deforestation stands in contrast to modern practices which as recently reported in 1994 accounted for more than half of the Amazon rainforest deforestation. Much of the land that is cleared is not recultivated after its nutrients are taken up by a few years of productive agriculture (Lindsey). Slash-and-burn deforestation's connection to the rapid reduction of the planet's great rainforests and their subsequent biodiversity defines this technique as an antagonist in the environmental turn narratives of both the Global North and the Global South.

With this backdrop in mind, we can read "Ah miras al presente..." as emerging from the weakly burgeoning environmental turn in Latin America in the 1960s. Our analysis therefore will shed light on Ortiz's *ecopoiesis* in regard to his comprehension and expression of ecopolitical inconsistencies in Argentina, whether they deal with property rights, animal rights, or human rights, and can be taken as an example of how Southern Cone poets and intellectuals were seeing the trees and the forest of environmental crises even at the forefront of the environmental turn. However, Ortiz's *ecopoiesis* in this light is refracted through his presentation of the interrelationships among humans and nonhumans alike and not through ecopolitical activism. An ecopolitical view could focus too much on the human side of these interrelationships while Ortiz's poetry considers all sides and actors involved. "Ah miras al presente..." demonstrates this interest in a multidimensional conceptualization of place by juxtaposing the visual landscape and the living landscape.

From the opening stanza the poem sets up a contrast of images. The poem begins with one poetic image, the two-dimensional aspects of a landscape, and then transitions into the contrasting yet central image of the poem, the multidimensionality of a landscape. With this contrast, Ortiz enhances the impact of what he calls the poem's "centro vital," which, in this case, is an elucidation of humanity's role in and impact on the mesh (*OC* 1051). This contrast reappears throughout the poem and serves to continually point the reader back to the poet's central concern. Similar to the dynamic movement between perspectives in "Deja las letras...", this movement between images serves to create spatial depth within the world that the speaker and interlocutor are contemplating and, as the poem insists, in which they are participating. Beginning with title of the poem the poet emphasizes the parameters of the dynamic space: perception and time. Repeating a previously touched upon aspect of Ortiz's poetry, the first line repeats the idea of the title and therefore engages the reader to focus on visual perception in real time. That is, the title and the beginning of the poem suggest a historical present, making the act of viewing connected with the act of reading (the poem). And the speaker immediately provides a subject for the reader via the listener to gaze upon:

Ah, miras, ahora, miras

la quemazón de las islas...

Llamas de rosa, no?

Llamas al fondo del anochecer, aquél, del norte...

o un amanecer de estío,

allá,

antes del sueño, no?... (lines 1-7)

By comparing a brush or forest fire with a sunset or a summer sunrise the poet through his speaker brings the often violent spectacle of our interrelationships with nonhumans into the two-dimensional picturesque discursive space that the classical idea of landscape occupies (Krauss 312). In the stanza that follows the one quoted above, the speaker focuses even more on the visual by directing the reader's gaze at the female listener, indicated by "querida" from line fourteen, who is viewing the fire and we "see" in her face the sublime pleasure that the "rosa de destiempo" of such an exhibition of force and beauty gives her (lines 8-10). By observing the listener/observer, the reader is self conscious of his or her own gaze, especially because the poem is written as if the speaker were speaking directly to the listener as he does in "Deja las letras" and, though in the plural, "El jacarandá." This self-consciousness of the limits of visual information and the implication of the reader's gaze in the poem set up the next lines of the fourth and fifth stanzas:

Pero si supieras, querida, si supieras, si supieras...

"Marchan las islas"...

dicen en la ocasión los isleños...

Marchan las islas en la dirección, justamente, de las vidas

que huyen del estrépito

al asaltar éste a la oscuridad

por encima aún del humo y de unas centellas hechas trizas...:

que huyen

dejando atrás todo, todo, lo que a veces las hacía

encontrarse entre sí... (lines 14-23)

The speaker presents the landscape to his dear companion as much more than a background or an aesthetic discourse that one visually enjoys. In his repeating of “si supieras” previous to acknowledging what those who live in the landscape already know, the speaker emphasizes that the interrelational aspect of living in a landscape is strengthened and deepened by knowledge based on experience and not by knowledge based on visual perception. Since his listener is his “querida,” we can also read the speaker’s words as less didactic and more sympathetic. That is, he is advising rather than condemning the listener and, vicariously, the reader. By addressing the listener in familiar terms, the speaker can put the reader at ease and invite him or her to consider his presentation of the ecosystem-landscape. Instead of a sublime or a two-dimensional picturesque conceptualization of landscape, Ortiz reveals the landscape as a plural and multilayered network that includes personal human-nonhuman interrelationships. The stair-like form of the lines in these stanzas above supports the structure of this layered system and reflects the movement away from the darkness and chaos caused by human interference. Ortiz’s use of ellipses — or rather, the absence of ellipses — works here to speed up the escape of the animals by eliminating any enjambment hesitation. And the connection between these escaping “vidas” and the system of which they are a part is clear in how the speaker refers to their escape by including them all together anti-metonymically as “las islas.” Those from the human world who are aware of this particular network are those who live and identify themselves as participants in it. That is, the “isleños” know when the local ecosystem, one of the many islands in the Paraná river, is in danger and they know in which direction its various actors will

attempt to escape (lines 16-18). The interlocutor and observer, however, is apparently ignorant of this system.

The interlocutor's apparent ignorance regarding the diverse and expansive "mesh" of life is a manifestation of the abyss that exists between the human and the nonhuman worlds when that abyss goes unrecognized. Whereas in "El jacarandá" the speaker views the tree as attempting to form a spanning network over the abyss, in "Ah, miras al presente..." the speaker suggests that human ignorance of the ecosystem that lies beneath our visual plane actually increases, even widens the abyss. As if to rectify this ignorance, the speaker in "Ah, miras al presente..." personifies many members of the effected ecosystem by listing them and the different "signs" they make as they escape the fire:

Marchan todas, todas esas vidas a través del pastizal
que tiembla con los destellos...:
las culebras poniendo, literalmente, en líneas
la ondulación de ese miedo
junto a las ranitas a la zaga, en verdad, de unos ojillos
que no vuelven...

.....

y junto a las gallinetas que han desenramado,
increíblemente, el silencio...
y junto al zorrino que sesga, sin trascender ni detenerse [...]
y a los carpinchos
que no se cuidan más de la codicia
de nadie... (lines 24-29, 34-39)

Again, the connection among the participants in this system is evident in Ortiz's use of the anaphora, "junto a" and its permutations of "y junto a" and, eventually, "y a"

throughout the first half of the thirty-two lined, sixth stanza. How these animals demonstrate their individuality within this network connects directly with that which has become humanity's post-darwinian focus of proving our exceptionality in a nonhuman world: language (Abrams 77-78). Ecophrastically the speaker includes the speech of these animals as they communicate their escape and in this way their "cries" are made known. Not only does the animals' "speech" suggest that the listener/observer, if not many or most readers, listen, it also ascribes itself as pertaining to the landscape, like a signature on a deed of land. Indeed, the personal yet fleeting mark that each animal makes as it leaves its home is contrasted in the next stanza by the power of the "apellido" of those humans who are clearing the land for their livestock. The speaker augments the imbalance of power by addressing his "querida" again while suggesting, with "has de saberlo," that as a woman she is already familiar with paternalistic economic power — represented here by the "apellido":

Porque ese país, querida, has de saberlo, es el haber de un apellido
que hojea órdenes, por ahí,
y que ha dispuesto eso para ahogar bajo cenizas
las “malezas” y las “alimañas”,
y poder dar a sus “Shorton”, a pesar, por cierto, en aquel libro,
más ilustración, todavía,
con el privilegio de la gramilla... (lines 56-62)

With an efficient burn the powerful livestock owner can too easily erase the diverse levels of the ecosystem in order to leave behind one species of plant and one species of animal. The plants (grass) are to feed the animals (cattle), and the animals are to

feed the humans. Naming the cow by its breed, “Shorton,” is pointing out its domestication, foreshadowing the domesticated fate of the landscape that the cow is set to occupy or already occupies. Of course, by introducing the livestock industry into his poem Ortiz is alluding to one of the central pillars of Argentine capitalism and national identity: the culture of cattle.

From pre-independence days to the days of territory expansion, otherwise known as the “Conquista del desierto,” around the turn of the twentieth century to today, cattle and all products derived from cattle constitute an important part of Argentine culture and politics (Romero 7). A source of immense wealth for a small amount of landowning oligarchs and, indirectly, Argentina in the early 1900s, the livestock industry became a linchpin in the country’s export revenues and continues to play a major economic and political role.¹⁹ During crucial periods of political strife, the livestock and meatpacking sectors of the economy have played key roles in forming foreign policy, especially when it came to trade relations with England and the United States (Romero 44, 70-71). The specific part of the livestock industry alluded to in “Ah, miras al presente” are the cattle ranchers or “fatteners,” whose specialization is beefing up the beef by finding or making places where they can put the cattle out to graze.

As they are depicted in the poem, these “fatteners” are using slash-and-burn techniques to make way for their livestock. And, as the speaker underscores with “un patronímico en cheques tendría así desde lejos / derechos sobre un paraíso”, the oligarch livestock owner can “fatten” from afar. He can take a “paraíso” like that of the Paraná delta and reduce it to an open plain and then to a desert, all in order to

make money (lines 64-65). What is left in place of a vibrant springtime renewal is a colorless, lifeless landscape, reduced to a necessarily two-dimensional and blurry charcoal drawing, a “grisalla / de días y días” (lines 70-71). Such a change strikes at the origins of the annual regeneration of life, “condenando, desde ya a carbonilla, cisco, o palidez, / las profundidades en un jardín” (lines 74-77). Essentially, the speaker returns to the two-dimensional image of the landscape and links its conceptualization to that which permits the abuse of the land in the name of capital gain, reducing it to an ecological disaster in the making. Hence, for the speaker, the ecological destruction and the visual reduction of landscapes run parallel.

Both this destruction and reduction call to mind a sense of loss. To express this sense of loss, Ortiz employs elegiac language to lament what is taken with the flames and with the whims of greed. And so, just as the speaker names and gives a “voice” to those animal members of the multilayered landscape earlier in the poem, he bids farewell to other actors who will not escape the blaze:

Adiós, pues, a los invisibles, casi, de las seis
 patitas entre las briznas,
 deflagrando ese su minuto que, sin embargo, aún a los oídos
 de los silencios
 miniaban los armónicos que unas preguntas requerían... (lines 78-82)

Beginning with some of the smallest, even almost “invisible” creatures, the speaker recognizes the many insects that will be lost and in so doing stretches the mesh to include even the “least of them” of animate life. Here the speaker initiates a new list of actors of place that are affected by the controlled burn. Whereas the speaker seeks to deepen the visual dimensions of the interlocutor’s gaze by listing and

thereby individualizing the escaping animals at the beginning of the poem, by listing the actors of place that cannot escape, such as a certain number of insects, the speaker seeks to explicate the consequences of ecological loss. With the speaker's elegiac liturgy we begin to understand the horizontal and vertical complexity of the mesh as an interobjective ecosystem.

According to Gregory Nagy, elegy, from the Greek *elogos* (to lament), has a long history beginning in ancient Greece, as both a "mournful song" and as a specific poem formed by multiple couplets, which, in turn, are formed by one hexameter and one pentameter verse (13). An elegy laments someone who has died as a way to make them present through paying homage to them. It is under this play of presence and absence by way of elegy that this portion of "Ah miras al presente..." falls, though in lieu of humans the speaker laments nonhumans. The idea of elegy that much of Ortiz's poetry, especially those poems like "Deja las letras...", that considers the power of words as finite, would be more akin to, however, is the idea of elegy that Karen Wiseman proposes:

More than any other literary kind, elegy pushes against the limits of our expressive resources precisely when we confront our mortality, which is as much to say that it throws into relief the inefficacy of language precisely when we need it most. (1)

Wiseman's assertion that words can fail us at critical times, such as those moments of loss, can be read, ironically, as an echo of Friedrich Hölderlin's elegy "Bread and Wine": "...and what are poets for in destitute times?" This line of verse was the inspiration for Martin Heidegger's article, "What are poet's for?", wherein he proceeds to utilize his exegeses of Hölderlin and Rilke elegies to find an answer to

that question (89). That elegies can challenge the limits of language and thereby hold the very reason for poets and, by extension, poetry in times of crisis is also at the center of “Ah miras al presente...”

With a close analysis of the structure of “Ah miras al presente...” we notice that it is essentially divided into three nearly equal portions. Out of the poem’s 210 lines the portion dedicated to the speaker’s elegy of the ecosystem runs from line 78 to line 140, effectively occupying the central space of the poem’s triptych-like structure. By dedicating the central space to elegizing the multidimensional landscape, the central subject matter of the poem, Ortiz intensifies the consequences of its “centro vital.” The speaker mourns the death of the ecosystem only after he has shown the interlocutor what in fact has caused the loss: human interference. To link the sense of loss to the source of that loss through elegy is part of what makes elegy appear “to be a quintessential mode of ecological writing,” as Morton points out in his article, “The Dark Ecology of Elegy” (251). “Ah miras al presente...” continues in the vein, in some ways, of environmentally themed elegies because it reflects the fact that “humans have entered a historical moment at which the consequences of past and present actions on Earth are becoming increasingly evident” (“Dark Ecology” 252). Ortiz’s poetry varies from the environmental elegies that Morton criticizes in that while these elegies mourn nature as something outside of humanity or “something we never lost because we never had it, we *are* it” (253) Ortiz’s elegy includes humanity as part of that which is lost. His elegy argues against a conceptualization of a nature separate from humanity and laments the absence of interconnectivity. More specifically, much of Ortiz’s elegiac poetry mourns the loss

of both the actors of place, including humans, and the loss of the interrelations between those actors.

D. G. Helder writes about Ortiz's particular modes of elegy as "intimamente ligado" to the landscape in his poems. As part of his argument, he points to Ortiz's 1942 essay quoted at the beginning of this section, "El paisaje en los últimos poetas entrerrianos." In the essay, Ortiz defends and highlights the provincial poetry of Entre Ríos as a reflection of its landscape. This reflection is valid because, "en la poesía auténtica el lugar en que vive el poeta, el paisaje circundante, lo profundo o la presencia inefable de este paisaje [...] no puede dejar de estar presente" (1072). Part of what influences these poets, Ortiz contends, is the elegy-producing *soledad* brought on by both human and nonhuman landscapes. Helder reads Ortiz's view of elegy as multifaceted:

Ahora bien, el concepto orticiano de elegía no reconoce un único modo, no se limita a lamentar la muerte de los seres queridos y la desaparición de condiciones de la vida personal relativamente ideales, sino que más bien se amplía hasta abarcar la pérdida de la unidad original del hombre con la naturaleza, cuando el uno no necesitaba salir hacia la otra por medio del éxtasis, ya que estaba en ella. (141)

Though Morton contends that "we *are*" nature, which runs against the "pérdida de la unidad original" that Helder sees Ortiz as seeking, the two critics refer to two different ideas of unity. Helder refers to Ortiz's view of the ontological abyss separating humans and nonhumans when he speaks of a loss of unity while Morton indicates every other possible form of unity, whether it be physiological, political, or, most importantly, ecological. Of course, in the case of "Ah miras al

presente..." we see that Ortiz is referring to the loss of unity on various levels. The elegy in this poem, then, reflects what Ortiz calls "elegía combatiente" because, as he says in his 1942 essay, elegy is also "justicia" (1072). Lamenting the actors of place that have been run off and killed off, including the "isleños" the speaker also seeks "justicia" by keeping these actors present in the mind of his listener and, consequentially, in the mind of the reader. This hybrid of mourning loss and seeking justice moves toward "la estabilidad," as Helder puts it. With his later poetry (including most of the poems analyzed in this chapter), Ortiz demonstrates "la esperanza en una religación del hombre consigo mismo, con sus semejantes y con la naturaleza" (142). The elegiac portion of "Ah miras al presente..." shows, however, that Ortiz is interested in restoring such ties on a much more intimate scale than the monolithic concept of "naturaleza."

In addition to bidding farewell to the minute creatures from the animate world, the speaker in "Ah miras al presente..." mourns for those who cannot move, namely the flowers. As with the animals, he names flowers, like the "silvia" (92), "lila" (93), "verbenas" (95), "malvas" (97), "petunias" (100), and "madreselva" (108) that will no longer give their light and fragrance to the "camoatíes," among other insects (line 106). For the speaker, the flowers are indispensable actors because they make fundamental contributions to the mesh in their colors, fragrance, and pollination. To mourn the flowers is to mourn smells and colors. Moving on from this list of flowers, the speaker mourns the birds and with them, their song:

No, no creas que dejaría así nomás sin despedirme
de las sucesiones de los intertonos
de los fonos y de los rubatos que no podrán en su hora adelgazar

ni transparecer hasta la flor
 los sentimientos de la luz,
 desde los ritmos, que, creadoramente, continúan en la serie
 de esos instrumentos de lo irreversible... (lines 120-26)²⁰

The loss of birdsong presents an ideal example of the loss of a human-nonhuman interrelationship. Rachel Carson appealed to this same elegiac perspective in *Silent Spring* and her work has had a monumental influence on generations of professional and amateur environmentalists alike. Like the “signs” left behind by the scampering skunks and jaguars, the birdsong is taken from the mesh by the “instrumentos de lo irreversible.” With the speaker’s intimate articulation of the landscape’s multiplicity, the magnitude and far-reaching consequences of eliminating an ecosystem become strikingly clear. The landscape will die, one interrelation at a time.

Now nearly finished with the elegy portion of the poem the speaker transitions into the next portion by defending and justifying his elegy. He does this by returning to the juxtapositional metaphor of the landscape painting and the living landscape. As it loses levels of complexity and life, the speaker contends, the living landscape becomes more and more like a two-dimensional visual aesthetic conceptualization:

Cómo no me despediría?...
 Ya que después habrá de ser, por cuánto tiempo? una extrañeza
 del aire en el aire
 sin mensajeros, entonces, para nada
 ni nadie...
 a no ser para la tiza del fin...
 y aunque la forrajera de elección pincele, ciertamente, con él,

de oleo, las islas,
 luego de esas lluvias que llegan a anañar
 el verde, aún, de los ácidos
 y aunque le toque ahondar hasta más allá, si cabe, de la cintas
 que ciñen la tardecita,
 los mugidos que, por su parte, se van ennegreciendo a tono con el luto
 que pace, ya, la penumbra... (lines 127- 40)

Though the new animals and the foraging grass may make the scene a typically picturesque one, the somber sounds of the lowing cows that ironically harmonize with the “luto / que pace, ya la penumbra,” betray that image. To the speaker, the landscape has been left bereft of active participants. The air, without the birds and insects, is only air. Again, for Ortiz a landscape is not a landscape if it is perceived or conceived as two-dimensional, as if it were painted with “tiza,” “óleo,” and “ácidos” (referring to acrylic paint). To treat an ecosystem as something that is malleable in human hands is essentially to treat it as if it were two-dimensional and therefore completely separate from humanity. Returning to juxtapose the two conceptualizations of landscape, the speaker transitions out of his elegy and reminds the interlocutor and reader of the source of the loss: the capitalistic system allowing the fate of the market to swallow up “los signos / de su propia condenación” that makes our appetite for natural resources self-perpetuating, lending itself to further destruction of the mesh (lines 141-49).

If in the first third of the poem the speaker reveals the multidimensionality of the living landscape to his interlocutor, his “querida,” in order to help her “know” what pain and fear the animate actors of place will experience because of the greed

of an absent landowner, in the second third he mourns the death of the same ecosystem. Both of these expressions of the casualties and consequences that human manipulation of the mesh lead up to the final third of the poem wherein the speaker points to possible ways toward a future utopian moment of interobjective equilibrium happily bereft of social and ecological incongruences. And for the speaker, looking toward the utopian horizon is hoping for the reconstitution of the mesh free from the bundling of human knots and snarls.

Directly transitioning out of the structural and philosophical center, the last portion of the poem finds the speaker expanding on his “elegía combatiente” in order to offer a way out of mourning that contrasts with the capitalistic disconnect from the living landscape that reduces it to, almost literally, a blank slate. In the end, what troubles the speaker about this disconnect is the lopsided societal value that humans put on “goods.” And the accumulation of wealth can not only destroy landscapes and ecosystems it can also segregate humans from other humans. The utopian living landscape, then, becomes a place where both social and ecological inequalities have balanced out. To such a place the speaker points, taking care to compare it, “allá,” with the burning landscape “aquí” in front him and his interlocutor:

Mientras que allá,
 allá donde las cañas no tendrán más “un sol de hiel” ...
 allá, donde, precisamente,
 las furtividades del guajiro y el apuro y la avidez
 de las compañías,
 habían desnudado con los años hasta casi la caliza,
 la sierra que habría

de bajar “Julio”...
 allá... y por poco en seguida, diéronse, cariñosamente, a restituirle
 los hábitos de “maestra”
 que lo fuera también en la oportunidad de volver hacia los hijos
 las cornucopias que, entonces,
 desde las faldas y los pliegues, tropicalmente, le fluían
 bajo la vigilia del Tarquino... (150-63)

As a lifelong communist, it is not surprising that Ortiz chooses Cuba to contrast with the Argentine agrarian oligarchy. Referencing in line 151 Nicolás Guillen’s “Mi patria es dulce por fuera,” the speaker alludes to the inequalities of pre-revolution Cuba that extended to the land as evidenced by the landscape deforested and eroded bald to its limestone skull (line 155). But with the onset of the revolution, the land began to be restored in tandem with the society. Though it is not clear, the speaker’s allusion to Cuba as a utopian model may be the result of wishful thinking that stems from the Cuban land reforms that were put into place by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and the “Julio” movement immediately following the revolutionary victory in 1959. As Ortiz tells fellow poet Vicente Zito Lema in an interview: “Acaso la revolución consista en lo que el hombre por siglos ha estado postergando: la necesidad del verdadero descanso, el que permite ver cómo crecen, día a día, las florcitas salvajes...” (151). A complete revolution includes a re-union of human and nonhuman worlds. More than a verifiable ecological restoration in Cuba, the hope that this portion of the poem calls for is the connection that the speaker makes between social equality and ecological equality. Roberto Retamoso reads this particular juxtaposition between capitalism and communism as a way for the poem

to inscribe “una dualidad, la misma que vincula en términos políticos los lugares del aquí y del allá como los opuestos que muestran, dialécticamente, las formas que adopta el devenir de la Historia” (25). The results of both systems are clearly different and lead to either “caminos que se reabren a las citas / de las gracias de la clorofila...” (lines 179-80) under social and ecological equality or “el imperio de la sílice” (line 186) under social and ecological inequality. Hoping for a utopian future without looking back through a pastoral lens of nostalgia but forward through the lens of socialism, Ortiz’s poetic voice seeks unity (Helder 144).

After the back and forth between the hopeful “allá” and the despair of “aquí,” reflecting the back and forth between a multidimensional and two-dimensional conceptualization of landscape prevalent throughout the entire poem, the speaker ends on a note alluding to the simultaneous spiritual and ecological consequences of ignoring any restoration of the ecosystem in order to grow value in the market rather than in the living landscape. Such an economic and political system is bound to borrow on the debt of the lives that *are* and that *will* be lost. Once those multidimensional landscapes are turned to flat, monocultured spaces, all that will be left are the shadows of debt that will leave the future hanging:

de esa obligación que llaga
y llaga
los paisajes de la promisión
y los climas de la promisión... (lines 207-10)

“Ah miras al presente...” ends near its beginning by reflecting upon time and space. It is significant that the speaker uses the word “paisajes” here for the first and only time during the poem. This points back to the philosophical center of the poem

in the two-dimensional painting sense of the word and it alludes to the Judeo-Christian archetypal idea of a promised home land or “tierra de promisión.” In so doing, it plays ironically on the idea of a people enjoying the interrelationships with the nonhuman world that they eventually deserve. Emphasizing this point he repeats it, only to modify “paisajes” to “climas,” therefore expanding the dimensions of said world to include every one of its actors, whether human or nonhuman, animate or inanimate. The poem is clear: if we look at the living landscape as a two-dimensional aesthetic discourse now and allow our leave-it-for-tomorrow culture to continually and repeatedly (“llaga / y llaga”) interfere with the mesh, the living landscape will eventually become two-dimensional. If we do not recognize the many actors of the living landscape, we put at risk our inheritance in the mesh.

Poetry is Love

Sí, porque no veo en el paisaje, como Sartre dijo muy bien, solamente paisaje. Veo, o lo trato de ver, o lo siento así, todas las dimensiones de lo que trasciende o de lo que diríamos así lo abisma. Es decir, la vida secreta por un lado y la vida no sólo con las criaturas que lo habitan o lo componen sino con las otras cosas con lo que está relacionado no solamente en el sentido de las sensaciones, diríamos.

- Juan L. Ortiz, “La poesía que circula y está como el aire”

Responding to a question about what he, a “poeta que canta la naturaleza,” thinks about poetic technique, Juan L. Ortiz comments that poetic technique is important but that “es necesario ver cómo el hombre, al obrar sobre la realidad, dominándola, cree que su lenguaje es superior al de las otras especies.” We are

falsely led, says the poet, to believe that our reality is more real than that of animals, for example. Poetry, however, can act as a way to “acceder a la calidad” of the nonhuman reality. This is possible because, “La poesía es el amor que encuentra su propio ritmo. Cuando tenemos una efusión amorosa hacia la cosa, estamos en mejores condiciones de percibir el alma de esa cosa que si empleáramos otros instrumentos” (“Las arrugas” 45-46). Effectively, Ortiz is referring to what we have been discussing as his “ética-moral” or “ética-aestética.” There is a sense in his poetry that in order to make connections with the “other,” one must set aside or step away from one’s own humanness in order to reveal and then to participate in one’s surroundings with the other actors of place, as the speaker demonstrates in “Deja las letras...” and “Fui al río.” These connections, in turn, look to recognize and then contribute to the mesh of relationships to bridge both the ontological and ecological space that exists between both worlds. This weaving comes in “El jacarandá” in the form of a spiritual questioning of the speaker and in his recognition of the space or *abismo* between the human and the nonhuman. And in “Ah, miras al presente...” we see how Ortiz reveals this same mesh through his speaker by unfolding the multidimensional landscape for his interlocutor and the reader simultaneously, as he does in both “Deja las letras...” and “El Jacarandá.” We are invited to participate in the mesh as we recognize our part in it.

Ortiz’s conceptualization of the living landscape as an infinitely deep place full of creatures, souls, and ineffable mystery demonstrated through his ecopoetics reflects an ecological thinking previous to the environmental turn in both the Global North and the Global South. Eastern thought and philosophy influenced his ethical,

ecological thought but it is his incredible dedication to contemplation and sense of place that guided his poetry as a “servicio” toward humans and nonhumans:

Yo creo [...] que cada poeta que nace en el mundo crea, si es fiel a sí mismo, una forma nueva de poesía, o una visión, aunque sean matices. Yo quería servir, tenía un sentimiento de servicio. Pero servir a qué; a algo que siempre has sido a través de toda mi vida muy operante: la piedad, en el mejor sentido de la palabra.

Piedad hacia el hombre, hacia los animales. En este sentido, mi vida me llevó a buscar todo lo que podía encontrar que me iluminara. Así, el servicio era la necesidad de denunciar la injusticia, y denunciarla como yo lo podía hacer; y eso también es piedad. (Urondo 126)

The ortician living landscape is populated by all, both human and nonhuman. Poetry for Ortiz is a way to love the “other.” Partly for this purpose he stayed out of Argentina’s cultural center, Buenos Aires. He chose to follow Antonio Machado’s experience and pass the “prueba de la soledad en el paisaje” in order to continually search for answers where they are hard to come by because there is no human to answer (“Conversación” 145). Like Ortiz, Alfredo Veiravé made the decision to purposefully live in “el interior.” He found that he could still be cosmopolitan while being local through his poetic vision and conceptualization of the world as it is connected through culture, philosophy, history, politics, biology, and technology. Though he was a devoted disciple of Ortiz, Veiravé created his own “voice in the wilderness.” His *ecopoiesis* also ties together loose ends but it does so with an ironic knot.

¹ For her participation in the special bicentennial list of “200 libros por 200 años” Sarlo was asked to choose a list of twelve to fifteen books. Ortiz’s *Obra completa* was on her list (Rey).

² Borges’s article “The Argentine Writer and Tradition” and book *El “Martín Fierro”* contain examples of his criticism of these genres, or, at least, of how others have given them undue praise.

³ See Hugo Gola, Juan José Saer, Martín Prieto, Viviana Da-Re, María del Carmen Marengo, Eduardo Milán, and Jorge Santiago Perednik.

⁴ In a tragically ironic twist, after Ortiz had finally allowed a publisher to mass-produce his *Obra Completa*, the oppressive government in Argentina stormed into the presses one day and burned a large portion of his work (Gola, “Conferencia”).

⁵ Edelstein thinks of his early conversations with Ortiz in his hometown, Paraná, Argentina, as an education.

⁶ Nilda Redondo speculates that Urondo chose “Ortiz” for his code name in honor of Juan L. Ortiz. Another journalist who was killed in the Dirty War, Rodolfo Walsh, tells the story of how he found out about Urondo’s death by recalling that a colleague came into his office and reported that “lo mataron a Ortiz” (Redondo 11).

⁷ Of those who have critically read Ortiz, many are poets themselves (e.g. Saer, Gola, Prieto, Francisco Urondo, Alfredo Veiravé, D.G. Helder, Jorge Conti, Carlos Mastronardi, and Alberto Carrera).

⁸ Ortiz did, however, fill these two books with poems whose themes revolve around the speaker’s relationship with elements of the natural world (e.g. “Fui al río,” “El pueblo bajo las nubes,” and “Luciérnagas” from *El ángel inclinado* and “El aguaribay florecido,” “Las flores de las márgenes del camino...,” and “Venía de las colinas...” from *La mano infinita*).

⁹ I am referring here, of course, to the *Blut und Boden* philosophy, or the ideology based on the peasantry’s working of the land on which the Nazis based their own particular sense of place.

¹⁰ See Helder, and Saer.

¹¹ Together with *La orilla que se abisma* and the 2639 line poem *El Gualaguay, El junco y el corriente* were first published as part of *En el aura del sauce* in 1970, Ortiz’s first mass-published book, which brought together all of his poetic work up until that point.

¹² Though it came about by pure accident, Ortiz’s omission of the inverted question mark at the beginning of interrogative phrases in his poetry became an important part of his aesthetic (Perednik 62). A brief discussion of this technique is discussed later in this chapter.

¹³ In an interview with Tamara Kamenszain, Ortiz mentions that he is a great admirer of Jiménez (“Las arrugas” 47).

¹⁴ Synder, incidentally, has also been very interested in eastern traditions (Stalling, 97 - 120).

¹⁵ There are two poems in *La orilla que se abisma* entitled “El jacarandá.” The poem treated here comes first in the collection on page 752, while the other appears on page 858.

¹⁶ See Robert Frost's "Tree at my Window" or Gloria Fuentes's "En mi jardín" for similar yet more detached poetic questioning.

¹⁷ See René Magritte's "The Human Condition" series of paintings for another ironic take on landscape views.

¹⁸ This is the "estética-moral" discussed earlier in the chapter.

¹⁹ Only recently in 2008 was the federal government pitted against the agricultural sector or "campo" in a conflict regarding the federal government's increases in export taxes for agricultural goods. After many months of protests including protests by the "campo" and by the Argentine populace, the government of President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner diverted the problem to congress where it eventually came to a tie vote. The tie was finally broken by the vote of the Vice President at the time, Julio Cobos. Cobos voted in favor of the "campo" and against Fernández de Kirchner. The campo ultimately won out when the national government officially reversed its tax increase back to pre-conflict levels ("Paro agropecuario"). As Jorge Marirrodiga reports, the crisis lasted 129 days and President Fernández de Kirchner's approval ratings took a significant dip.

²⁰ Though formatting constraints have made it impossible to perfectly recreate the position of the wandering lines in this and other Ortiz poems, I have attempted to reproduce these lines of poetry as faithfully as possible.

CHAPTER 2

“Mi casa es una parte del universo”: Alfredo Veiravé and Ecopoetic Irony

¡Cuán poca cosa sería una cosa si fuera solo lo que es en el aislamiento! ¡Qué pobre, qué yerma, qué borrosa! Diríase que hay en cada una cierta secreta potencialidad de ser mucho más, la cual se liberta y expansiona cuando otra u otras entran en relación con ella.

- José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditaciones del Quijote*

Finally home from the first of two extended stays in hospitals for treatment of Pott's Disease¹ a dangerous and possibly deforming illness, the Argentine literary scholar and poet Alfredo Veiravé ripped his unpublished poetry to shreds ("La poesía" 11). Though he had already published a volume of poetry, *El alba, el río y tu presencia* (1951), that had received welcoming acceptance from established and professional writers and poets from Argentina, his "apartamento de todo el mundo," as he calls his time in treatment and recovery, caused him to put life above art: "Durante los años de enfermedad había rehuido el poema porque sabía que si me entregaba a la fiebre de la poesía, no iba a vivir. Yo quería vivir" ("La poesía" 14). Moreover, in "La poesía, crítica y biografía," an autobiographical essay, Veiravé describes his first bout with Pott's disease as a critical turning point in his life and career. He destroyed his unpublished work once he got home but began to write again, he remembers, when fellow poet Alfredo Martínez Howard showed him how destroying his work was a positive sign of his promise as a poet. As Martínez Howard explained it, that Veiravé could tear up all of his previous poems only proves that he had more poetry to write and did not need to attach himself to his old words (12). Notably, Veiravé's second book of poetry, *Después del alba, el angel*

(1955), reflects a new outlook on poetry and the capacity of one's poetic style and sensitivity to evolve. It demonstrates his separation from the "impregnación emocional" of *neoromanticismo* that defined the *generación del 40* in Argentine poetry (A. Prieto 129). Veiravé agrees with several fellow literary scholars that this shift in his early poetry represents an "equilibrio" in his poetic style, which he attributes to his first experience with his own mortality and separation from the world on account of Pott's disease ("La poesía" 13-14).

After living in Buenos Aires for a few years following his first hospitalization, Veiravé experienced another significant change in his life that would also come to affect his art. Having published *Después del alba, el ángel*, the poet, already a resident of the capital city, began to feel a different sort of separation from the world than that which he had had as an in-house patient. He felt a particular disconnection from himself while living in the metropolis and he longed for the countryside like the small town of Gualeguay, Entre Ríos, his birth city.² Though he knew that in terms of becoming a successful and published poet, leaving Buenos Aires was like going into exile, as his friends advised (16), he was put off by the idea of continuing to live in the space and movement of the big city: "Jamás pude sentirme sino un simple provinciano de paso, y ya me veía criando a mis hijos en los balcones de un departamento, corriendo los domingos para lograr un poco de verde y río [...]" (15). For Veiravé, Buenos Aires denied him the kind of intimate relationships with people and the natural world that he had known and enjoyed while in Gualeguay, far from the mad rush of the modern megacity. So determined was he to leave the big city for the country that he left without having any

occupational prospects waiting for him. His and his family's destination soon became Resistencia the capital city of Chaco, Veiravé's wife's native province located in northeast Argentina. Soon after his arrival, he found work as a professor in the Universidad Nacional del Nordeste. Leaving a Buenos Aires that separated him from relating to the world as he would like, Veiravé realized that the city did not need him, nor vice versa (16). Like with his first bout with Pott's disease, his poetry changed because he distanced himself from a reality accepted by a mainstream majority. He realized that, like his mentor Juan L. Ortiz, he did not want to write from the center of society. In fact, as we will discuss in this chapter, Veiravé did not necessarily rest importance on subscribing to a literary, cultural, or even biological center from which to build his worldview. And so, in a similar way to those of Ortiz, his poems can be read as coming from within a mesh-like system of connections wherein humans exist together with other entities as participants. His poetry, especially his later work, reflects this ecopoetic sensibility in how it conceptualizes interrelationships and interconnections among humans, nonhumans, objects, and ideas as dynamically reciprocal.

Veiravé's decision to leave Argentina's center for its margins appears to be in line with Ortiz's poem, "Deja las letras, deja la ciudad." Indeed he uses words from this poem as an epigraph to his poem "Las carabelas de Colón," from *La máquina del mundo* (1976), wherein the speaker declares with more than a touch of irony: "Los poetas del interior y los tesoros de esmeraldas las negras esclavas / bañadas en oro y las orquídeas de olores perversos en el tropico vivimos / esperando que lleguen las carabelas de Buenos Aires y nos descubran" (*Obra poética* 2: 95; lines 1-3).³

However, it is significant to note that unlike Ortiz, Veiravé traveled frequently and widely, and became a part of an international group of friends and colleagues. He participated in the famed International Writing Program at the University of Iowa in 1968 and he later traveled extensively through Spanish America and Europe giving lectures and attending literary conferences, making friends with the likes of the Chilean novelist José Donoso, and Mexican author Juan Rulfo ("La poesía" 25, 33; Giardinelli "Alfredo Veiravé").⁴ Veiravé also read extensively through lenses of both poet and scholar. As a voracious reader, he seemed to know a little or a lot about everything. Perhaps his good friend, Argentine novelist Mempo Giardinelli, puts it best when he declares that "Veiravé fue un hombre universal, enciclopédico, casi renacentista" ("Alfredo Veiravé"). His international experience, both in travel and in reading, however extensive, never overshadowed Veiravé's dedication to his adopted place and home in Chaco. One can find this dedication to place not only in his biography but in his poetry as well, such as is apparent in "Poema con color local," from *La máquina del mundo (Obra poética 2: 83)*. The references to Resistencia and the Chaco region in Veiravé's poetry serve as marks of his often autobiographical style. When his poems speak about Chaco, they are often speaking about him. If we look at how both his dedication to the provincial interior of his country and his extensive knowledge of global culture come together in his poetry, we can see how he formed his own sense of place.

That Veiravé writes from a potentially isolated perspective in Chaco makes his playful consideration of the well-worn binary local/global especially provocative. Several of his poems speak specifically to the tension and connection

between these two geographically and culturally distant positions. The aforementioned “Poema con color local,” for example, links local physical connections with global cultural connections. He adopted Resistencia as his home much like he adopted the words and images of global humanity as his own. What reflects this fluidity between perspectives in his poetry, is how Veiravé’s poetic voice often ventures out from Chaco into the world geographically, culturally, and historically without eschewing the view from his kitchen window or of the plants in his backyard, as he does in his poem “Mi casa es una parte del universe” from *Puntos luminosos* (1970). In a sense, the two conceptual parts of the French American microbiologist René Dubos’s famous statement, “think globally” and “act locally,” are one and the same for the Argentine poet. This combination of local and global positions eliminates any possible and related binary conceptualizations and allows his poetry to express a form of Heise’s “eco-cosmopolitanism,” an idea that we touch upon in our analysis of Ortiz’s poetry (60-1). Veiravé’s ability to put the local and the global together relies on his ecopoetic understanding of human and nonhuman interconnectedness.

Part of the eco-cosmopolitan vision of Veiravé’s poetry is presenting how everything and everyone connects to everything, and everyone, else. Or as he puts it, all things have inevitable “asociaciones interminables” between them and poetry as an “hecho histórico” is especially adept at revealing these “asociaciones” (“La poesía” 30, 24). Indeed, by presenting these connections, poetry reveals how the world is both finite (disparate things can connect together) and infinite (the amount of connections is seemingly innumerable). For Veiravé, poetry helps us understand

how we as humans are linked physically, emotionally, and spiritually with all that is nonhuman. Similar to Ortiz's notion of the "red" and "trama" or even, as we shall see in the next chapter, Cecilia Vicuña's weaving motif, Veiravé's concept of how animate and inanimate objects, ideas, memories, and cultural products connect together in an "infinita red de relaciones" that often painfully includes himself, underlies his ecopoetics (18).

One of the ways that Veiravé seeks to reveal this connectedness is by questioning our humanity along with our spatial and ontological understanding of the world. This questioning emphasizes particular ironies in the human way of seeing the natural world through the epistemic subjectivity of the sciences, the arts, and everything in-between. Veiravé questions this subjectivity by uniting disparate and diverse themes and things in and of the world, which, in turn, lessens and muddles falsely predetermined differences between any set of concrete and/or abstract subjects, whether they be human or nonhuman. Even more specifically, he ironizes all perceived accurate representations of nonhuman reality on the part of humanity by writing palimpsest-like "transparencias" – allusions and intertexts selected from representative discourses, be they scientific, artistic, religious, political, or mass media – and puts them into conversation in a poetic discourse ("La poesía" 27, 30). His most overt and sustained "transparencia" comes in the form of his book *Historia natural* (1980) in which he structures his poetics by parodying the format and function of pre-enlightenment and enlightenment scientific classificatory discourse that certain natural histories display (*Obra poética* 2:149-225).⁵ More specifically, Veiravé parodies a natural history written about the Chaco

region, *Ensayo sobre la historia natural del Gran Chaco*, by the Spanish Jesuit José Jolís S.J. in the eighteenth century. The format of *Historia natural*, however, mostly reflects one of the original natural histories, the encyclopedic work of the Roman Pliny the Elder, written during the first century, AD. By parodying early “scientific” analyses of the natural world, Veiravé sets up his poems as objective sketches that treat aspects of life worthy of study. Therefore, Pliny’s work together with that of Jolís are key contextual reference points for our reading of Veiravé’s ironic perspective on “official” epistemologies in *Historia natural* because they provide examples of scientific works that make rather subjective attempts at objectivity.

One of two of Veiravé’s books published during the “dirty war”⁶ (1976 - 1983), *Historia natural* also reflects an irony that can be read as aiming to criticize “official” concepts of knowledge and power. Coincidentally, this same period marks the latter part of the environmental turn, which may explain Veiravé’s use of environmental terms and concepts like “reserva ecológica” as he does in his poem by the same name. By 1980, environmental themes and ideas were already cultural currency for cosmopolites like Veiravé, thanks in part to the paradigm shift from nature writing to environmental writing represented by Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962, as we discussed in the introduction (Clark 84). What largely defines this shift is the naturalist-turned-environmentalist writers’ focus on human interference in and responsibility to the natural world. Part of this focus is centered on the struggles for political and social authority as they deal with how to use and or conserve the nonhuman world. Veiravé’s ecopoetry is not necessarily similar to contemporary environmental writing but it does question the validity of human

authority over the natural world. And *Historia natural*'s concept of treating both the arts and the sciences as potentially epistemologically repressive systems, especially as they are related to nonhuman entities, in the midst of a repressive political climate, is particularly powerful and timely.

Some of Veiravé's most poignant lines that express how interconnectivity between humans and nonhumans helps us face and overcome tragedy ecopoetically, come from his work produced in the late-dictatorship, post-Malvinas war as well as intimately autobiographical poems, such as "Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer," from his penultimate book of poetry, *Radar en la tormenta* (1985). What at its heart is an anecdote from Veiravé's life told through the speaker to communicate the feelings of a father having to send his son off to war, "Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer" also tells of how the speaker is able to express his conflictive feelings by seeking to understand the "thoughts" and "actions" of a flamboyantly flowering tree. The account is very personal and, as we will see, by making it so autobiographical yet ecopoetic, Veiravé can unproblematize the inherently limited subjective quality of lyric poetry. Our reading of the poem will also reveal how Veiravé utilizes what he calls a "sistema" of symbols for his books of poetry that creates interconnections between poems and, in the case of "Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer," sets up a *mise en abyme* of meaning that augments the overall effect of the poem.

Each of the aspects of Veiravé's ecopoetry that I have previewed here above – eco-cosmopolitism, ironic anthropocentric knowledge over the natural world, and interconnectivity that can overcome subjectivity – reveal a poet that understands some of the fundamental obstacles that have faced human-nonhuman

interrelationships: ignorance, distance, and limited perspective caused by repression. His ecopoetics center on making the world smaller, from the margins of history, culture, and geography, while allowing for its limitlessness simultaneously. This quality is especially apparent in his poetry beginning with *Puntos luminosos*, which was published in 1970, during the same period that Juan L. Ortiz's complete works were coming to light and, as we shall read later, the same period that Vicuña was gaining her early ecopoetic sensibility. As Mariela Blanco makes clear in her recent study of Veiravé's poetry, several critics point out that *Puntos luminosos* is a departure from Veiravé's previous work (165). The poet himself noted this shift in his work as similar to the way that *Después del alba, el ángel* is a departure from his first book and never-to-be seen poems that he destroyed. This second "equilibrio" as he calls it in his autobiography, was brought on by another and even closer brush with death on account of his Potts Disease ("La poesía" 31). In an anecdote connected to this second round of treatment, Veiravé describes his reaction to finally ending a horrible stay at the hospital, where he went through surgery, dying briefly, and then more surgery (or the "desgajamiento" of his body parts, as he puts it), as liberating. Once he recovered his health for the second time, he found joy in simple things like the "calor del sol, [...] la alegría del agua, [el] cariño de mis amigos [y] mi tiempo." He had confronted his physical and spiritual limitations and subsequently found a new poetic perspective wherein all things and ideas fit, including "las pirámides de Teotihuacán y los bichitos del jardín, el vuelo especial y una gota de suero entrando lentamente a nuestras venas, el azar y el destino, lo más pequeño, como el iris del ojo, o lo mas inabarcable como el cosmos" (24-25). This

perspective of being able to see beyond the horizon without losing sight of what is in front of you is what makes much of this third and final period of Veiravé's poetry characteristically eco-cosmopolitan.

"Color local": Eco-Cosmopolitan Poetry

¿La viste todo bien, en colores?

- Carlos Argentino, Jorge Luis Borges's "El aleph"

Alfredo Veiravé's second "equilibrio" is well noted by literary critics of his work. Indeed, Veiravé only recognized the two major changes in his poetic style after he had read and reflected upon the judgments of his peers in academia ("La poesía" 25). The second change was obvious to many critics when *Puntos luminosos* was first published and it has been recognized as an axis in Veiravé's work ever since.⁷ Significantly, part of this change in style came about shortly after he recovered from his second near-death experience, because of his fellowship and his consequent exposure to international writers and their ideas at the University of Iowa. *Puntos luminosos* was born out of his time in Iowa and *El imperio milenario* out of his specific experiences with the contingent of Latin American authors he met and befriended during his stay in the United States ("La poesía" 25-27). Agreeing with the critics, Veiravé conceptualizes his changed style as a "desacralización" of poetic language, which comes as a consequence of a:

choque violento frente a las técnicas del mundo contemporáneo y la seguridad de que los poetas habían bajado del Olimpo para instaurarse en los medios de comunicación masivos, en la ruptura del tiempo de la eternidad

atrapado en una máquina fotográfica, en la trasposición de esos desajustes cronológicos que son tan evidentes en América. (30)

For Veiravé, poetry could be created out of language from any corner of life and from any form of modernity. His statement here comes decades before the Internet or other leaps of technology produced at the end of the millennium, but he seems to foresee poetry's necessary evolution as parallel to that of technology. He removes the distance between the classical, somewhat anachronistic language of more traditional poetry and the reader by producing poems that reflect contemporary life and language. Though his keen interest in the contrast of technological advances with the art of poetry is notable, his desacralization of poetic language is right in line with his antipoet contemporaries. The Argentine critic Elisa Calabrese points out that after Veiravé's shift in style and approach, his poetry aligns itself with the work of poets such as the Chilean Nicanor Parra:

En efecto, aparecen ya emergentes constitutivos de la producción posterior de Veiravé; es el caso de una intertextualidad manifiesta en las relaciones de autorreferencialidad entre sus propios textos; por otra parte, una ironía enmarcada en su propia retórica, lo inscribe claramente en lo que se conoce como 'antipoesía.' (270)

Like Parra's antipoetics, Veiravé's desacralized poetics do not necessarily simplify the meaning of his poems; rather, his poetics attempt the opposite: to poeticize the seemingly banal language of contemporary life.

When Veiravé poeticizes everyday, banal language, such as the language used in vehicles of mass communication, he also celebrates the connections that technology provides between culturally and geographically outlying areas and the

rest of the world. For the poet, what cannot be communicated through these communication technologies, however, is the physical and psychological sense of place he has of home. In “Mi casa es una parte del universo,” for example, the speaker ponders the difference between the local knowledge and the global connectedness that technology can produce or provoke (*Obra poética* 1: 212). The poem makes a direct reference to a benchmark event in both space exploration and how humans perceive our planet. After NASA astronauts took and published the now famous picture, known as “Blue Marble,” of the Earth during the Apollo 17 mission in 1972, humans could see the world as a single entity. Clearly referencing this photo and focusing on the addition of this new perspective to our collective psyche, the speaker, who comes across as Veiravé’s persona on account of the biographical information included in the poem, contrasts the image and the idea of all of humanity in one place, with his own subjectivity:

Los que la vieron dicen que la tierra
 es una esfera en el espacio, un planeta
 más bien pequeño
 del tamaño del dedo pulgar de los astronautas.
 Yo no lo dudo porque he visto las fotografías
 y porque ahora estoy a casi medio planeta de mi casa. (1-6)

He can concede that technology has given us a new perspective but he also points to the way humans conceived of Earth as a whole before any visual “proof,” such as what a photograph offers. The speaker’s colloquial voice juxtaposes the two spatial conceptualizations of the planet in a casual way, diminishing the difference between the two while simultaneously highlighting it through recognition. Mariela Blanco

uses “Mi casa es una parte del universo” as an example to discuss how Veiravé puts the everyday up against the cosmos in a “dinámica compositiva” that comes together as a “juego con los puntos de vista que abre el espectro para la exploración de los múltiples procedimientos de las mezclas surrealistas que comienzan a fraguarse” (176-77). The base of Blanco’s reading is how Veiravé’s seemingly strange – or surreal as she puts it — composition of the proximate next to the remote opens up conceptual space for him to make similar disparate connections seem familiar.

Along a related line of analysis, I see that by trivializing the importance of the entire planet by putting it under our collective thumb – perhaps in reference to the now famous “one giant leap” declaration – while at the same time referring to the enormous distance separating him from his home, Veiravé’s speaker emphasizes both his and the astronauts’ perspectives equally. Within this juxtaposition, however, he is also calling attention to how he can “see” from both sides. He has not been to space to put his own thumb over the earth but via the camera the speaker can experience the astronaut’s perspective. It is also a question of physical, spatial knowledge: he knows where he is at and he knows where he was. For him to understand the Earth as a single entity, the speaker relies on the eyes of others and of a machine, but to understand it as a mesh of spaces and places he relies on his own experiences. The speaker concedes that the picture of the earth is authentic enough; nevertheless, he leads the reader to zoom in with him on a specific area of that image:

Lo mejor de todo esto es que en ese pulgar
también mi casa es una parte del universo. (lines 7-8)

Making the thumb into a metaphor for the Earth, Veiravé completes the ironic imagery of the entire planet as a minimalized and manageable object, which parallels the name that NASA gave our home's famous first portrait. The poem draws a relationship from the micro to the macro conceptualization of space by way of the speaker's change in perspective. Beginning with his minimalization of Earth from afar and then going on to focus on a real, known place, the speaker de-pixelates the out-of-planet perspective. He juxtapositions "casa" and "universo" to reflect both the *intimate* and *infinite* perspectives at work in this poem.

Twenty-first century readers may recognize this sort of movement of perspective from far above the planet to the very specific place thereon as similar to what one can experience when using the Google Earth software and/or the Google Maps online search application. Ursula Heise points out this very phenomenon in her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* to discuss how both a local and a global environmental perspective can be held simultaneously, like a collage:

In its ability to display the whole planet as well as the minute details of particular places in such a way that the user can zoom from one to the other and focus on different types of information, Google Earth's database imaginary may well be the latest and post-postmodernist avatar of the modernist collage, which has now turned global, digital, dynamic, and interactive. (67)

Creating the global out of the disparate experiences of the local, the eco-cosmopolitan collage that Heise links to modern techniques is an expression of connectedness that allows for individuality. Veiravé's speaker, for his part,

recognizes the increased reduction of global distances, both geographically and culturally, while also recognizing the increased importance of his individual place.

Mariela Blanco, who has been one of the few contemporary voices recovering Veiravé and his work from obscurity, also sees a collage aesthetic at work in Veiravé's poetry through his "exploración de las relaciones semánticas inesperadas donde emerge la aspiración a lo nuevo como imperativo estético" (170). This is partly how she reads this poem as a demonstration of Veiravé's dynamic and simultaneous contrapositioning and conjoining of "lo cotidiano" and "la inmensidad de todo" (176). Blanco sees this as a dynamic movement, a series of "vaivenes entre las cosas de este mundo y el viaje trascendente que implica el acto de poetizar," that works like a camera to put all things within a frame (211). Though she views this dynamism as surreal, we can see that the poet is honing in on particularly new technologies and perspectives brought about by humanity's ambitions. In this manner, he creates a contrast between these two views to point out their similarities and disparities. As the speaker reaches the mid point of the poem, he zooms in even closer on his home and beautifully represents his sense of place by justifying why his house, however infinitesimally small under an astronaut's thumb, is also a part of, and therefore connected to, everything:

Cómo no serlo si en el patio del fondo
 hay un filodendro de gigantes hojas y también gusanos bajo la tierra
 aptos para la pesca, y ahora que me acuerdo
 el olor de los helechos contra la pared
 la cara de Delfina o Federico entre los árboles
 y aquel canario que se nos voló de noche. (lines 9-14)

In these last six lines, fixed together as one sentence, the speaker ties his sense of place to his physiological senses and to his memories. Similar to how oral cultures' stories are triggered by experience with places wherein they originally occurred, as David Abram argues, the speaker can "see" his home from afar because of his spatial-temporal experiences there (183). He can see the philodendron and the faces of his children; he can smell the ferns; he knows where night crawlers creep. His perspective is metaphorically from above, like the astronauts, but his perspective is not omniscient, like that of Jorge Luis Borges's protagonist in "El Aleph" who can see all that exists in the world in a single point of light, for example (121-22). He reduces or concentrates his perspective down from above to the intimate space of his own home, much closer than Google Maps's zoom function can currently get. Writing from Iowa, or "a casi medio planeta de [su] casa" (line 6) and including the names of his children in the poem, Veiravé overtly makes "Mi casa es una parte del universo" about his own homesickness ("Memories" 194).

Like many of his poems, "Mi casa es una parte del universo" has a personal tone to it. As the reader follows the speaker from above the earth to the backyard of the speaker's home, the poem becomes more intimate. No longer speaking of the entire planet, a shared, even public space, the speaker invites the reader into his private space. This intimacy reveals a certain vulnerable quality in Veiravé's sense of place and in his ecopoetics — something that we will further explore in the next section. The vulnerability in Veiravé's sense of place is reflected in this and other poems. One such poem is "Los domingos sin Pía," in which the speaker agonizes about how the wonderful things that are connected to and can occur in a certain

place during the week cannot happen on a Sunday when he is without his lover (*Obra poética* 1: 251-52).

Though “Mi casa es una parte del universo” is steeped in nostalgic overtones, it justifies home as a concrete and experienced place, however infinitesimally small it may be in comparison to the universe. The poem focuses in on place beyond what any technology can do – whether it be the photography of 1970 or interactive mapping interface of 2013 – by representing a home as a web of physical and psychological interrelationships among humans and nonhumans. The image of home created by Veiravé in his poetry is part of the infinite web of existence, he contends, because of what is beyond the abstract global perspective: what is behind, underground, unseen, and what is accessible only to memory. What is hidden here to the astronaut is that which is available to the individual – wherein even his sense of loss, the “canario” that escaped, becomes integral. This allusion to a specific memory in the last line of “Mi casa es una parte del universo” comes at the end of a climax of emotion in the poem and underlines the longing the speaker has for his home and place in the world, no matter how far it is from him in the poem’s present or from the cultural center of the world or of his own country.

Six years after he published “Mi casa es una parte del universo” in 1970, Veiravé published a poem that seems to run opposite to the positively focused perspective of “Mi casa.” The poem, “Poema con color local,” from *La maquina del mundo*, is itself a parody of regional poetry and provincial writing. Though Veiravé had eschewed the big city for the small town, he was well aware of insular tendencies of some of his fellow writing-from-the-margins writers. Indeed, as he

explains in his autobiography, he was just as concerned about falling into a sort of updated *costumbrismo* as were his mentors, Juan L. Ortiz and Carlos Mastronardi, who, like Veiravé, were native to Gualeguay (Giardinelli “Nota” 5). He goes on to explain that even though Chaco (the province and geographical region) started to appear in his poetry after he moved to Resistencia in 1957, he has intentionally avoided the “tipicidad” or “color local” that often prevails in regional literature (17). Though the *costumbrismo* of regional literature is a different concept than the “locavore” culture of western environmentalism,⁸ we can see some parallels between what Veiravé is concerned about and what Ursula Heise points to in her chapter on eco-cosmopolitanism.

To explain how western environmentalism has favored the local over the global, Heise reviews the modern movement and its most popular strains since the 1960s. She recognizes that there were various manifestations of a global ecological awareness, such as James Lovelock’s “Gaia” hypotheses and Buckminster Fuller’s “Spaceship Earth” global cybernetics,⁹ each of which sought to unite humanity by understanding how we are “bound together by a global ecosystem.” On the other hand, Heise contends, fears of globalization have squelched the utopian hopes of these conceptualizations, swinging the environmentalist pendulum toward the “act local” and away from the “think global” (24-28). This swing has been sustained through several different theories and projects coming from the United States like “bioregionalism,” “land-ethic,” and “dwelling.”¹⁰ Heise concludes that these and other local-leaning or “place imagination” ideas differ widely, but that “a fundamental investment in a particular kind of ‘situated knowledge,’ the intimate

acquaintance with local nature and history that develops with sustained interest in one's immediate surroundings, recurs across otherwise quite different discourses" (29-30). They all focus heavily on the full bodily or sensorial experience as a basis of a sense of place. To have a true sense of place, these ideas conclude, one must physically be in place. What these theories and movements lack, Heise proposes, is an investment in "cultural mediations" and "abstract knowledge" that could connect their place with others, though they often show a desire to do so (37-38). That is, the sense of place that these ideas promote is often only available or desirable to those who can afford it and is unable or unwilling to include connections with other senses of place that rely on un-situated knowledge – including political, cultural, and ethical considerations.

What Heise does not seem to be referring to in her critique of local-based environmentalism is the localized campaigns for cleaner, healthier ecological relationships. The target of her critique is the privileging of immediate, physical experience, over abstract, conceptual thinking as far as environmentalism is concerned. Part of the problem that Heise has with the sense of place promoted by the aforementioned theories and projects is that they often include and/or suggest a return to a "natural" state of being, even though, in reality, there is no such state of being. If the "natural" can be approached from within a self-conscious "cultural framework," as several cultural theorists like Henri Lefebvre would contend, argues Heise, then one can develop a more attainable sense of place.

Beyond Heise's concern with the question of socially constructed ecological relationships, Veiravé shows how his physical and cultural location, though

comically distant from one another, work toward his own brand of *costumbrismo* in “Poema con color local,” a fourteen-lined poem that can be analyzed as a Shakespearean sonnet-like structure composed of three quatrains and a couplet. In the first quatrain, the speaker displays the sort of situated knowledge to which Heise refers:

Vivo en el Chaco en la ciudad de Resistencia y conozco
 el quebracho, el algodonal y el viento norte
 en las siestas del verano
 sus templos sacramentales y las lluvias interminables (lines 1-4)

Deliberately pointing out his provincial location, the speaker then lists the bits of local knowledge that establish his sense of place. Because of the important difference between “conozco” and “saber” in Spanish, the speaker’s declaration of knowledge more than suggests an empirical, and therefore sensual, understanding of Resistencia and the nonhuman residents of the area. The speaker is equally familiar with native, represented by the autochthonous quebracho tree, and nativized flora, represented by the “algodonal” or cotton plantation. By commingling the native with the nativized flora, both of which are utilized for their raw material products,¹¹ the speaker alludes to the appropriative way that humans have related to nonhumans in the Chaco region. This relationship marks a part of the speaker’s sense of place as one sensitive to anthropocentric valuation of the natural world. Additionally, linking to the “color local” in the poem’s title, the speaker includes places of worship and the mention of “siestas” in his list, which serves the purpose of recognizing the cultural component of the typical *cuadro de costumbrismo* (“Costumbrismo I. Literatura española”).

Immediately after the break at the end of line four, however, the speaker qualifies and subsequently juxtaposes his local, intimate knowledge of his hometown with a different kind of knowledge:

no obstante eso ojeo la enciclopedia que en fascículos
llega a los quioscos
y leo sobre “La infancia de la humanidad”
“La estructura de las máquinas” (lines 5-8)

The enjambment of “interminables” and “no” without even a comma makes our reading run through the juxtaposition here at the same pace that we read the list of local-knowledge evidence, and if it were not for the qualificative “no obstante,” the differences between book knowledge and hands-on knowledge, as it were, would be negligible, or at the very least, implicit. What the juxtaposition does is create an antithesis wherein the idea of “local” is not as firm as the title seems to make it out to be by referring to a well-known phrase that denominates local culture and knowledge. The speaker can read about the world – represented here by seemingly arbitrary, yet universal encyclopedia entries – at his local corner store and gain universal knowledge. In the third quatrain, however, the speaker makes a connection with a globalized pop-cultural knowledge:

Soy de la primera generación de Tarzán y el
Tit-Bits fui Sobrino del Capitán y ahijado de Fantomas
y no veré seguramente
la colonización del planeta Marte (lines 9-12)

If the first two quatrains transition from situated knowledge to universal knowledge, effectively pushing the horizon of the speaker's capacity to understand the world outward, the third quatrain reveals the speaker's capacity and history of eliminating this horizon. He traces his epistemological genealogy to his childhood reading of adventure, super hero, and science fiction series or comics. With these references, the speaker is also locating himself culturally. Being the "primera generación" sets him apart from those who came before him. Identifying with mass-media comic strips removes any "color local" from the speaker's identity because it links him with a more globalized pop-culture. "Tarzán" and "Tit-bits" are derived from English sources, "Sobrinos del Capitán" from the United States, and "Fantomas" from France. A narrative that includes the colonization of Mars could come from a variety of sources but it most likely comes from Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*. As a child who grew up reading these adventures his mind would have been taken far away (even to Mars!) from his physical location and from objective reason.¹²

There is a sense here that the speaker is indeed far removed from any *costumbrismo* that would encumber him or his sense of place. This removal of the poetic subject away from localized knowledge-making is precisely what Heise understands as "deterritorialization" or "the detachment of social and cultural practices from their ties to place" (51). Environmentalists have also noticed such detachments and have advocated for a "reterritorialization" of place, effectively bringing culture back home (53). Veiravé mixes the local and the global in this

poem, with a progression away from local, but, as in many of his poems, he turns his reader around at the end to look back at the beginning of the poem.

The twelve-line movement of the three quatrains that goes from situated knowledge toward universal knowledge creates an affective distance between the local and the global. Hence, the couplet at the end of the poem impacts the reader even more strikingly:

no obstante eso miro los lapachos florecidos
con cierta nostalgia becqueriana. (lines 13-14)

Appearing for the second time in the poem, the qualifying “no obstante eso” shifts our reading from the capacity of his imagination to take him culturally far away back to his physical location, determined in the lines above by the mention of another local flora. The couplet’s *volta* does not necessarily contradict or override the two previous quatrains’ movements outward but it does bring the reader full circle to contemplate the speaker’s version of “color local,” in which he can still have an emotional connection with his surroundings despite his movement away from such feelings. He brings the reader full circle by referencing the nonhuman natural world again in the guise of local flora. In contrast to the quebracho, listed in the second line of the poem, the lapacho tree is not widely utilized for its raw material product. It is, however, widely planted as an ornamental plant on account of its abundant and beautiful display of flowers. As we will read later in this chapter in Veiravé’s poem, “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer,” the lapacho tree and its seasonal flowering symbolize the cycles of life, including the cycle of memory and forgetting. The speaker points to this same cycle in attaching the experience of

looking at the flowering trees to a “nostalgia becqueriana,” connoting how humans appropriate nonhumans to express human desires. Instead of questioning if the sparrows will return, as is the case with Spanish poet, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer’s famous poem, “Rima LIII,” the speaker questions if the lapacho’s flowers will return as always. Empirically knowing that they will return does not prevent the speaker from contemplating, by way of a nineteenth-century Spanish love poem, the possibility that they will not return. Essentially, his sense of place, which is founded on his interrelationships with both the local human and nonhuman world does not limit his use of a universal knowledge, which is founded on global culture. It is through his sense of place that he has, as Heise has termed it, a sense of planet. Having a sense of planet is to be an eco-cosmopolitan:

Besides the valuation of physical experience and sensory perception, therefore, an eco-cosmopolitan approach should also value the abstract and highly mediated kinds of knowledge and experience that lend equal or greater support to a grasp of biospheric connectedness. (Heise 62)

Long before Heise formulated her conceptualization of “biospheric connectedness” Veiravé’s poems, “Mi casa es una parte del universo” and “Poema con color local,” along with several other selections from his *oeuvre*, demonstrated his keen sense that there are real connections between the local and the universal. Having decided to live his life in the physical margins of his country, Veiravé found solace and truth in his immediate surroundings by making connections between both physical and abstract forms of nonhumans. He demonstrates that our capacity as humans to imagine both connects us to a sense of place and to a sense of planet — as he

illustrates with the Tolstoy epigraph that introduces “Poema con color local”:
 “Pintan a tu aldea y serás universal.”

In other examples of his poetic work, Veiravé deals with the epistemological approaches to human-nonhuman interrelationships that he moves through in “Poema con color local.” More directly, he explores the filters through which we as humans “know” the world. His book *Historia natural* in particular allows him to use irony to peel back these filters and offer the reader a new perspective on the natural world as both *human* and *nature*.

Non-natural History

*That the poetry of this most scientific of centuries
 should be, on the whole, less concerned with science
 than was the poetry of times of which science was
 relatively unimportant is a paradox that requires to
 be elucidated and explained.*

- Aldous Huxley, *Literature and Science*

*nosotros como los físicos, los psicólogos, los químicos,
 científicos o inventores
 a partir de la Revolución Industrial pertenecemos
 a la historia de la ciencia, somos
 también especialistas,
 los legisladores que el mundo no reconoce.*

- Alfredo Veiravé, “Físicos y químicos”

To more fully understand the context and the importance of the ironic voice of Veiravé and his poems, and in particular his work, *Historia natural*, one must consider the philosophical and political questions regarding the idea of “Nature” with a capital “N.” Indeed, to doubt or question the idea of “Nature” and what it does or does not encompass, has been a central task of humanistic and scientific studies

alike. We referenced two such contemporary studies that reflect this questioning in our study of Juan L. Ortiz's poetry. Timothy Morton's 2007 work, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, and Bruno Latour's work, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, both examine how the humanities and the sciences, respectively, have manipulated and manufactured the idea of "Nature." By looking closely, we can see that the concepts of "Nature" and human subjectivity that *Historia natural* ironizes are parallel to similar arguments made by Morton and Latour toward pointing out what is partially wrong with certain sectors of ecocritical and ecopoetical movements in their attempts to make an ontological or epistemological change in how we approach the interrelationships among humans and nonhumans.

According to Morton, what conventional ecocriticism needs, as does so-called environmental art and other "ecological" representations, in order to be completely ecological or express "a proper relationship with the earth and its life forms" is to rid itself of "Nature" (2). That is, what ecocritics consider as "Nature" paradoxically acts as an obstacle in their attempt to analyze art and literature's ecological thought, especially when it comes to relationships among humans and nonhumans (1, 7). The idea of "Nature" that Morton wants to remove from ecocritical analysis, and from the idea of environmental art, is the concept of the transcendental masked in material (14). This is the "Nature" that is somehow both the will behind what happens in the natural world and the natural world itself. In other words, "Nature" is the abstract concept of a nonhuman world that exists beyond the so-called human world yet attempts to dialogue with humanity on certain occasions such as weather

events or camping trips. In *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* Morton traces many philosophical theories and aesthetic positions regarding this human/nonhuman dualism fallacy and often argues that one cannot view the natural world from the outside because everything is connected; everything is already everywhere. There is no natural world, there is only the world: “To write about ecology is to write about society” (17). Therefore, “Nature” becomes a slippery, fantastic, and ironic term as far as artistic representations of what it supposedly connotes, and as analyses of it as a concept are concerned.

In some ways this question of how humans can be exceptional while also joining nonhumans as part of “Nature,” is one of the fundamental questions that had great thinkers like Descartes and Kant struggling during the Enlightenment and scientific revolution. This struggle to see humans as both inside and outside the natural world was a struggle for “the conciliation of causality, needed for science, with free will, needed for ethics.” Kant and Descartes’s inability to satisfactorily explain and justify human free will while simultaneously emphasize mechanical materiality eventually led to the birth of Romanticism (Eichner 13-14). Human free will and subjectivity are closely linked and Veiravé shows the irony inherent in human subjectivity and its representation of “Nature” in his way of playing with the often ambiguous distinction between the human and the nonhuman. In *Historia natural*, this playing comes about in part through his parody of scientific discourse. Primarily, Veiravé formulates his book of poetry with the guise of a natural history — a document supposedly dedicated to an objective observation of the natural world. To do this the poet writes palimpsestic phrases, forming “versos construidos

sobre frases de informaciones extraídas de documentos o textos o tesis” which he calls “transparencias” (“La poesía 27). These phrases allude to and include various facts of history, art, science, daily life, and current events alongside and connected to the speaker’s observation of nonhumans, thereby reorienting the parameters of what constitutes “Nature.” In this way he also signals, in a certain level of meta-representation, the impossibility of perfect human objectivity regarding nonhumans.

The opening lines of “El Zamuhu,” from *Historia natural* demonstrate Veiravé’s palimpsest poetics: “La forma del Zamuhu es tan ridícula como su nombre / dice Dobrizhoffer del palo borracho, o palo ebrio según los / españoles de la Real Academia [...]” (lines 1 - 3). The speaker’s discourse is structured as observational and academic at the same time that it is ironic. He appeals to a natural historian, Martin Dobrizhoffer, but not for the scholar’s objective assessment; rather the speaker cites the scholar’s value judgment of both the tree and the Amerindian name for it. He then references the well known and authoritative Real Academia at the same time he points out the irony of the Spanish name for the tree. Both of these references to objective authority are underlying texts in the poem’s palimpsest. Further along in the poem the underlying texts switch from scientific references to allusions to an Italian *vedette*, amerindian culture, and ancient Roman poetry, to name a few. Eventually the speaker utilizes his own discourse about the Zamuhu tree as an underlying text over which he writes to his lover, comparing her unfavorably to the tree (lines 45 - 49). Veiravé organizes this and other poems in *Historia natural* as objective encyclopedic entries in a natural history but through

his “transparencias” he reveals how human subjectivity affects our relationships with the nonhuman world.

It is the impossibility of perfectly objective perspective that Bruno Latour refers to when he compares the platonic myth of the cave with the politicization of the relationship between science and humanity — a process that turns “the sciences” into “Science.” That is, the sciences are pathways for earnest and curious engagement with the natural world whereas Science is “the politicization of the sciences through epistemology in order to render ordinary political life impotent through the threat of an incontestable nature” (10). Representatively, the Scientists are those who say that they can leave the cave and objectively observe what is real and true about life, outside of the influence of culture or society. Thus, the statements of Science are supposed to be apolitical, even if the statements have political implications. The “slaves,” who are not Scientists, are tied to a continual debate regarding the subjective truth of their shadows forever unless they accept the ultimate truth from the mouth and hands of the Scientists (10-14). Latour does not broadly discount the sciences nor the possibility of an absolute truth; rather he sees making a worn and rigid distinction between humans and nonhumans as a fallacy. There is no distinct binary tension between the two but a dynamic “collective”: “We are not dealing with a society ‘threatened’ by recourse to an objective nature, but with a collective *in the process of expanding*: the properties of human beings and nonhumans with which it has to come to terms are in no way assured” (38). Whereas with Ortiz’s poetry we see the same desire to diversify meanings of truth that Latour petitions in his ideas about the human coming

together with the nonhuman in a “collective,” with *Historia natural* this collective character of human-nonhuman interrelationships is reaffirmed by way of denying the singular and personalized “Nature” for the plural and heterogeneous “natures” (Latour, *Politics* 29, 37). Scientists do not have a monopoly on objective privilege because there is no platonic “cave,” and there are no clear candidates for non-Scientist “slaves” who create reality from their own shadow theories. Basically, as Latour explains, in order to avoid scientific exceptionalism as such and, in turn, the continual but artificial separation of humankind from the natural world, our questioning of human subjectivity must necessarily continue.

According to Latour, the goal that Science has to be purely objective in its understanding of “Nature,” must transform into a goal of the sciences to seek out continual interdisciplinary dialogue and multivocal perspectives regarding “natures.” To pursue this collaboration could change separate and distinct perspectives on natures into “associations” of mind and matter (Latour, *Politics* 37, 71-3). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in order to make and reveal connections between the objects and ideas, in a way similar to what Latour suggests, Veiravé’s poetry recognizes what he calls “asociaciones interminables” among many and apparently disparate concrete and abstract things. Veiravé organization of *Historia natural*, as we will see, puts his poetic voice in the position of a natural historian, and in doing so he structures the question of human subjectivity’s authority over nonhumans as a study in observation. And it is through observation that the speaker reveals Veiravé’s ecopoetic “asociaciones.”

Arguably, changing how one views one's place in the natural world could be a consequence of what a contemporary natural history writer (or naturalist) does. She places herself in a natural environment, without completely losing her subjectivity, and she uses her creativity to record her observations with regard to the various actors of the corresponding space and thus interacts with the multifarious environment. In this way the naturalist discourse does not claim to be completely objective nor purely scientific. She takes detailed observations, makes objective calculations and explanatory conjectures regarding what she is observing.¹³ This model is patterned after the environmentally embedded naturalist methodology established by such figures as Alexander von Humboldt and Charles Darwin.¹⁴ Such a basic model for a modern natural history does not, nevertheless, serve as the parodied discourse on top of which Veiravé lays his "transparencias." Though *Historia natural* alludes to some of the tenets and refers to several of the means of the modern natural history monograph, such as it does in the poem "Consideraciones sobre las oscuras golondrinas," it parodies more closely a combination of those classic and early modern natural histories that came to form the underlying base of modern natural histories (Principe 108). Mariela Blanco's critique of *Historia natural* refers to the relationship that Veiravé makes between poetry and science as a way of demonstrating "la confluencia de elementos naturales en contextos ajenos." She qualifies the *poemario*, however, as possibly in line with magical realism because of its mutual roots in surrealism (187). Her observations of the parallels between the every-day magic in mixing the real and surreal and the "asociaciones" that Veiravé makes evolve into an analysis of how

science gives the poet a “punto de partida” for his poetry, inspiring him to see with new eyes (195). Precisely, the natural histories that Veiravé parodies represent the origins and the “modern” revolutions in how we observe and represent the nonhuman world. In this way Veiravé reminds his readers of the discursive similarities and dissimilarities of human subjectivity as far as “Nature” is concerned that have guided us to the current ecological debates.

From the very beginning of *Historia natural*, it is clear that there is a connection between Veiravé’s book and an early American-made natural history, Spanish Jesuit José Jolís’s eighteenth-century *Ensayo sobre la historia natural del Gran Chaco*. As a sort of epigraph for the entire book, and even before the title page, Veiravé alludes directly to Jolís’s work: “Historia natural y moral del Gran Chaco y de otros reynos / que trata de las cosas del cielo y de la tierra / animales / plantas / móviles / costumbres / museos / máquinas / y otros *objetos imaginarios*” (italics are mine).¹⁵ The epigraph clearly parrots the title of one of the first and most recognized natural histories to come out of the New World, José de Acosta’s 1690 publication, *Historia natural y moral de las indias*.¹⁶ By substituting “*indias*” with “*Gran Chaco*,” however, Veiravé indicates that his book of poetry is to be read as a natural history connected directly with Jolís’s. With this pseudo epigraph, Veiravé makes it apparent from the beginning of *Historia natural* that this “natural history” is more than slightly ironic by including everything from “animales” to “máquinas” and “objetos imaginarios.” Progressing increasingly along a gradient from natural to imaginary, this brief introductory phrase sets the iconoclastic tone of the tome. A natural history, for the author of *Historia natural* includes all that is natural and

artificial or “imaginario.” This epigraph is not the only intertextual link, however, between Veiravé’s book and that of Jolís. At the beginning of the second section of *Historia natural*, “Libro II,” Veiravé includes a direct quote from the Spanish Jesuit’s work, and in several of the poems the poet refers directly or indirectly to the latter’s study of the region and to the scholar himself. Veiravé’s interest in linking his poetry with this eighteenth-century manuscript can be read as a sign that the poet understands the geo-biographic importance of a natural history as well as the episteme that Jolís’s work reflects as a product of human subjectivity in the years of the Enlightenment after the Scientific Revolution – a time in which “Science” had already begun to come out of Latour’s platonic cave (Cohen 22-23).

Though Argentina had a few decades yet to become a nation when Jolís wrote and published his study in 1789, it took more than two hundred years for his work to be translated from Italian into Spanish in 1972 – something that might have contributed to its nonexistence in many canons relating to Latin American natural histories (Maeder 9). Fortuitously, at the time of the publication of the Spanish translation, Veiravé worked for Universidad Nacional del Nordeste, which financed and published the work (“La poesía” 16, Maeder 27). Veiravé’s *Historia natural* was published shortly thereafter in 1980 and so his allusions to an old work, as is Jolís’s study, are also allusions to a rather new work because of the contemporary translation date. Even though Jolís’s *Ensayo sobre la historia natural del Gran Chaco* most likely continues to be an obscure work for the reader of Veiravé’s poetry, one can still analyze its role in regard to *Historia natural* as a text that paradoxically links the poet to a specific region while it also distances him from that same place.

That is, the Jesuit's text vindicates the native peoples' culture and history, in addition to promoting the utility and beauty of its landscapes and climates, but it also represents a colonial or even neocolonial, and therefore non-native, voice and knowledge (Maeder 20-3). In effect, Veiravé's *Historia natural* is a reading of scientific and humanistic discourse as well as it is a reading of the colonial perspective of Spanish American nature.

To complicate a reading of Jolís's text even further, then, his voice and perspective are not only non-native, they are a voice and a perspective that come out of a time period in which the Enlightenment was already well developed and the Scientific Revolution was freshly affecting the worldview of those seeking knowledge and truth. The text is contemporary with those written in the time period between the publishing of seminal works by important figures such as Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin.¹⁷ By his own account Jolís sees fit to demonstrate that he did not intend to write a natural history from the stance of a "trained" naturalist. He writes, rather, as an astute observer and readily admits his lack of qualifications for the task. In place of professional qualifications, Jolís emphasizes his dedication to detail in his observation of the natural world. Indeed, it is this confession of ignorance that Veiravé quotes as the epigraph of "Libro II" in *Historia natural* (177). Because of his lack of education and time, Jolís believes that he cannot publish "una Historia Natural exacta y curiosa con términos técnicos y frases grecolatinas al gusto de los modernos Naturalistas" (90). His confession is understandable when we consider the context within which he was working at the time. In contrast to the seventeenth-century studies that based themselves on "affective interpretation of

metaphysical experience,” Jolís’s study was to be compared to fellow Jesuit studies of his time that “were based on a new-found faith in scientific facts and objectivity” (Huffine 282). Notably, the idea that one can write an “exact” natural history most likely comes from the influence of figures from the Scientific Revolution such as Carl Linnaeus, as Jolís himself points out (90), and from the Enlightenment such as Francis Bacon. Bacon encouraged experimental investigation through the newly formed scientific method and promoted ideas that submit the natural world to human domination as a means to understanding it. As pointed out earlier in the case of Juan L. Ortiz’s use of doubt to decentralize anthropocentric perspective, the baconian ideal of putting the human mind over all other matter only isolates humans from nonhumans, paradoxically impeding the human desire to understand the nonhuman.

Though Jolís cannot provide an “exact” natural history, he finds it necessary to write in dialogue and dispute with other natural histories that cover the same territory, including the aforementioned Acosta natural history, in order to confirm or correct the ‘truth’ of their accounts (Maeder 21-3). His study works as a clarification of the human perspective of nature, in a determined geographic location, and so his most convincing claim to scholarly authority relies on the fact that he is physically present in the environment he is studying. He is physically present, something that was not absolutely necessary for someone to write a natural history of a place during his time — Georges Louis LeClerc Comte de Buffon is one of the best examples of a practitioner of this sort of distance study — and so he is able to be an eye witness to Argentine nature’s beauty and utility (Gerbi 218-19). In

other words, he makes a claim about the value of environmentally embedded knowledge. On the other hand, he appeals to second-hand knowledge to fill in the gaps that his empirical knowledge cannot cover. According to Ernesto Maeder, author of the introduction to the 1972 edition of Jolís's study the Jesuit's references to historians are the weakest parts of his work because they reveal his mistakes and the limits to his knowledge (23-24). While his scholarship is instantly verifiable for anyone who has access to the same sources as he, his naturalist work carries more validity because its *ethos* is based on environmentally embedded and, therefore, empirical knowledge, which is not verifiable to the average reader. This privileged perspective notwithstanding, he was still a European voice writing for a European readership.

As was discussed in regard to Veiravé's eco-cosmopolitan poems in the previous section of this chapter, the joining of local, physical knowledge with global, more abstract knowledge in a unified argument communicates a way for humans to connect with nonhumans without losing their humanness. Jolís's refutation of faulty and "absent" scholarship and confirmation of more mindful scholarship regarding New World natural history demonstrates a human quality of making abstract meaning out of the experience of a material world: in other words, *poiesis*. Veiravé addresses this paradox of an environmentally embedded yet abstract perspective in *Historia natural*, in part, through his "asociaciones interminables." There are poems, for example, that are dedicated to plants and animals native to the Chaco región, like the previously discussed "El Zamuhu" (2: 192-93), and that refer to Chinese legends, like "El sapo" (2: 155), to Greek epics, like "Ybirapitá" (2: 188-89), and French

symbolist poets, like “Mallarmé” (2: 214). The poem “Hieronimus Bosch” displays Veiravé’s ability to juxtapose such things as the frequent floods of his resident city of Resistencia, Argentina, and a copy of the well-known painting *Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronimus Bosch in his home (2: 197). The speaker of the poem recognizes the incommensurability between a European sensibility and the American reality:

Cómo no se va a asustar aquí un pintor flamenco de estos
cambios de la realidad si su fantasía sólo sabe engendrar
maquinarias de monstruos devoradores europeos, un bestiario
de símbolos carnales en la aldea de Heterogenbosch! (lines 11-14)

Intentionally anachronistic, Veiravé’s poetic voice compares the fantasy of Bosch and with him the same hinge in time between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance from which Columbus emerges to the reality of the new world nature of the twentieth century. There is a hard line between abstract and concrete knowledge that even the vibrant imagination of Bosch or any other absent European cannot cross. *Historia natural*’s close connection with Jolís’s text supports this concept because of the Jesuit’s insistence on his environmentally embedded knowledge.

Notwithstanding Jolís’s empirical *ethos* and recognition of autochthonous and therefore environmentally embedded knowledge’s importance by using it throughout his work as a way to certify his own observations, he retains his non-native perspective regarding the Chaco environment. It is this perspective that influences his use of scholarly texts to convince and to prove himself to his European readership. The fact that he combines contemporary academic texts together with more ancient texts considered academic in their time makes sense

when one considers that Jolís was writing during a transitional moment in the history of natural histories. Tellingly, one of the ancient texts to which Jolís repeatedly refers is one of the oldest natural histories, Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* from first-century Rome, to confirm his conjectures based on his observations (121, 212, 225). Nevertheless, as he does with more contemporary texts, Jolís tempers his references to Pliny's work with clarifications and refutations of the Roman's obsolete observations. In other words, though *Naturalis Historia* is a product of the ancient world, the Spanish Jesuit, a son of the Enlightenment, feels obligated to measure himself and his work against that of Pliny. Ironically, Veiravé makes a similar move by placing Pliny's text as one more discursive layer in his "transparencias." *Historia natural* alludes to *Naturalis Historia* in direct references, in how Veiravé structures the poems as encyclopedic entries, and in its diversity of what Pliny deems as "natural" topics.

Veiravé's *Historia natural*, Jolís's *Ensayo sobre la historia natural del Gran Chaco* and Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* are each divided up into encyclopedic "Books" that cover either a single subject or multiple topics related to what is "natural." In the case of Veiravé and Pliny, "natural" includes not only plants, nonhuman animals, and humans but also art. As if to confirm a mutual agreement regarding this expanding sense of what is "natural," Veiravé's includes Pliny's own words, translated into Spanish, in an epigraph in *Historia natural*:

En efecto, ellos [los libros de la obra] no son dignos de tu genio (que en mí es en extremo insignificante) y no contienen ni digresiones, ni discursos o diálogos, ni sucesos maravillosos o aventuras variadas, todas cosas agradables de escribir, atrayentes para los lectores, ya que el asunto que yo

trato es árido: se trata de la naturaleza de las cosas, es decir, la *vida*. (2: 211, emphasis is mine)

In her reading of this and similar statements from *Naturalis Historia*, Sorchá Carey points out that according to Pliny, “Natural history” includes all points and aspects of *life*, and so it includes all that exists in the world (17-18). But, of course, Pliny’s world was systematically anthropocentric, placing humankind (mostly men) at the center of the world and the world at the center of the cosmos that rotates around it. “Nature” according to Pliny, however, exists as the “other,” though it is an “other” that is the artist that has made humans and nonhumans alike (Carey 133-5). Thus, paradoxically, “Nature” is the creator and the created; all that is “Nature” is life.

To a contemporary reader, *Naturalis Historia* is not a strictly scientific text, by any stretch of reason. It is based on the careful observations of its author, but, as is the case in Jolís’s study, it bases much of its conclusions on the texts of others. Both Pliny and Jolís reference nameless Greek and Roman authors to establish their own *logos* and to demonstrate the superiority of their own texts via their bibliography, as it were (Carey 23-4). Though one cannot qualify Pliny’s work as scientific by today’s standards, it does “converge with its twentieth-century descendants [...] in its concern with totality” (Carey 17). It handles such totality by way of categorizing it, not too dissimilar to the way that biological sciences categorize the study of life into specializations such as entomology, mammology, botany, and ecology. As we have already observed, *Historia natural* also follows this pattern of organization by categorization. The poems do not explicitly indicate any one theme necessarily, but they do infer a theme to the degree that they indicate to

what “Libro” in the book of poems they belong. That is, the “Libros” are divided thematically into “animals,” “plants,” “art/culture,” and poetry successively, as their poems indicate. In this way the structure of *Historia natural* functions even more as a parody of natural history’s categorization of the natural and artificial world. Titles of certain poems — especially those that portray actants of “Nature” — appear to be titles of a page from a natural history but their contents betray this expectation.

“Filodendros” is a poem as much about its ornamental plant namesake as *Don Quijote* is about the madness of creating everyday casual encounters with a love interest (2: 182). This relationship between title and poem is parallel to the relationship between the book’s title and its poems. Blanco finds that this structure of beginning with scientific discourse that breaks down at some point and turns into a “mirada alternativa al ámbito de la ciencia” (189). Within this parodic structure Veiravé links his poems and his “asociaciones interminables” in a “sistema,” as he likes to refer to the structure of his books of poetry. He reinforces and emphasizes the irony that he reveals through his poetry (“La poesía” 9).

Similar to Latour’s “associations” between the actants of life, Veiravé’s “asociaciones interminables” include humans and nonhumans, though the Argentine goes further, as we have discussed, including not only “natural” things but “artificial” things, those made by human hands and ingenuity, in this system. Works of art and household appliances can be connected; musical compositions, an overcoat or a photograph can be connected in this system. Nevertheless, the “asociaciones” that Veiravé makes do not come in random fashion in his poetry; rather he offers them as ways to unite diverse perspectives by way of an idea or a subject. The poems in

Historia natural that present irony and diverse perspectives most effectively are those that maintain the book's irony by juxtaposing representations of "Nature" from artistic and scientific points of view. With these juxtapositions the poems reconceptualize the homogenous "Nature" as the heterogeneous, and politically messy "natures" that we discussed earlier in our reading of Latour (*Politics* 29). For example, the poem "Consideraciones sobre las oscuras golondrinas" takes the discourse of the naturalist, Len Howard, regarding the migrations of swallows and weaves it together ironically with the classic Spanish poet, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's famous poem, "Rima LIII" – the same nostalgic poem to which Veiravé alludes in "Poema con color local" (2:167). Both Howard's work and Bécquer's poem have the bird in common and so the connections that Veiravé makes come across as one unit. He does this connecting somewhat seamlessly, though the two intertextual subjects of the discourses are separated into the two stanzas of the poem:

Miss Len Howard ha descubierto que las golondrinas emigran
 de un almendro del valle de Sussex a un campanario
 de un pueblito de Corrientes,
 del estado de Minnesota a la casa del Greco
 en Toledo,
 que avanzan por un deseo de orientación inexplicable
 y en cada una de las estaciones desovan, nos envían
 postales desde Brujas, evocan
 distintos lugares y después
 naturalmente
 se transforman en recuerdos o fantasías eróticas.

Inexplicablemente algunos enamorados se apoyan en el balcón

y se preguntan siempre de la misma manera:

volverán las oscuras golondrinas? (lines 1-14)

The connection between what Howard has “discovered” and Bécquer’s elocutions over a lamented love trace a gradual path through the poem but, in the reader’s hindsight, the speaker gives clues to this connection along the way. And looking at the entire poem at once, we see that in the beginning of the poem the “golondrinas” are literal, but by the end of the poem they are figurative. The crucial turn in this change in discourse is in line eight, the first line in the second half of the poem where the speaker personifies the swallows, having them send postcards. Including himself and an interlocutor as connected to the swallows, his tone becomes subjective, but only for a moment. This inclusion of himself in the poem is purposefully brief and serves as a pivot point for the gradual change of discourse. Ironically, with the exception of this subjective pivot point, though the discourse changes from scientific to artistic, the objective tone of the poetic voice does not change. By making such a gradual transition the poem makes a strong connection between the literal and the figurative because it obscures the supposed hard line between the two. To make this transition, the speaker is combining his reading of two texts and in this way the poem is a metatext. The speaker is “reading” the natural world via others’ readings of the natural world and the poem depends on the reader’s reading of the speaker’s “reading.” Again, the texts or discourses at the extreme ends of the poem are two supposedly opposite perspectives of truth. The first verse points directly to scientific discourse by mentioning Howards and by highlighting the idea of discovery. To point to Bécquer, and therefore artistic or

humanistic discourse, in the last verse, however, the speaker merely alludes to the Spaniard's famous first verse from "Rima LIII" (81).

That Veiravé has singled out Howard is significant when we consider her famously eccentric methods of observation. She considered each bird as an individual. And she carried out this sort of offer of subjectivity whilst living with the birds in her "Bird Cottage," as her home became known (Crist 181). Her method of understanding "Nature" as "natures" was to try to erase any artificial border between humans and nonhumans. Howard's attempt to make herself a bird or vice-versa, takes the birds to the point that, by the end of the first stanza, they lose their individuality and become abstract as memories or erotic fantasies. It is as if by treating the birds as equals, Howard has driven them off, instead of bringing them closer.

In place of the birds as the focus of human subjectivity, as is the case with Howard, Bécquer's focus comes from humanity itself. Although the swallows symbolize lost love or regret, and in this way they do not seem to get beyond the metaphor, Veiravé's speaker bases Bécquer's speaker's preoccupation with the swallows' return on the same natural mystery that Howard is also determined to clarify: a swallow's migration pattern. Within the lines of the poem, the words that point us to this mystery are "inexplicable" (6) and, nearly the same, "Inexplicablemente" (12). The former pertains to the birds, the latter to the lovers contemplating the birds. Here the irony is clear: the naturalist and the poet are both unable to represent a human-nonhuman mystery. In the case of Howard, the birds are treated like humans in order to bring them closer to us, and therefore

understand them, and in the other case they are used to help understand the passage of time and the corresponding loss of human love.

In “Hormigas,” another poem from “Libro II,” we can see another demonstration of the human comprehension of the nonhuman irony between scientific and poetic representations of “Nature” (2: 171). Its title gives it a simple, encyclopedic air and shows how this poem functions under the natural history parody paradigm of categorization. Basically, the poem presents itself as part of an unnatural history of ants in which the speaker tries to explain why the ants do not suffer from loneliness:

Delicadamente transportan grandes piedras para
 las pirámides de los faraones
 apenas se tocan desde lejos
 con las antenas versátiles
 tristemente ignoran el sentimiento de los
 amantes separados en los aeropuertos
 y tampoco nada sintieron dentro del hormiguero
 cuando la noticia de la muerte de Chaplin
 recorrió el mundo en su silla de ruedas.

Según los especialistas de ciencias naturales
 toda esa soledad de las hormigas no se siente
 simplemente
 porque no se acoplan porque sus huevos
 son fórmulas del anonimato,
 y porque de la lluvia sólo sienten sustancias líquidas
 no sus nostalgias y eso
 les impide silbar un viejo bolero de Armando Manzanero. (lines 1-17)

Divided almost directly down the center into two sentences, “Hormigas” offers a reading in contrasts. We can interpret the “asociaciones” game from the first stanza as an ambiguous way to initiate a juxtaposition of the differences and similarities between the speaker’s subjectivity and what he perceives as a scientist’s objectivity. The speaker interprets his “investigation” of ants as from the same motivational standpoint as an “objective” scientist. They both want to know why the ants are not like humans and why humans are not like ants.

The way to express this curiosity is by way of the “asociaciones interminables” that come in commingled metaphors. In this way, images of pyramids, airports, and Charly Chaplin come together with the “antenas versátiles” and an ant hill to draw a representation that puts in doubt the actual focus of the poem. Is “Hormigas” about ants or about humans? Effectively, it is either an exercise in exaggerated anthropomorphology or it is a drawn-out way of indicating a group of people who look like ants — or it is neither. This ambiguity prepares the irony of the second stanza and the clear reference to the limits of scientific knowledge as far as the “why” regarding the loneliness of ants. Even if the explanations for why the ants lack emotions seem logical, the conclusion mocks the possibility of making such a conjecture based on scientific observations, seeing as how emotion is too abstract to quantify. Thus the word “simplemente” augments this mockery and ironizes a scientist’s work. Indeed, all of the poem’s irony and power rests upon the banal and common-sounding phrase that comes at the beginning of the second half of the poem: “Según los especialistas de ciencias naturales.” Without mentioning the supposed source of authority over the natural world, the poem would maintain its

humor but it would simply remain as a long list of metaphors that describe the communitarian life of ants. In the end, by ironizing scientific authority over determining the “whys” of the nonhuman world and by ironizing poetic perspective that anthropomorphizes the same, is to put “Nature” ironically between quotes.

Veiravé does not try to offer a “correct” perspective regarding the natural world in either “Hormigas” or “Consideraciones sobre las oscuras golondrinas.” Put another way, as we consider Jonathan Bate’s words, these poems are not ecopolitical but ecopoetic (42). They are not normative nor didactic. If they affect our perspective, their influence is more akin to what Octavio Paz declares in his book, *La otra voz: Poesía y fin de siglo*, and was reviewed previously in the introduction: “Ante la cuestión de la supervivencia del género humano en una tierra envenenada y asolada, la respuesta no puede ser distinta. Su influencia sería indirecta: sugerir, inspirar e insinuar. No demostrar sino mostrar” (137). One could claim that *Historia natural*, in its totality as part of a “sistema,” works in the same way. Its structure beginning with its title, its epigraph, and its literary and cultural allusions invites the reader to contemplate his or her own natural worldview with irony and circumspection. By way of the “asociaciones interminables” that he makes, Veiravé links both concrete and abstract things of the world – including all that is human – in order to blur the traditional divisions that have existed between them. This blurring is why the description of a whale’s skeleton can be put in the position of supporting a lover’s blue-jeaned legs in “Apología de la ballena,” and a quote from a “novela de la tierra,” *La vorágine*, mingles with biology, the “agrimensores kafkianos,” ants, linguistics, and metapoetry in “Naturaleza y tratado

de la antropofagia.” Nature is not “Nature” because, as Latour indicates, it is a multitude of “natures” that are each linked intimately, whether it be emotionally, physically and culturally. Humans cannot abstain from human subjectivity, however, when we are poetizing the interrelationships among ourselves and nonhumans. If the poems that we have analyzed here from *Historia natural* underscore human subjectivity in its diverse forms as ironically unavoidable, then, as we will see in the next section, poems such as “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer” from Veiravé’s collection, *Radar en la tormenta* (*Obra poética* 2: 227 - 309), make a case that human subjectivity and our recognition of its limits can paradoxically help us to connect with each other and with nonhumans. In order to understand how human subjectivity can aid interconnectivity among humans and nonhumans, according to several of Veiravé’s poems, one must first consider one’s own, intimate subjectivity and its limits.

Intimate Interconnectivity

A poem’s indigenous material, its patterns and ideas, cannot be exhausted through mere static contemplation. In order to be contemplated aesthetically, they ask to be thought through, and a thought once set into motion by a poem cannot be cut off at the poem’s behest.

-Theodor Adorno, “Lyric Poetry and Society”

Understandably, pronouns such as “yo,” “mí” and “mío” dot Veiravé’s lyrical landscape. Veiravé’s poetic voice is purposefully subjective but, though this may go without saying, the prominence of singular personal pronouns in his poems does

not necessarily mean that Veiravé's poetry is autobiographical. However, the speaker's frequent references to people and places from Veiravé's life give many of his poems an autobiographical affinity that ask the reader to consider that the speaker and the poet share the same voice. Key to understanding how to read this autobiographical aspect of his poems is understanding that because of Veiravé's ecopoetic distribution of the poetic subject, the speaker's referencing Veiravé's life is not an act of self-indulgence. That is, because of how Veiravé places the speaker as one node among many within the dynamic interrelationships formed among the "asociaciones interminables," he does not center the poem on the speaker's subjectivity. The autobiographical references by way of his speaker may also seem to condemn his poetry as too hermetic or as bound to historical context but in actuality it gives his poetry a conceptual framework within which to connect human subjectivity and expression to nonhuman subjectivity and expression. Working with the limited perspective of human subjectivity, he shows how even with situations and experiences all too human, to connect with each other and the natural world is to complete our humanity. By exploring the limits of human subjectivity, Veiravé can then underscore the need for interconnectivity between humans and nonhumans. He does this by way of the speaker questioning his subjectivity and limited perspective. And similar to how Juan L. Ortiz's speaker displaces himself by seeking anonymity, Veiravé's autobiographical speaker never makes the poem exclusively about him. Clearly, however, Veiravé's poetic voice is not anonymous.

In poems that we have already studied like "Mi casa es una parte del universo" and "Poema con color local," Veiravé explicitly references his life. For

example, the speaker's "casa" is Veiravé's house in "Mi casa es una parte del universo," and "Resistencia" in "Poema con color local" is the same Resistencia, Argentina where Veiravé lived at the time that he wrote the poem. Furthermore, many literary critics and readers, including the poet in question, make direct connections between Veiravé's biography and his poetry. He underscores his health issues as forces that directed his life and work, for better or for worse ("La poesía" 25). Indeed, before his first encounter with mortality by way of Pott's Disease, his poetry is very lyrical, yet the biographical difference between poet and poetic voice rarely appears very salient. As his medical problems continued, this difference becomes less nuanced in the poetry he wrote. Because of this particularly strong link between Veiravé's life and his work, it seems fitting, then, that much of his poetry explicitly references his life. Autobiographical poetry is nothing new, of course, and if lyrical poetry can be defined by its subjectivity then it follows that lyrical poetry is a perfect vehicle for autobiography (Cuddon). What carries weight in our analysis, nevertheless, is reading Veiravé's autobiographical poetry as ecopoetry.

To read autobiographical poetry as ecopoetry can be a difficult task. Considering that we are working with a definition of ecopoetry as poetry that shifts the poem's emphasis away from subjects or objects to the relationship between them, then in order to read lyrical poetry that is also autobiographical as ecopoetry we must scrutinize its subjectivity. We must answer how anthropocentric poetry can also be ecocentric poetry. If we consider what Theodor Adorno writes about lyrical poetry, we do not have to exaggerate this combination because lyrical poetry

is already “social in nature” and therefore it already has the ability to undermine its own isolation or individuality. Adorno goes on to explain in his article “Lyric Poetry and Society” that:

(T)he descent into individuality raises the lyric poem to the realm of the general by virtue of its bringing to light things undistorted, ungrasped, things not yet subsumed — and thus the poem anticipates, in an abstract way, a condition in which no mere generalities (i.e., extreme particularities) can bind and chain that which is human. (213)

In other words, by speaking through subjective experience, lyrical poetry avoids speaking for everybody and in doing so it secures our heterogeneous character, thereby securing what makes humans human in contemporary “atomistic society.” Veiravé’s autobiographical lyric fits well within Adorno’s definition here because of the poet’s insistence on “bringing to light” how the isolating effects of modernity are able to be overcome. He connects “generalities” like elements of popular culture, science, and politics to his intimate life and in doing so he emphasizes both the individual and society at the same time. In this guise, “Mi casa es una parte del universo,” for example, is a manifesto against isolation brought on by modernity. Veiravé’s autobiographical poetry is also ecopoetic, then, because it emphasizes ecological interrelationships by way of the individual.

One of Veiravé’s most personal manifestations of both autobiographical and ecological poetry comes in his poem “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer” from *Radar en la tormenta* (*Obra poética* 2: 294). Though it was published in 1985, the poem makes reference to a specific time during 1982. During this time Argentina was still under the rule of the military *junta* known as the *Proceso de Reorganización*

Nacional, headed, at the time, by Leopoldo Galtieri. More specifically, the poem references the time period dominated by the *Guerra de las Malvinas* or the Falkland Islands War as it is known in English. The autobiographical character of the poem is defined by the speaker recounting how he had to see off his son to fight the war, something that Veiravé did with his son, Federico (Blanco 206). This recounting is at the physical center of the poem, beginning at line eleven out of twenty-seven, and is presented by the speaker as a recent memory:

Y los padres nos quedamos mirando en el aeropuerto
 cómo nuestros hijos subían a los aviones de transporte
 con armas y cascos y mochilas y fuertes
 borceguíes para el frío del sur abajo del planeta que se iba
 cantando la marcha de San Lorenzo pero a él no lo podíamos distinguir
 cuál era desde la terraza porque
 ya no era nuestro hijo sino un soldado que iba hacia la guerra (lines 11-17)

More narrative than lyrical, this portion of the poem reads like a report of the day's occurrences, without any of Veiravé's typical *asociaciones interminables*. It reads more like a Billy Collins poem that recounts events in a straightforward, conversational way, and builds up an image that reveals a profound truth. Here we read, for example, how the speaker's son transforms from being a son into being one soldier amongst many. To become a soldier of war, the poem suggests, is to lose individuality, at least from the point of view of a soldier's parents. Lines eleven and twelve include all parents and their sons in this process of departing but by line fifteen the speaker becomes more personal and directs his word toward his own son just as he fades into the crowd, which emphasizes the loss of individuality.

Though the tone here is conversational, the image of parents seeing their children off to war, and, therefore, off to possible death, is an image painted with a mixture of emotions. The speaker completes this image in the continuing lines and therein makes it clear that his emotions are affecting him negatively, effectively making it hard for him to communicate with words what he is feeling as he watches the airplane and, therefore, his son get “lost” in the sky (lines 18 - 24). This image is one of the central images of the poem and by closely examining it we will see how it is aligned within a deliberate system of symbols that reaches beyond the poem into the collection of poetry and into *Historia natural*. We will see how this system creates a matrix of meaning that ultimately supports and emphasizes the ecopoetic power of “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer.”

Tied to the powerful metaphor based on the dialectic of individuality and identity loss already discussed regarding “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer,” the image of the airplane and its passengers getting lost in the sky further emphasizes the speaker’s limited perspective. For those familiar with Veiravé’s work, this image carries a heavy symbolic weight in one of his later collections of poetry. Indeed, it is the image that dictates much of the poetry in *Radar en la tormenta*, the collection wherein “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer” appears. The name of this collection refers to a poem of the same name in *Historia natural*, the collection preceding it (*Obra poética* 2: 160).¹⁸ “Radar en la tormenta,” perhaps one of Veiravé’s most well known poems, is a five-verse extended metaphor comparing the survival of an airplane in a thunderstorm to the process of poetry:

Y alguna vez, no siempre, guiado por el radar
 el poema aterriza en la pista, a ciegas,
 (entre relámpagos)
 carretea bajo la lluvia, y al detener sus turbinas, descienden
 de él, pasajeros aliviados de la muerte: las palabras. (lines 1-5)

Following the pattern set by the poem, *Radar en la tormenta*, the collection, is divided into four sections called books. With the exception of the last one, each book is titled according to a phrase from the poem: “Libro I: El poema aterriza en la pista”; “Libro II: A ciegas, entre relámpagos”; “Libro III: Pasajeros aliviados de la muerte: Las palabras.” The fourth and final book, “Libro IV: “Radar en la tormenta,” repeats the name of the collection and the name of the original poem and therefore creates another step in a *mise en abyme*. “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer” appears in this forth book. As part of this extension and repetition of “Radar en la tormenta,” the poems in *Radar en la tormenta* continue the themes and images of the original poem. For example, many of the poems in the collection such as “Fasten seat belt” (2: 283-84), “No smoking” (2: 285), and “Antipanfleteo arrojado por los harriers sobre las Islas Malvinas” (2: 296-97) make clear reference to airplanes and air flight, which is the central image of “Radar en la tormenta.”

Another poem in the same book of the same collection is titled “El cuadro dentro del cuadro” (2: 293). This poem immediately precedes “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer,” and as its title and content — including allusions to *Las Meninas* — explicitly indicate, the *mise en abyme* movement that Veiravé creates, beginning with “Radar en la tormenta” poem to *Radar en la tormenta* collection to “Radar en la tormenta” book (section), is directed toward the emotional experience of seeing off

one's children to die. As the speaker in "El cuadro dentro del cuadro" puts it, making a literal connection between *mise en abyme* and personal tragedy: "quién que vio ir a su hijo a la guerra / no vio cómo se caía el borde del abismo" (lines 9-10). This falling-like movement of the *mise en abyme*, or "placed in an abyss," matches perfectly with the fear of seeing one's loved one disappear via airplane and, in this sense, "Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer" is following the deliberate fear-of-flight leitmotif as part of the inter-collection "sistema" that Veiravé creates with "Radar en la tormenta" from *Historia Natural* and with *Radar en la tormenta*. As he explains in his autobiographic essay, his books of poetry became their own systems and not simply "*la recopilación de poesías disperses*" and their titles became vehicles for "el destino de los símbolos" of their poems ("La poesía" 9, italics in original). "Radar en la tormenta" as a title — whether that be for a poem, a book of poetry, or a section of a book of poetry — carries the symbols of tragedy and hope simultaneously.

Beyond the *mise en abyme*, falling-like movement provided by the extended and systematic metaphor beginning with the initial poem, "Radar en la tormenta," the image of the airplane full of young men getting lost in the sky on its way to battle and, perhaps, death in "Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer" may reverberate particularly with Argentine readers because of its parallels to the alleged *vuelos de la muerte* conducted by the military *juntas* during the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*. These *vuelos* are those that allegedly took men and women whom the *junta* had captured, interrogated, and tortured, to finally disappear them by way of dumping them, dead or alive, from a military airplane into the River Plate (República de Argentina 235-36).¹⁹ Veiravé was certainly aware of these atrocities,

as he directly points to them in his poem “Nunca más,” also in *Radar en la tormenta*, referencing the famous report on human rights abuses during the dirty war. In contrast to the *desaparecidos* — the men and women detained and disappeared by the government — Veiravé’s son, however, returned alive from the Malvinas war, though many young men certainly lost their lives in the war. The connections between the “disappearance” of those who were sent to fight in the Malvinas war and the disappearance of many other young men and women during the dirty war in “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer” reveal how Veiravé’s personal and subjective experiences bring to light “things undistorted, things ungrasped,” as Adorno puts it (213). Through poetry his limited perspective as an individual is able to link the diverse ways that the *junta* disappeared a great many from a generation of Argentines and, in turn, frustrated and manipulated the parents of the disappeared.

What Veiravé’s autobiographical poetics in “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer” also reveal while making an integral yet implicit connection between the individual and society is the ecopoetic connection between the individual, society, and the nonhuman. For Veiravé these connections come by way of the word, or, rather, by way of the lack of words. Returning to the “Radar en la tormenta” poem, we read that the words are the passengers, and the survivors of the poem “in flight.” If we combine the *mise en abyme* movement that we have isolated regarding state violence and the frustration of the Argentine populace under such violence with a words-as-survivors interpretation of “Radar en la tormenta” poem, we begin to see the full impact of Veiravé’s *sistema* in this case. That is, the tragedy provided by the symbol of the storm and the symbol of hope provided by the radar are both

reflected in the poem, the book, and the section. In the poem, the “palabras” are carried in the “poema” through tragedy, “la tormenta,” by hope, “el radar.” Following this metaphor further along the *mise en abyme* line of movement, we arrive at “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer,” which displays the precariousness of words in the face of tragedy. Lines eighteen through twenty-four, alluded to above to point out the speaker’s difficulty to communicate his emotions at seeing his son getting “lost” on his way to war, make it clear how words can fail even a poet at times of such stress:

y a mí se me cruzaron todas las palabras
 rotas
 tartamudas
 y todavía siento que en aquella madrugada
 cuando los aviones se perdieron en el cielo a las seis de la mañana
 supe que ya podía escribir rabiosamente
 la palabra cibilización con be larga, por lo menos. (lines 18-24)

The words “rotas” and “tartamudas” in lines nineteen and twenty respectively, isolated here both as single-word verses and by the clear indent emphasize the speaker’s inability to communicate his sense of loss and confusion. His limited perspective cannot follow his son and his limited ability to express himself cannot adequately convey his feelings. In such a state and influenced by the violent political climate of the time, the speaker can only express himself through biting irony. J. G. Borda refers to Veiravé’s writing during the dirty war as a sort of game with the censors. With *Radar en la tormenta*, in particular, Borda says that Veiravé’s poetry “devela pero también oculta” (91). Other critics such as Mariela Blanco point out,

however, that “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer” and other Veiravé poems that connect political oppression and poetic expression demonstrate how, just like the words “flying” safely through the storm in the poem, “Radar en la tormenta”: “[E]s posible hacer poesía con el peor de los materiales concebibles, con los más feroces y descarnados hechos de violencia de la historia argentina” (203). Even as it may appear to attempt to hide through metaphors or a “retórica del miedo,” as another poem from *Radar en la tormenta* refers to self-censorship (2: 288-89), Veiravé’s poetry deftly expresses the desperation of living under state violence. Underlining this point in “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer” is the speaker’s clear allusion to a dichotomy at the crux of the concept of state-sanctioned violence, such as war.

Most likely referring to the well worn-over dichotomy of “civilización y barbarie,” debated by fellow Argentine, Domingo F. Sarmiento in the nineteenth century regarding the “proper” base of a new nation, the speaker finally expresses himself by choosing the “civilización” side of this dichotomy. He clearly points out, however, that he cannot completely write out the word *civilización* as is proper and replaces the “v” with a “b,” as in *barbarie*,²⁰ suggesting that the barbarity of the government is hidden within Argentina’s supposedly civilized society. By combining both sides of the dichotomy to express his feelings in words, the speaker finds a middle ground on which his words can “land”: between *civilización* and *barbarie*, between the “hope” and “tragedy” symbolism dictated by the “Radar en la tormenta” *mise en abyme* system. Though the speaker is finally able to express himself in a single word, his overall inability to express his repressed feelings reflects his limited perspective as an individual. When we consider, nevertheless, the parts of the poem

both before and after the speaker's narrative regarding his son going off to war we see that when individuals consider perspectives outside of their own, they are able to effectively break down any limits impeding their individual perspective or expression. In this specifically ecopoetic case, the speaker considers the "perspective" of a nonhuman as a way to comprehend his trauma.

Because of the "sistema" of symbols built with a *mise en abyme* movement of which "Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer" takes part, the speaker's search for "hope" in the natural world to help him understand and express his emotions is not surprising. The lines from the poem that we have analyzed up to this point are at the structural center. Previous to and following the speaker's narration of watching his son fly away and his subsequent loss of words, the speaker contemplates the blooming of the lapacho tree's flowers. More to the point, the speaker's contemplation of lapacho trees is what leads him to reflect upon the episode that he then narrates. His present contemplation leads him to revisit the dilemma that he experienced in the past:

Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer en este mes de agosto
como si fueran el eje de la historia, y la explosión de
sus flores rosadas un movimiento circular de suaves rotaciones ¿qué
piensan dentro de sus ramas (aparentemente imperturbables) sobre
lo que pasó este otoño en los mares del sur bajo un manto de
neblinas? (lines 1-6)

Looking from a moment when his son has already returned to him and is no longer lost, the speaker continues to try to find a way to understand and express his original sense of loss. He questions what the trees have to say about human affairs

such as war. With a slight bitterness in words and phrases such as “eje de la historia” and “explosión,” he suggests that the tree’s showy display somehow mocks or is at the very least indifferent to his personal pain. Effectively expecting the natural world to parallel his feelings, he has been conditioned by the pathetic fallacy. Since lapacho trees bloom before they leaf, producing a spectacular sight, the speaker is taken aback by such beauty. Adding to this burst of colorful life is the contrast the trees make by way of their prevernal anthesis, or late winter bloom (*Nuevo árbol* 57). While other trees continue with winter dormancy, the lapachos flamboyantly signal the beginning of spring. Within the poem these blooms that end winter contrast with the “manto de / neblinas” that hid the speaker’s son from him in autumn, as winter began, and cause the speaker to contemplate such vivacity in the face of such despairing drabness, both in the environment and in his mood.

This, of course, is not the first time the speaker has seen this spectacle, as the title and first line of the poem indicate. Moreover, that the lapachos are blooming is not what causes the speaker to question them; rather it is the fact that they have bloomed *again* so brilliantly even after a winter replete with human anguish that has caught the speaker off guard. What connects the speaker’s contemplation of the trees to his experience seeing his son off to war is the speaker’s realization of his limited perspective. The speaker, as a poet, expects to be able to “read” the landscape for meaning but he ultimately feels confused by the blossoms because they do not reflect his emotions. Paradoxically, along with their showy display they offer branches that are “aparentemente imperturbables,” and therefore they seem unsympathetic to Veiravé’s problems. By questioning what these apparently

oblivious trees can teach him about loss and renewal, the speaker recognizes his limits as a poet.

These lines prepare the reader for the speaker's narrative of seeing his son off to war by setting up the image of a limited subjectivity. The speaker loses sight of his son in the crowd of soldiers and in the clouds. He then loses the ability to express his emotions. Here, confronted by the paradoxical flamboyant and reticent lapacho, he struggles to relate to his environment. Though Veiravé's emphasis on the limits of his subjectivity may appear to suggest his complete isolation from other humans and nonhumans, which would be antithetical to ecological realities, it more accurately points to how he is reliant on others. Effectively, the "asociaciones interminables" that he finds between humans, nonhumans, events, and ideas are connections that rely on limits to necessitate them. This interconnectivity is the essence of his eco-poetics at work in "Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer."

In the final three lines of the poem, after the narrative of dealing with sending his son off to war while only being able to express his emotions by way of a single word, though a word that holds a complicated meaning, the speaker returns to contemplating the lapachos:

Y como si nada hubiera ocurrido, en agosto los lapachos han vuelto a florecer
sobre nuestros corazones con armas de papel "igual que sobrevivientes
que vuelven de la guerra". (lines 25-27)

The speaker connects the lapachos' cyclical blooming to his own thinking by cycling back to the opening line of the poem, adding only "Y como si nada hubiera ocurrido." One could read this additional phrase as another show of bitterness if it were not for

the line that follows, expressing that the trees are blooming over the speaker's heart. Significantly, the speaker uses the first person plural to indicate a collective realization. This "we" can indicate the speaker and his wife, all of the parents of the Malvinas soldiers, Argentine society, or more broadly, the speaker and the reader. Instead of bitterness, the speaker sees hope in the example of the lapacho as it drops its flowers like leaflets or "armas de papel" convincing the speaker and others that there is life after tragedy. To this aim Veiravé ends the poem by quoting the Argentine poet María Elena Walsh's famous song, "Como la cigarra." He makes a slight but important change to the lyrics by pluralizing the subjects, which parallels the "nuestros" reference in the same verse.

The lyrics of the song refer to how, like a cicada who after having been underground for many years can "resurrect" and can come out of the ground, a person can "come out singing" even after having suffered tragedy, "igual que sobrevivientes / que vuelven de la guerra." Though the lyrics connect directly with the poem's overall narrative of a man whose son has come back from war but is reflecting on how it was to see that same son disappear as a soldier going to war in the first place, they also directly connect to the poem through their use of ecopoetic metaphors. In "Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer" the cyclical blooming of the lapacho tree signifies renewal in the face of tragedy and in "Como la cigarra" the cicada's "resurrection" from a life underground signifies the same thing. In both examples the poets look to the natural world for inspiration to overcome tragedy. For the speaker in "Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer," nevertheless, the lapachos are not simply symbols to utilize for one's own message, rather they participate in

an interrelationship with the speaker. They direct how they can be interpreted, in the face of pathetic fallacy, by the poet. It is this interconnectivity that inspires the poet to speak and to leave the trees to speak for him. And so, like a “radar” in the “tormenta,” interconnectivity between humans and nonhumans can aid poetry to carry the words and their meaning to safety.

Only Human

*Cuando viví con las raíces
me gustaron más que las flores,
y cuando hablé con una piedra
sonaba como una campana.*

- Pablo Neruda, “Demasiados nombres”

Veiravé considered his son returning safely from war a personal tragedy averted. And as we learned at the beginning of this chapter, the poet was already familiar with other forms of personal tragedy by the time he watched his son’s plane disappear in the sky. Facing and overcoming two bouts with Pott’s Disease gave Veiravé a new perspective on life:

Una de las cosas más importantes que aprendí en esas experiencias tremendas es que solamente los que han estado cerca de la muerte saben bien cómo es el tiempo de la vida que fluye armoniosamente, que de nuestras limitaciones físicas o espirituales podemos hacer una sabia administración regulada para alcanzar los más lejanos objetivos [...] (Poesía 24)

There is an at times palpable joy for life in many of Veiravé’s later poems and many of them celebrate the relationship that he has with the actors of the natural world. Whether its the brilliant lapachos that remind him of renewal or that, like poetry, “enriquece la vida” as the speaker declares in “Reportajes sobre la realidad” (Obra

poética 2: 235), or it is his beloved philodendron plants waiting for him at home, as a part of his home, Veiravé demonstrates an awareness that he is part of a larger mesh of life. Part of this mesh of relationships includes how ideas and objects contribute to our human perspective through their various “asociaciones” with which naturalists and poets can find common ground in understanding the migratory patterns of birds, as “Consideraciones sobre las oscuras golondrinas” shows.

To find middle ground between scientific and humanistic discourse regarding human to nonhuman relationships by parodying both discourses is to uncover the role of human subjectivity in determining our relationship with the actors of the natural world. Veiravé points out the ironies of our baconian domination of the natural world in *Historia natural* by utilizing an encyclopedic format that seeks to organize knowledge for consumption but that eventually succeeds in demonstrating how arbitrary knowledge making is. In his final collection of poetry, *Laboratorio central* (1991), Veiravé aptly synthesizes this coming together of two bases of knowledge creation in the first poem of the collection, “Arte poética como ciencia de la naturaleza” (Obra poética 2: 315). The similarities between “arte” and “ciencia” are telling:

Las ciencias etimológicamente nacen del saber
y se dividen en teóricas, prácticas y poéticas.
Las poéticas son ensoñaciones cósmicas
Bachelard dice de sus fenomenologías
que las imágenes son novedades
o sea, abren un futuro en el lenguaje
y,

una de las últimas verdades desde la
 Poética de Aristóteles,
 que el mundo real es comido
 por el mundo imaginario.
 Así en el futuro se donominará
 Ciencias Naturales
 a todo texto que sea un invento geométrico
 de la nueva vida de los hombres. (lines 1-15)

The idea that one side of the supposed science/art dichotomy can take over the other that the speaker proposes here in these lines suggests that perhaps such a dichotomy is only an illusion. At the very least it suggests that any differences between the idea of science and the idea of art are etymological in origin. In other words, the differences have as much to do with how we choose to name things as anything else.

As the speaker in Pablo Neruda's poem, "Demasiados nombres" (366, 368), explains, when we name the days of the week or our children we are performing a useless task. The days are erased by "el agua de la noche" (line 6), and "ninguna es Rosa ni María, / todos somos polvo o arena, todos somos lluvia en la lluvia" (lines 8 - 10). To name is an artificial act that does not change the essence of what is being named. Veiravé, with his poetry that parodies scientific and humanistic discourses, arrives at a similar conclusion. When he writes about the limits of personal perspective, however, he turns human limits into opportunities to make interconnections. His autobiographical poetry places humans and our limits within a set of interconnections and in doing so he converts supposed anthropocentric poetry into ecocentric poetry. One of the human limits that he utilizes to make

connections is our visual capacity, as we read in “Los lapachos han vuelto a florecer.” Veiravé considers the fear and desperation of not knowing the fate of one’s loved ones as akin to falling into an abyss, which underscores the influence that one’s vision has on one’s knowledge. Because of this limit and the fear that accompanies it, the poet recognizes our need to rely on an interconnection with others, both humans and nonhumans, to get beyond our limited perspective.

He also shows that there are different ways to conceive of perspective with regard to a sense of place. His house is part of the vast universe and may appear to be an inconsequential pixel in the overall picture of life but it is still there and it contains memories and microspaces that make it part of Veiravé. Indeed much of what makes Veiravé’s poetry ecopoetic is his emphasis on his relationships with nonhumans, places, and ideas. The “asociaciones interminables” that he finds through layering textual “transparencias” down over other texts and ideas bring out these relationships and connect them back to the poet. Cecilia Vicuña displays a similar way of weaving texts and images together, which bring out the points of contact between humans and nonhumans. In the following chapter we will analyze Vicuña’s work and we will see how her ecopoetics is a multilayered approach to representing the relationships between humans and nonhumans. And just like with Veiravé’s poetry, we will discover how Vicuña fits into the later portion of the environmental turn.

¹ Pott’s Disease is an extrapulmonary tuberculosis that affects the spine and can cause symptoms such as a hunch back (Gordon 128). The disease is named after the English surgeon Percivall Pott who, interestingly, is the first scientist who was able to link cancer with a toxic environment (in this case, chimney soot in industrial-age England)(Brown and Thorton 69).

² The reader will be reminded that Juan L. Ortiz was also a native of Gualaguay.

³ The full poem reads as follows: “Los poetas del interior y los tesoros de esmeraldas las negras esclavas / bañadas en oro y las orquídeas de olores perversos en el tropic vivimos / esperando que lleguen las carabelas de Buenos Aires y nos descubran / Mientras tanto nosotros pagamos religiosamente los impuestos / podamos las plantas del jardín y nos ocupamos de tener bien copiados / los poemas / porque cuando nos descubran tendremos que vaciarnos de golpe de papeles / inventor un pasado majestuosos y en legítima defensa / ir acostumbrándonos a sonreír entre vedettes y boxeadores. / Cuando nos descubran y nos busquen por las provincias / a nosotros: naturales de la poesía dedito alado de la / fortuna / monólogo del pésimo poeta hay que estar preparado / (Y sin resentimientos amigo sin resentimiento: nosotros también / fuimos moda en las aldeas.)”

⁴ Along with Donoso, Veiravé went through the IWP with such authors and the Native American poet Simón J. Ortiz, the Israeli novelist Avraham B. Yehoshua, and the Panamanian author Enrique Jaramillo Levi (International Writing Program).

⁵ The definition of “natural history” as a term and subject has been, and continues to be, debated by those who see it as form of scientific investigation and those that see it as amateur science (Secord 448-50). In any case in the present work, I use the term to indicate those studies of nature that come through an objective perspective.

⁶ The other book is *La máquina del mundo* published in 1976.

⁷ In his autobiography, Veiravé points out authors such as Horacio Salas, Ulises Petit de Murat (25), and, later accompanying *El imperio milenario*, which follows *Puntos luminosos*, critics such as Carlos Germán Belli (31). Other more recent readings of his work such as David Lagmanovich (88-89), Elisa Calabrese (56), Rafael Felipe Oteriño (whose article suggests a more gradual change rather than an abrupt division)(121), and most recently, Mariela Blanco (who also notes the critical consensus on this topic)(165).

⁸ “Locavore” is a neologism that defines those people who go out of their way to eat food that has only been grown and harvested near to where they live.

⁹ Lovelock proposed in the mid 1970s that the Earth should be studied as a single entity. Naming his hypothesis after the Greek goddess of the Earth, *Gaia*, Lovelock pointed out how the living conditions on Earth are maintained by the millions of living organisms who inhabit it and in doing so, they actively form a system that integrally supports the Earth (304-06).

R. Buckminster Fuller’s “Spaceship Earth” metaphor stresses the closed-system relationships that are revealed once we begin to think of the earth as a unified vehicle, as we would a ship or an automobile. All parts function together and affect each other both positively and negatively (Fuller 52-54, 87-89).

¹⁰ The ideas behind the theory of “bioregionalism” has been traced back to aboriginal times through the 19th and 20th centuries. It came together as an area of study during the environmental turn during the 1960s. The theory considers ecological regions that are made up of self-sustained ecosystems as the bases for any conservation plan (McGinnis 1; Aberley 13-16).

“Land ethic” is a phrase and idea created by the American naturalist, Aldo Leopold. He explains in his now canonized *A Sand County Almanac* that humans

needed to stop thinking of land as a slave to our needs and begin to think of it as a partner in a community of interests (202-03).

"Dwelling" refers to Martin Heidegger's phenomenological theories regarding how a person can live more "authentically" by not treating the natural world as a reserve of energy and utility. It is a theory that is popular with ecocritics because of its emphasis on a sustainable sense of place (Clark 59).

¹¹ The red quebracho tree that grows in the Chaco province is a highly valued for its hard, dense timber and as a rich source of tannins for a variety of industrial uses (*El nuevo libro* 95).

¹² "Tarzán," "Tit-bits," "Sobrino del Capitán" or "The Katzenjammer Kids" as it is called in English, and "Fantomas" were available in translation in Argentina during Veiravé's youth (Merino 35, 40, 66n; Steimberg 48).

¹³ Good examples of a contemporary naturalist are Annie Dillard with her famous *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and Aldo Leopold with *A Sand Count Almanac*.

¹⁴ Several good examples of this are the relatively dated *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1839) by Darwin or the more contemporary *Journey to the Ants* (1994) by Bert H. Hildobler and Edward O. Wilson.

¹⁵ For reasons unknown to me, the inclusion of this epigraph is left out of the version of *Historia natural* in Veiravé's *Obra poética*. For this reason have I included the reference to the original publication of the collection.

¹⁶ The full title of Acosta's work also demonstrates how Veiravé has used it to form his own: *Historia natural y moral de las indias: En que se tratan de las cosas notables del cielo / elementos / metals / plantas y animals dellas / y los ritos / y ceremonias / leyes y gobierno*.

¹⁷ If one considers Newton's *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* published in 1687 and Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* published in 1859 as their most important works, Joliís's natural history published in 1789 falls nearly equidistantly between them.

¹⁸ Helping out his readers, Veiravé includes the poem in its entirety as an epigraph at the beginning of *Radar en la tormenta*.

¹⁹ The final scene of the much-lauded Argentine film, *Garage Olimpo*, recreates one of these *vuelos de la muerte* to the tune of the patriotic aria "Alto en el cielo."

²⁰ This substitution can also be read as an allusion to a debate between Sarmiento and the Venezuelan poet Andrés Bello regarding proper orthography. Sarmiento advocated an "American" spelling of Spanish as another way to distinguish the new world from the old, while Bello debated the side of the Spaniards. In particular Sarmiento argued to eliminate Spanish homophones such as "z" and "c" (ç), and, of course, "v" and "b": "En América, nadie pronuncia el sonido v" (Sarmiento 4, 18).

CHAPTER 3

Reciprocal Weaving: Cecilia Vicuña's Multidimensional Ecopoetics

*It is difficult to undo our own damage, and to recall
to our presence that which we have asked to leave.*

- Annie Dillard, "Teaching a Stone to Talk"

Recently, in response to a question asking her what qualifies poetry as "ecopoesía," the Chilean poet, artist, and performer, Cecilia Vicuña (1947 -) comments that "toda la poesía pertenece a la tierra" (Personal interview). She further explains that poetry from many non-western cultures has always been "dedicado a escuchar al mundo suprahumano, al mundo más allá de lo humano." Her objection to "ecopoesía" as a label to distinguish one kind of poetry from another, as she makes clear, is just that, an objection to a label that claims to create something that was already there. Vicuña's answer both rejects restrictions on poetry and accepts the idea that poetry is always about humanity as part of a larger ontological mesh. This philosophy regarding poetry is similar to Juan L. Ortiz's statement about how "verdadera poesía" helps us discover "el misterio de un lugar" (OC 1077). That is, connecting both Vicuña's and Ortiz's statements, one understands that poetry is what it is because of and how it "listens to" and "discovers" the human-nonhuman interrelationships of the world. The sort of atemporal quality that Vicuña gives what has been discussed here as ecopoetry, though she rejects that label, is key to understanding how her work fits into our discussion. Her influences, literary and otherwise, from Latin America and beyond, and her experiences as a child, an exile, and a "native daughter" shaped both her life and her art, forming the foundation of her ecopoetics.

As the environmental turn was just beginning to gain momentum in the western world during the mid to late 1960s, Vicuña was coming of age. She essentially came into her own as an artist just as world leaders began to take threats against the survival of the earth and humanity very seriously. Whereas poets like fellow Chilean Nicanor Parra “awoke” to environmentalism when he was well into his career, Vicuña was exposed to it early enough that it has come to affect her work throughout her entire life. Compared to the poets in our current study, Vicuña, like Alfredo Veiravé, was more familiar with an environmentalist vocabulary than Ortiz was during his time. This lack of familiarity is most likely due to the generational differences between them combined with the relatively late appearance of the modern environmental movement and its accompanying discourse in relation to Ortiz’s life. It is precisely during the final years of Ortiz’s work that Vicuña began her life as an artist. This makes Vicuña’s place in the ecological turn in Latin American literature at the initial cusp of its aperture. Her work bridges and goes beyond this opening. In other words, Vicuña’s work from the time she was seventeen years old in the mid 1960s until today demonstrates both the philosophical impetus to present human to nonhuman relationships as governed by a dynamic, interrelated ontology and a political engagement with environmental discourse regarding ecological destruction. And like Ortiz and Veiravé, Vicuña has worked and continually works from the margins of the Latin American literary canon, both figuratively and geographically.

Vicuña has chosen to work outside of the cultural center of her country, but, unlike Veiravé and Ortiz, she has also chosen to live outside of her native country,

and outside of Latin America altogether. Living in New York since the mid 1980s, she continues to maintain a presence in Chilean arts and letters as an exile of sorts. At the same time her art and poetry is considered foreign to her North American audiences (“Vicuña: ‘En Chile’”). This dual marginality pertains to her work as well because of its multi-genre, multimedia character. She is a poet yet she is a performer, filmmaker, essayist and artist. Members of the communities that follow and enjoy these various genres have embraced her as one of their own while simultaneously considering her as a special case. As Vicuña puts it, like her relationship to Chilean arts and letters, she has a “magical outsider/rejected/included relationship to the art world” (Saterstrom). Similar to Ortiz, working from the margins frees her work from the canon. Often writing and performing in English, Spanish, and indigenous languages, she exists “en ese espacio entre las lenguas” and between cultures:

Los chilenos nunca me han reconocido como chilena. Yo no soy de ningún lugar, entonces ese no ser de ningún lugar, hace que yo sea del espacio, del momento y el espacio del momento, y entonces ahí bailo, ese es el lugar donde los sonidos danzan. (“Vicuña: ‘En Chile’”)

In New York, she is Chilean; in Chile she is not. Every so often, however, she appears in the Chilean news. Though her work still is regarded cautiously by Chilean *compatriotas*, admirers coax her back home. Only this past year Vicuña was celebrated in Chile to mark the publication of her most recent book, *Zen surado* — a tome containing several poems that were originally lost to censorship and dictatorship. It should be noted here that Vicuña’s initial exile was a consequence of Chile’s recent brutal past during the time of Pinochet’s regime, and that her

continued absence is the result of an economic reality: in New York she can make a living from art and poetry, whereas in Chile it would be very difficult to do the same ("Vicuña: 'En Chile'"). Though Vicuña has made her home in New York, her work, based on its subject matter and material, has a decidedly Latin American foundation. With a solid footing in Latin American culture, geography, and civilization, Vicuña's work is still able to cross cultural boundaries because of its interest in more universal preoccupations, such as human with nonhuman interconnections.

Amongst the cross-cultural preoccupations that surface in Vicuña's work, her concern for ecological and ethical interrelationships among humans and nonhumans has been one of the most *consistent* and *insistent*. From her initial creative forays until the present day, Vicuña has questioned humanity's self-imposed ontological hierarchy over the natural world. Her engagement with current and recurrent climate crises appears in her work beginning with her first *precarios* – the sculptures that she made and unmade out of wave-deposited detritus on a Chilean beach in the 1960s – and her first book of poetry and visual art, *Sabor a mí* from 1973. These beginnings reflect the nascent ecological thought that has formed the essential base of what we will call her ecopoetics. Vicuña has repeatedly returned to and added to these early works, reimagining and repurposing them. This progressive recycling of her work is ecological in and of itself. That is, by revisiting and renewing her work, she retains the initial poetic and political impetus that motivated her in the first instance and applies it to a present project or circumstance. She retains her poetic energy, as it were, by reintroducing it into her work, and she creates poetic movement by re-addressing certain subjects and

objects. It could be said, then, that Vicuña follows the “Second Law of Ecology,” as Barry Commoner, one of the pioneers of the modern environmental movement in the United States, notes regarding where things go when they are “thrown out”: “Nothing ‘goes away’; it is simply transferred from place to place” (40). Poetically, then, Vicuña throws little away.

In a dynamic sense her return to, and renewal of, the subjects and objects of her work, give both an atemporality and a temporality to Vicuña’s poetry and art. Her projects are always current but they also link with the past. For example, more recent art projects of hers that incorporate differing colors of unspun wool, like *Quipu Austral* from 2012, connect directly with projects like *Antivero* from 1981, wherein she weaves the banks of the Antivero river together with a slight thread, and with some of her earliest performance art like *El guante*, wherein she weaves a loose ‘glove’ over her hand as she travels on a Chilean city bus in 1966 (*Precarios, The Precarious* q22).¹ Not only does she connect her current work to her past work and life, but she also connects it to the ancient past of native peoples of the Americas through different methods and meaning. While she revisits her art’s past subjects and objects, she mixes contemporary and ancient words and methods together, reflecting what she has called “mestizo poetics,” as a particularly Latin American poetics (“Mestizo Poetics” xx). Combining video with ritual, for example, or mixing Spanish, English, and Quechua in a poem or performance, Vicuña refreshes and revitalizes the past, and justifies the present. In other words, Vicuña’s work is contemporary yet traditional, textual yet oral and visual, urban yet wild, and discursive yet performative. Ecopoetically, it looks to both the past and the future to

bring to the surface and to frame human-nonhuman interrelationships as necessarily reciprocal, unbreakable, even sacred or spiritual. Looking to the local past of her homeland, she channels oral and ritualistic non-western Amerindian traditions, planting her poetics and art in solid and sacred ground. At the same time she utilizes different media to extratextually present the reciprocity of her interrelationships with human and nonhuman natures.

Cecilia Vicuña's ecopoetics is multifaceted. Unlike Ortiz and Veiravé, Vicuña utilizes text, music, film, and several different artistic media to express her ecopoetic perspective. Though her career has spanned almost fifty years now, she has demonstrated a consistent interest and preoccupation with the state of human-nonhuman interrelationships. In the discussion that follows we will see how multifaceted work comes together to express an ecological thought and ecopoetics based on reciprocal human-nonhuman interconnections and interrelations that include her Andean indigenous-influenced ritualistic performance, embodied poetics, oral textuality, and ecophrastic weaving. Additionally, we will illuminate Vicuña's ability to recycle her work that deals with the environment and her own subjectivity determined by place and time, which, in turn, reveals how she views the interconnectedness of humans and nonhumans. Indeed if we look back at her life, writing, and art, we can see how and why she revisits this interconnectedness in her work from within the Latin American ecological turn until today.

The Poet: A Delicate Occupation

*Torturas
a un intelectual por ejemplo
basta con esconderle los anteojos*

- Nicanor Parra "Ecopoemas"

In several interviews, as a way of reflecting on her views on the nonhuman natural world, Vicuña references her 1970 failed attempt to convince the then president of Chile, Salvador Allende, to declare a "National Seed Day" dedicated to a nationwide seed-planting program. "Se cagó de la risa," Vicuña recalls the president responding ("Vicuña: 'En Chile'"). Allende then joked with her that it might work in the year 2000.² Her petition could have been partly the result of the socialistic utopian fervor that the 'Chilean Revolution' had created within certain circles like the artistic community. Nevertheless, even before Allende's ascendance, and only a few years before she left to study in London where she eventually remained in exile after the 1973 coup, Vicuña had been planting her own tree nursery and giving saplings away in shantytowns. Similar to the reaction that Nicanor Parra's fellow members of the *Unión Popular* had to his new-found interest in environmentalism we discussed in the introduction, Allende's response to Vicuña's idea reflects the general political emphasis at the time in Latin America – and in many parts of world for that matter – on social inequality issues, for example, over environmental issues³. That is, as we also discussed in the introduction, during this time in question, environmentalism was viewed by many in Latin American politically left circles as anti-development and thus neocolonial. Economic development, of course, was and is viewed to be a solution to social inequality and neocolonialism, and so

environmentalism, at least global north environmentalism, was viewed as working against social equality. Indeed, the environmental turn in Latin America reflects the change in political attitudes regarding the link between environmental and social issues from conflicting to connected. In Vicuña's individual case, her early understanding of environmental crises was not tied to her political leanings; rather it was her growing up in a "wild place" coupled with her interest in, and reading of, scientific thought that initiated her attention to ecological issues ("Vicuña: 'En Chile'"). As she related to me in a recent interview, she remembers reading in the early 1970s an entry in the *Enciclopedia Barsa* regarding the Club of Rome and its reports on the dire future of humanity on account of our material waste and excess. She soon became concerned with how humans were interacting with the natural world. Notwithstanding her personal study of environmental issues, evidence of Vicuña's concern for human-nonhuman interrelationships appears early in her career by way of her *precario* art pieces. From the label she puts on these temporary sculptures, to the *in situ* aspect of her work and its display, and to the level of participation that she shares with the place and elements that make up her work, Vicuña's *precarios* reflect a collaborative, even reciprocal relationship among the artist, the place, the materials, and the elements (*The Precarious* q14).

One of Vicuña's first *precarios*, *Con-cón* (1966), is a good example of how the artist, the place, and the materials come together to bring out where, as she puts it, "poetry inhabits" (*The Precarious* q11, Lippard 8). Essentially, *Cón-cón* is a collection of twigs, leaves, feathers and other "basuritas" that the artist has deliberately arranged in the sand just as it meets with what appears to be a large patch of sea

figs.⁴ More specifically, Vicuña has created an enclosed area with the twigs and leaves, stuck erect, forming the outside border. In the center of the shape, yet on opposite ends, the artist has drawn two figures. The first is a perfect circle made of what looks like a discarded length of marine rope while the second is a spiral that Vicuña has drawn in the sand. As if they were drawing an invisible line that separates the two circular shapes, two feathers stand perpendicular to ground. The altar-like sculpture is visibly fragile to the whims of the elements, as the artist indicates herself (q14). A key component in the reciprocal quality of the work, the elements participate in creating the statues' precariousness by altering and eventually eliminating all traces made by the artist. That is, each *precario* depends upon both artist and the various nonhuman actors, such as those in the wind, water, and sand, to be complete. All sides are working in the creation of the art and all sides depend on each other for the work of art to exist.

It should be mentioned that though Vicuña's *precarios* are temporary sculptures, the photographs and videos of these sculptures offer another level of interpretation for the viewer and/or reader to consider. Perhaps one can appreciate the full temporary quality of the *precarios* more through film than photography, as we will discuss later, but through both media Vicuña has recycled her sculptures for different projects. Photographs of *Con-cón* alone appear in a few of her works such as *quipoem* and *Precario/Precarious*. In both of these tomes, Vicuña has intertwined words and photographs of *Con-cón* to form a poem or poetic phrase. The poem in



Fig. 1. *Con-cón*, Chile, 1966⁵

quipoem partially accomplishes this intertwining by not explicitly mentioning the photographs. It takes the images for granted and incorporates the reciprocal quality of the *precario* into its meaning. Below the first photograph of *Con-cón* included in



Fig. 2. *Con-cón*, Chile, 1966

As shown by the handwritten font earlier in the poem and by the zigzag-like form given to these lines here, Vicuña's poetry is often visually dynamic, as we will later discuss in more detail. The back and forth path that the lines of poetry make is similar to the spiral marked in the sand. Indeed, this motion, like the *vaivén* movement discussed earlier with regard to Juan L. Ortiz's poetry, reflects the reciprocal quality of the ecological message. This is the same reciprocal quality that Vicuña refers to as the "unión complementaria" in one of her poems from the "Reflejos" portion of her book, *La Wik'uña*. According to the speaker, reciprocity is the quality of erasing false dichotomies: "Unión complementaria, paridad / [...] Nacer y morir / Dar y recibir / Reciprocarse, el fundamento de la igualdad" (lines 1, 6-

8). The line in *Con-cón*'s spiral folds back on itself without ever touching and the lines of poetry above do likewise. Each line, with the exception of the first and last — like the beginning and the ending of the spiral — connects with the one that comes before and after it in a way that isolates it from and integrates it with the other. As the lines advance on the page the aspects of the sculpture unfold together with their subjectivity. The spiral hears, the furrows receive, the stick speaks. All together they form a “sign” that pierces the earth/sky false dichotomy in order “to write from below.” Completing the reciprocal act, *Con-cón* can see what has been erased.

On the pages that follow the lines and second photograph referenced above (Fig. 2), the final line and photograph from the *Con-cón* segment in *quipoem* bring the reader back to the reciprocally precariousness of Vicuña's sculpture and poetry. Spread over two pages, a photograph of another iteration of *Con-cón* from 1967 looms over the single line: “The tide erased the work as night completes the day” (q14-q15). By comparing the reciprocal and collaborative process involved in making the *precarios* to the daily cycle of life and light, the speaker contextualizes the artist's relationship with the art and the nonhuman elements.

Out of the same period of her first *precarios* Vicuña demonstrates her direct engagement with these same relationships and environmental politics, as we can see in *Sabor a mí*.⁸ In the “Diario de Vida” portion of the book, which is filled with images of *precarios*-like objects that are displayed chronologically according to a date from the London spring and summer of 1973, an object from late August stands out. The object highlights Vicuña's early engagement and understanding of

environmental problems within the context of an otherwise anti-fascist, highly political, and erotic book of visual art and poetry. It is made out of what appears to be a strip of bark wrapped together with another unremarkable piece of wood by a string. One can also just make out an unintelligible date imprinted on the small piece of wood. Similar to the other images of objects in the book, this image of the bark and string is accompanied by a text that functions as, what the poet terms, a “leve explicación.”



Fig. 3. From *Sabor a mí*, page 42.

Vicuña initially introduces all objects by explaining in part that each object, its text, and accompanying date is meant to be read together as being a chapter. The collection of the objects, then, form a novel. These poem-objects, as the scholar Jill Kuhnheim deems them, take “part in a ritual discourse whose purpose is to transform” (56). Their ritual discursiveness goes toward fulfilling the ultimate goal of the objects, which is to kill “tres pájaros de un tiro: hacer un trabajo mágico, uno revolucionario y otro estético” (*Sabor* 19). In the case of the bark and string poem-

object, the text, written in verse, that accompanies its image conjures up socialism's power to take care of the environment:

los palitos del bosque o la reforestación o el control
de la contaminación por las obreras mineras campesinas:
las trabajadoras son la vanguardia en la defensa
del equilibrio ecológico y los recursos naturales.
las industrias del área social no contaminarán
el medioambiente, no seguirán el modelo
de industrialización capitalista! (42)

As these lines suggest, though Allende had expressed his doubts about Vicuña's ecological projects, she continued to believe in their future under socialism in opposition to an industrialized capitalism. The poet expected Chilean socialism to lead a red-green revolution. When we consider that she created these objects out of litter that she found in the streets of London, the city at the center of the Industrial Revolution, their created-out-of-detritus state emphasizes Vicuña's own revolutionary message. As she explains in her introduction to the book, "Acerca de los objetos,":

Desde que sobrevino [the 1973 coup] los objetos son
para que se organice la resistencia, para que se desarrolle
el ejército revolucionario, se tome poder y el socialismo
pueda florecer en Chile, como habíamos elegido. (19)

Not only did she reclaim capitalism's garbage to make it resist its maker, she personally printed and put together each of the original two hundred and fifty copies of *Sabor a mí*, effectively undoing the industrial assembly line (*Sabor* 10). Ironically, her choice to make each book by hand underscores an environmentally

friendly, artisanal movement more than it does a workers' party production mentality in the way that it embraces individuality. Each of the copies of the 1973 *Sabor a mí* is distinct from another and so we can read Vicuña's intent for the book and its eclectic multi-genre content to restore Chile, by way of the power of ritual, to what its people had already fairly chosen, as both a call to restore the broad hope that Allende's initial victory promised and as a statement of Vicuña's own hope for the future of Chilean socialism. Kuhnheim sees *Sabor a mí* as a continuation of the Chilean socialist revolution in the way that the poem-objects' interplay of image and text decenters the author and "enacts (sic) cooperative constructions against the incipient consolidation of authoritarian discourse in 1970s Chile" (58). Good evidence of this fact is that Vicuña had created many of the objects before the coup with the purpose of sustaining the Chilean experiment with socialism that was, at the time, under tremendous pressure.

With the violent change at home on account of the 1973 coup, Vicuña did not want to publish her *Diario de objetos* – the title she was preparing to give her ensemble of poem-objects before Pinochet overthrew Allende – as she had originally intended, without making sufficient changes to respond to Chile's September 11. Part of this change was to include poems from the original *Sabor a mí*. Just as she chose to utilize the objects in a different way, she repurposed her poems by including only a fifth of the original one hundred poems that she had prepared for the book (*Soy yos* 140).⁹ One of the poems that the poet left out in 1973, but later included in the 2010 anthology of her work, *Soy yos*, stands apart from the others while it makes a clear connection to the bark and string object we have already

reviewed. Titled “Ecólogo barbitúrico,” the poem is reminiscent of Parra’s word-playing *ecopoemas* and Vicuña’s later work, beginning with *PALABRARmas* from 1984 (*Soy yos* 23 – 24). Written in 1971 while she was still in Chile and before the 1973 coup, “Ecólogo barbitúrico” reveals the poet’s ecopolitical beginnings while the Allende presidency was still new. Vicuña told me in our interview that she still recalls the poem as one of the first manifestations of her ecological sensibility, though it was initially censured. The poem reads like a laundry list of occupations that correspond to ecological problems:

La nueva ocupación más delicada del siglo
 debemos ofrecer a nuestros hermanos
 y amigos: la de preservador natural
 perseguidor de contaminadores
 plantador
 arbóreo ilustre
 flor de los abismos infernales
 predicador de pobreza dignas
 y el control de la reproducción
 santo jugueteón
 alimaña clorofila
 amador
 de animales y especies
 aquiler del asma
 muñequito que odia el smog. (lines 1-15)

The speaker lists the occupations in a way so that they slightly commingle and therefore connect with each other. Leaving out commas, creating an asyndeton-like effect, the enjambment of the lines speeds up the list yet the separation of the verses

spaces it out visually for the reader. In this way, activist-oriented occupations like “perseguidor de contaminadores” and more general or passive occupations like “amador / de animales y especies” share the same function and become a single “ocupación” as the poem’s opening line suggests, and not the plural, “ocupaciones.” Additionally and importantly, the “delicada” aspect of this single “ocupación” stems from the juxtaposed images of ecological problems and solutions. Flowers should be planted in the “abismos infernales” and objects of innocence, such as dolls, should be used to ward off contamination. The speaker suggests that this occupation is delicate both in the sense of the occupation’s duties and as a result of not employing anyone in said duties.

“Ecólogo barbitúrico” did not make the press for the 1973 publication, even though the bark and string poem-object did. Felipe Ehrenberg, the Mexican artist who is Vicuña’s collaborator from Beau Geste Press on the first edition of *Sabor a mí*, introduces the book by emphasizing its immediacy with regard to the coup, but he also writes of it being “hecho con deshechos” (16). *Sabor a mí*’s reactionary immediacy filtered out poems like “Ecólogo barbitúrico,” but it could not completely eliminate the clear link that Vicuña makes between her green and red hopes. As we have already discussed, the poet was already fulfilling the “plantador / arbóreo ilustre” role with her tree planting as she was writing “Ecólogo barbitúrico.” Though she admits that she was naïve, as far as the influence she hoped to have from exile, her vision in this poem is undeniably sharp (“Libro censurado”). Indeed, many of the poem’s suggested occupations have since been created around the world and in Chile in one form or another. As we will see in our discussion, Vicuña can very well

claim several of these roles through her art and poetry. Her performances *predican* through their dialogue with the present and past, her films *juegan* by mixing the visual and the aural while suggesting the tactile, and her poems *aman* in the connections that they weave between humans and humans and between humans and nonhumans. It would seem, then, that the “ocupación más delicada del siglo” is that of the poet.

The Ecological Mestizo: Poetry in Place

Minha terra tem mais terra

- Oswald de Andrade, “Canção do Regresso à Pátria”

Fittingly or not, Cecilia Vicuña’s first published work, *Sabor a mí*, was published, as I have already noted, while she was living in London, by a non-Chilean editorial, and with the help of a Mexican expatriate. This cosmopolitan character of her first entry into public readership/viewership, corresponds with her feelings that she lives between languages and in-between spaces. Her ecopoetics, nevertheless, suggest that Vicuña is a poet *in* and *of* place. She has the ability and interest, as an artist and performer, to make site-specific works wherein her art *reacts* and *interacts* with the chosen place and her audience. Not only do her *precarios* and the objects from *Sabor a mí* connect the poet to a certain place, but several other place-centered works of hers, such as *K’ijllu* (1983, 1985) in Rhode Island and Maine, *The Hudson River* (1989) in Manhattan, and *Quipu Austral* (2012) in Australia, show how she has been able to connect to a variety of places.¹⁰ What is common among these works is their site specificity. That is, Vicuña, like artists such as Andy Goldsworthy,

utilize and incorporate the local material and environment to create an art piece that connects to the site via its material while distinguishing itself from the site via its form. Unlike Goldsworthy, who almost exclusively uses materials found on site, Vicuña is not averse to combining her own materials with those she finds. She combines vicuña hair yarn that she has brought with her and sticks, feathers, or other random objects located near where she sets up her *precarios* or other sculptures. By utilizing these found objects alongside her own, she incorporates her own materiality into the site and thus interacts with each specific place. Much of her poetry also connects itself to place through its sound and sense.

It becomes clear to the reader that Vicuña locates her ecopoetic place – both literally and figuratively – in the Andean region of South America. It could be easy to point to Vicuña's affinity for, and focus on, this region of the world as a natural extension of her longing for home from exile, and her work reveals as much in determined moments. Her connection to the region, however, is a combination of biography, geography, and philosophy. She was raised in what she refers to as a "wild place." Living in "puro campo," without television or radio and being left to discover and play in the natural setting surrounding her home, Vicuña was given the freedom to discover nonhuman nature independent from human influences ("Vicuña: 'En Chile,'" "Performing Memory" 37). Her work with the Guambiano tribal cooperative in Colombia after her return to the Americas from Europe in 1975 deepened her interest in and concern for Native American culture and cosmology ("Choosing the Feather" 18). Though she only recently discovered that she has indigenous DNA ("Conversation" 7), and has mostly claimed to "have invented [her]

indianness,” Vicuña’s work has maintained links to indigenous culture that she began making soon after her initial return to American soil (Lailhacar 46). Her interest goes beyond her art as well. She edited *Ūr: Four Mapuche Poets*, and has co-created *Oysi.org*, an online organization that is set up as “the only knowledge-based, self organizing network reflecting the indigenous concept of reciprocal exchange in its digital structure” that promotes and hopes to help sustain oral cultures around the world. These projects reflect her interest in how art and indigenous knowledge can link together to highlight underlying and universal truths.

Not only do many of her works take on or utilize indigenous cultural tropes like weaving and language, sacred places, and community performance, but she also adopts indigenous philosophies that regard the earth and its elements as subjects capable of responding to other subjects, such as humans, beyond scientifically-explainable phenomena. Though she does not subscribe to any one particular amerindian cultural heritage, Vicuña is careful to reference specific indigenous sources in her art. She does not conflate indigenous cultures into one, which would negate important differences in their cosmology and identity. Because she does not identify with a specific indigenous group and philosophy, however, she has felt free to connect with multiple amerindian cultures. This liberty allows her to express ideas from Incan, Mapuche, and Guarani cultures, for example, all in the same work. One of the particular tropes that she has tied to several different indigenous philosophies is the effect of rituals on human-nonhuman interrelationships. In addition to her connection to indigenous cultures through her use of ritualistic performance, including the figure of the shaman as a poetic and ethical position,

Vicuña reflects the art of indigenous poetry in her own manifestations of oral culture. Orality appears in more than just her performances; it arises in her texts as well, as we will discuss later. By occupying these avenues of different indigenous aesthetics and ethics, she lays claim to an often overemphasized, yet essential cultural locus that deserves “a central place in future ecocritical scholarship on Latin America,” something we have not touched upon in depth in our reading of Southern Cone ecopoetics (Kane 234).

Though the consideration of indigenous culture and influence in ecocritical analyses of Latin American literature is not a complete novelty,¹¹ a close reading of Vicuña’s work parses out how she neither plays the indigenous card too heavily, so to speak, nor misappropriates indigenous culture from an intellectual distance. In his article “Ecocrítica e hispanismo,” José Manuel Marrero Henríquez reviews the history of ecocritical assessments of Latin American literature, and views a divide in how critics emphasize indigenous cultures within eco-friendly literature. On the one hand are critics like Jorge Paredes, Benjamin McLean, and Steven White, who push for the necessity of Latin American indigenous cultural links for literature to be properly assessed as “literatura ecologista” (196). And on the other hand there are others like Jorge Marcone, Stephen Hart, and Carmen Rivera Villegas who have been able to show how non-*indigenista* texts also contribute to the Latin American ecological literature conversation (201-03). Marrero Henríquez rightly points out that if ecocritical studies of Latin American literature are limited as Paredes and McLean posit, they abandon “la posibilidad de hallar contenidos y formas ecologistas tanto en otros tiempos como en ámbitos de la literatura

hispanoamericana enraizados en tradiciones europeas y, por añadidadura, en la misma literatura española” (204).

It becomes clear that Marrero Henríquez wants to open Spanish literature to the ecocritical eye, something which would be nearly impossible under Paredes’s and McLean’s criteria. However critical Marrero Henríquez is of ecocritics who privilege indigenous cultures in Latin American texts, he does not reach the level of demythification that North American critics have set on the “ecological Indian” trope in North American culture and literature (Krech; White). There are great differences, of course, between the role and influence of indigenous cultures in North America and Latin America (e.g. pre-Colombian presence, history of conquest, mestizaje) and so it only makes sense that there would be differences in the role and influence of indigenous cultures in ‘ecological literature’ in both regions. Some Latin America critics have been cautious, though, in how they include indigenous thought and culture in their assessment of Latin American ecology and culture. In his vindication and critique of Latin American political ecology, Fernando Mires refers to the dangers of idealizing indigenous culture out of existence: “El indio, al ser convertido en un ‘ideal’ y no en un ser humano complejo y contradictorio, es nuevamente negado aunque, esta vez, con argumentos más refinados que en los tiempos de la conquista” (81). He contends that indigenous culture does have valuable insights into how to overcome environmental crises, but that it must come from inside their culture and epistemology and not from the outside (77-78, 99-100). As Marrero Henríquez indicates, however, ecocritics should measure this influence with a broadening perspective to mitigate undue favoritism that lessens

the importance and credibility of ecocriticism in Latin American letters. They should not fall into what Mires calls a “tendencia... neo-romántica” (80).

This call for an ecocritical measurement of indigenous influence on literature and culture is similar to what Jorge Luis Borges writes in his much cited article about what constitutes ‘authentic’ Argentine literature, “El escritor argentino y la tradición.” That is, as Borges emphasizes, there is no reason to relegate certain literature as inauthentic on account of its lack of “color local,” just as there is no reason to relegate literature as non-ecological on account of a lack of indigenous themes (319). It goes without saying that this reasoning should go the other way as well and not to deny ‘authenticity’ to those literatures that use regionalisms, nor deny an ecocritical reading of those literatures that intentionally include indigenous links. Effectively for Borges, being an “authentic” author is a determinism inherent to the combination of literary influences and geographic location: “no podemos concretarnos a lo argentino para ser argentinos: porque o ser argentino es una fatalidad y en ese caso lo seremos de cualquier modo, o ser argentino es una mera afectación, una máscara” (324). To make up rules of authenticity is to be inauthentic. This connection between Marrero Henríquez’s and Borges’s arguments should not imply that all Latin American literature is ecological in some way. All Latin American literature, however, should be open to ecocritical scrutiny and as we have read in Ortiz and Veiravé, poetry that does not make explicit connections with indigenous culture can be very ecopoetic *and* Latin American. In fact, recurring to images of ecological indigeneity is often read by critics of modern environmentalism as a misappropriation of indigenous culture in order to bolster environmentalist causes

as they have in North America (White 131). Hence, while claiming that Latin American indigenous cultures have been completely ecologically sound is a slippery slope (Miller 9, 48), their remaining cosmological influences on human-nonhuman interrelationships have inspired scholars, artists and authors to reevaluate contemporary thinking regarding the same interrelationships.

Walter Mignolo in his work *The Idea of Latin America*, for example, argues that an “indigenous ethos” has survived conquest, colonization, and modernity in “indigenous social movements” like the Zapatistas (127-28). Along the same lines, the Argentine anthropologist Rodolfo Kusch links ancient indigenous knowledge and world view to contemporary indigenous and popular cultures in his 1971 work *El pensamiento indígena y popular en América*. Vicuña makes a similar claim by asserting that indigenous poetry has always been ecopoetry (Personal interview). In the case of her poetry and art, what sets her ecopoetics apart from other Latin American poets who either utilize indigenous themes or ‘characters,’ and from other poets that self-identify as indigenous, is how she expresses it through “mestizo poetics” – a term that she develops in her introduction to the recent bilingual publication of Latin American poetry by Oxford Press, which she co-edited. “Mestizo poetics” refers to how the combination, and therefore tension, of a declining societal role for European poetics and a continued importance for indigenous poetics “gives Latin American poetry its force” (xix). Out of the tension produced between these two poetics, Vicuña’s poetry and art reflect the “interconnectedness” of the indigenous ethos and aesthetic as well as the avant-guard experimentation of its European counterpart.

From Vicuña's explication of how sound, visual, and spacial "forms" of art evolved out of "mestizo poetics," we can see how she fits well within, if not exceeds, its conceptualization (xx). Her channeling of indigenous culture and poetics through her ecopoetics, or her mestizo ecopoetics, emerges with these material forms in her ritualistic, shamanistic, and site-specific performances, in the oral quality of her poetry – whether written or performed – and in her attention and integration of visual images. Another part of her mestizo ecopoetics is the return to, or the revisiting of, ancient traditions in her work that we have already discussed. Vicuña finds something similar to this revisitation in mestizo poetics of artists like her compatriot Vicente Huidobro and the Brazilian 'anthropophagous' poet Oswald de Andrade. By combining European with indigenous poetics, Vicuña tells her reader, "a new integration of poetry and theory emerges: the patriarchal European heritage is desacralized and indianness is reinvented" (xxiii). Lastly, as part of her mestizo ecopoetics, she is attuned to the spiritual power of place in her poetry. Her ecopoetics in the above material forms unites place with the human community, because the forms are sensual yet provide a spiritual link, even a reciprocal and interconnected bond which allows for nonhuman subjectivity.

One of Vicuña's latest performances, the ritualistic *Río Mapocho* from April of 2012, claims to reveal the subjectivity of nonhumans. Done onsite and in conjunction with her exhibit entitled *Aural* at the Patricia Ready Galería in Santiago, Chile, *Río Mapocho* is a ritual created to heal the drought of the Mapocho river in central Chile — caused by "global warming and privatization of water by corporations," as the description accompanying the performance's video explains.

Joining her in the ritual is the musical group Pichimichina, comprised of members such as the musicologist and archeologist Jose Pérez de Arce, who helped Vicuña on her 2010 documentary, *Kon Kon*. Their music, dancing, and singing recall the ritual performed by the *chino* dancers in various central Chilean villages like Concón that Vicuña analyzes in *Kon Kon* and in its extra video clips. As the *Aural* exhibit's "comunicado" explains, whereas the villagers perform their age-old ritual as a religious devotion, Vicuña and Pichimichina make their 'offering' in order to repair the rift caused by those who removed the ancient remains of Kauri Paqsa, a young Incan boy sacrificed to ensure the water cycle function in the valleys fed by the Mapocho and other rivers. In *Kon Kon*, a work that we will examine later in more detail, Vicuña points out that a momentary cessation of the *chino* rituals for a few years coincided with the "death of the sea," or the dearth of fish available in the nearby ocean waters at the mouth of the Aconcagua River for the local fishermen. Similarly, she notes that a few days after her *Río Mapocho* ritual, it rained and the river swelled. For Vicuña, just as the Incan ritual burying was to guarantee the flow of water from the high mountain of El Plomo to the valley below, *Río Mapocho* was to restore that same water way, even if it only did so for a brief time.

It goes without saying that these examples of the perceived need for reciprocity between humans and the nonhuman natural world are not based on the scientific method of experimentation but on the perceived cause and effect that ritual practice had produced. Vicuña does not reject scientific inquiry, as we have already read in regard to her early education on the global environmental crisis as explained by scientists. Indeed, she follows scientific news with great interest,

especially when it concerns ecology, something to which her Facebook artist page can attest. One could even claim that she treats scientific knowledge and ritualistic or indigenous knowledge as complementary, as she explains in a 2008 interview:

Que la tierra registre las rogativas mapuches y el canto a la fertilidad no es una tontería ni una superchería. La materia no es materia, es energía, por lo tanto el agua, la tierra, son energía, su vibración lee nuestra vibración. Hay universidades norteamericanas donde la ciencia está estudiando la relación entre estos grandes rituales que quedan inscritos en la energía de la tierra por varios meses, y si se hacen consecutivamente, quedan por años, y esa energía es legible por los instrumentos actuales. (“El libro”)

Vicuña is referring to the chants and songs of Mapuche *machi* shaman, but as we can see in *Río Mapocho*, she has taken on a quasi-shamanistic role in her performances. Like in the text quoted above, the poet is concerned with the transfer of energy as a result of ritual. In order to interchange such energies, a poet must literally be in place. Perhaps it is this physicality that convinces Vicuña of the validity of ritual, beyond defending it from accusations of “superchería.” The concern that she has regarding the value of certain indigenous knowledge as an influence on, and guide for her art stems from her ecological thought. In other words, she seeks a knowledge of the nonhuman natural world that comes from a physical, spiritual, and ethical interrelationship with it. And the elaborate and mystical form of the various indigenous rituals often point to finding a balance between multiple subjects in an ecosystem. Kusch explains the relationship between Andean indigenous knowledge and ritual as one that rejects connotative knowledge and embraces “knowledge for living.” Rituals facilitate a knowledge that goes beyond the sensual comprehension of objects:

No es entonces un saber de objeto, como ser un arado, sino que trasciende al objeto. Entra en el trasfondo religioso que yace detrás del objeto y pareciera vincularse con la razón última de que los haya, o mejor aún, de que haya comunidad y vida en general. (75)

At once physical and metaphysical, rituals can connect human and nonhuman ontologies. A spiritual link between humans and “objects” invites a reciprocity that transcends physical limits, yet manifests itself in the material and interrelationships that constitute a community. Vicuña recognizes this when she declares that indigenous ritual is a “poética que está enraizada en la vida [and] es percibida por los elementos en una relación recíproca” (“Poeta chilena”). In a way, perhaps counterintuitive from an occidental perspective, then, rituals are a practical, as well as a poetic, matter for indigenous communities.

Rituals play into the communal part of Vicuña’s ecopoetic sensibilities. Hers is not an ecopoetics that stems from the sort of nature contemplation that comes from a cult of solitude in the wilderness. She values the human-human as much as the human-nonhuman interrelationships, and looks to bridge both relational dynamics together with her public performances. Part of her way of bridging communities and of humans and nonhumans in her performances is Vicuña’s act of ‘weaving’ the audience together. In the “Performing Memory: An Autobiography” section of one of her most recent publications, *Spit Temple*, she points out that she cannot remember how she began to link audience members with thread, but that by doing so she breaks a traditional barrier between artist and viewer. “Who is performing: the poet, or the audience?” she asks, “United by a thread, we form a living quipu: each person is a knot, and the / performance is / what happens

between the knots” (“Performing Memory” 99). The quipu – the Incan system of tying knots along several threads to communicate information – is a major trope and technique in Vicuña’s work. It materializes where much of her poetic preoccupations (e.g. weaving, extra-textual communication, indigenous knowledge, community, mesh of subjects) come together. If the knots are the participants, the performances are manifestations of the interrelationships between them; they are the interstices that connect the “knots” together.

One of Vicuña’s most endearing performances where she ‘weaves’ the ‘audience’ together as participants in her art is her workshop/performance *Caleu está soñando* from 1997. In the film of the workshop, the poet travels to Caleu, Chile with the purpose of helping the children of the local school “listen” to their ancient cultural roots. Vicuña brings thread and other crafting materials with her to the school and encourages the children to play as a way to recuperate cultural memory. Soon the children are weaving their fingers together and ducking under bridges of fabric, playing with flutes, and dancing happily. More than half of the film is focused on the children creating and playing with materials that are meant by the poet to conjure up ancient ways that have since been lost. *Caleu está soñando* has the direct purpose for Vicuña of uncovering connections between a community and its physical place and then to infuse the children in a similar exercise. She recently told Rodrigo Toscano in a conversation that *Caleu está soñando* was her first pedagogical act that attempted to make communal connections – though it was mildly subversive (6). As she explains in the film, Caleu has a ritual connection with the past that was lost after the church was destroyed by an earthquake in 1965. Until

the destruction, members of the community would perform the aforementioned ritual known as the *baile de los chinos* in order to maintain the telluric “fuerza vital.” Part of this ritual is the final arrival and the call-and-response chant at the local church, and so when the church crumbled, the dance and chant dissolved with it. Several generations in Caleu were brought up without the telltale dissonant sounds of the *chino* flute and without the pulsating, spring-like dancing of the ritual. Ironically, the earthquake ended this telluric ritual, yet it also separated western religion from the pre-Colombian practice, thus providing an opportunity for Vicuña to work toward a “restauración de tradiciones indígenas locales olvidadas” (“Vicuña: ‘En Chile’”), which is something she shares with Mapuche poets like Lorenzo Aillapán Cayuleo, “el hombre pájaro.” There is little doubt that she has organized the restoration of Caleu’s connection with its physical and spiritual place, but the film makes it clear she is not the only one involved: the children are also performing.

Except for the introductory and concluding remarks, Vicuña hardly appears in *Caleu está soñando*. She focuses the lens on the children instead, highlighting how they go from tentative students lined up “como si fuera para saludar a la bandera” to happy children running and playing together. Their play is their performance and Vicuña plays with them. The villagers, she explains, are unaware that Caleu can mean “ser transformado” in Mapundungún and so her hope for the outcome of the workshop, in part, is that “los niños y la gente recuerden su propio recordar” so that they understand how the rituals of the past can transform their present and future. Caleu’s physical place is significant in this regard for Vicuña, for it is located on *La*

Cuesta La Dormida and so, as she reveals in her introduction, the film's title plays off the town's surroundings. We can also read in the title how rituals combine the physical with the spiritual. When you dream you are simultaneously present and absent, and are as if in the midst of a transformation. By combining the spiritual and the physical in her work, Vicuña brings about what we can call an embodied poetics that forms part of her ecopoetics and, because of its ritualistic and multifaceted nature, her mestizo ecopoetics.

In "Entrando/Entering" her poetic introduction to the "Six Metaphors in Space" of her 1983 edition of *Precario/Precarious*, Vicuña makes a case for a special aspect of her poetry:

El gozo es la oración,
lo recordado en la ofrenda es una
forma poética esencial: si al principio de los tiempos la
poesía fue un acto de comunión, una forma de entrar co-
lectivamente a una visión, ahora es un espacio al que en-
tramos, una metáfora espacial. (lines 18-23)

Her 'essential' poetry is more than image making; it is a corporeal participation of language and space through performance. Though Vicuña often invokes past knowledge systems as a way of recovering lost wisdom in her poetics, here she delineates a difference between what function poetry provided for a community in the past, and what potential it has to provide for us now. Of course, in its context as part of an introduction to her melding of the performative, the visual, and the poetic into spatial metaphors, the above speaks to a certain connection between Vicuña's poetry and an embodied poetics. At the same time, as she points out only a few lines

later, metaphor comes from *metapherein*, which means to carry “más allá,” indicating paradoxically that though the poetics is embodied, it is also a way to reach beyond the limits of oneself. It comes as no surprise that Vicuña brings both the transcendental and the material together later in this same book through the ‘ofrendas’ that are her *precarios* sculptures and accompanying poems. After all, Vicuña tells her reader, ‘precarious’ has Latin roots in *précis*, or ‘prayer’ (*Unravelling* x). Live performance can also be understood as precarious because of its latent unpredictability and essential ephemerality. Based on Vicuña’s past performances, future viewers should expect to not expect anything. Her performances highlight the importance of place and time.

Ironically, to study and praise the quality of some of Vicuña’s performances, including their precariousness, some have transcribed them. *Spit Temple*, one of her latest publications is both an autobiography and an anthology of selected performances that includes critical interpretations and transcriptions of these and other performances. This is the first attempt to recognize and make available the many oral versions of her poetry in print. When we consider the availability of her past and present performances on media-sharing websites like Youtube.com and Vimeo.com, her new book is self-evidently behind the times.¹² Without getting mired in which of these uploaded videos of her performances could or should be held up to critical scrutiny or not, we can see how she references her past works in her performances and how she reuses them to a certain extent (Alcalá 14). For example in 2012 while at the “Poetry of the Page Symposium” in Tucson, Arizona, Vicuña was filmed reading her English-language poem “Resurrection of the Grasses”

from *Unravelling Words & the Weaving of Water* (7-8). From the video of the reading on Vimeo, edited and posted by the American poet Laynie Browne, Vicuña demonstrates how she updates her poetry in and through place. Standing in front of a saguaro cactus and holding a copy of *Unravelling Words & the Weaving of Water*, Vicuña begins her reading by dedicating it to the Sonoran Desert. About half way through the poem and the video clip, the poet visibly and audibly modifies the poem. After reading “once I dreamt of a form of poetry created by / the sound of feet walking in the grass” she lowers the book, closes her eyes, and adds “I had not yet dreamt of a form of poetry under / the fragrance of the saguaro” before going back to her reading. Vicuña eventually shortens her poem by replacing the last thirteen lines that speak specifically about grasses from Chile and New York¹³ with “the saguaro becomes the poem / the poem becomes the saguaro.” Like her live performances, this video clip of her reading and performing her poetry demonstrates the physicality of her poetry by fixing it in a time and place. Through the aid and possible concretizing effect of video and internet technology on art, however, the filmed performances can contradict the ephemerality that the live-yet-not-filmed performances retain. As long as the viewer has access to the videos, the performances lose their precarity and become more like a published book because their availability and accessibility does not require the presence of the artist. Even though this ephemeral quality is ironically lost through recording the performances, the question of the importance of place remains. Like *Río Mapocho* and *Caleu está soñando*, the “Resurrection of the Saguaro” performance highlights the ecopoetic interrelationship between the poet and the place (and time for that matter).

Highlighting this interrelationship displaces the authority of the poetic work from solely the poet to the poet, place, and time. Another way she accomplishes this connection between poet, place, and time is through the oral quality of her text. This orality bespeaks the strong connection that Vicuña's ecopoetics makes between material and meaning.

Sound, Sense, and Ecosensibility

reveler

VOLVER A VELAR

- Cecilia Vicuña "Palabrir"

Trililiuuuu Trililiuuuu

Trililiuuuu Trililiuuuu

- Lorenzo Aillapán Cayuleo, "TACHI TREGÜL – TREGÜLKAWÜN"

While Vicuña's oral performances and exhibitions underline her ecopoetic attachment to place and time, the oral quality of her work is not confined to her poetry readings. That is, qualities such as varied editions, word games, onomatopoeia, polyglot code-switching, and lyrical pacing reflect the 'sounds' of the text. To qualify her text as having an oral quality can be challenging, however, as there has been ongoing debate regarding what exactly is an "oral text." Some have suggested limiting the term "oral" when referring to literature as texts that result from a textualization of an "oral form of art" (Nile 211). Scholars such as Sukanta Chaudhuri, however, point out that once an oral performance is transcribed into written text it is no longer oral, it becomes "a master-text, a fixed entity — virtually a norm from which all other performances appear, in some way or other, either to derive or to deviate" (143). Of course, the oral quality of Vicuña's poetics is not

ascribed merely to recordings of her performances, as are *Spit Temple* and her filmed performances and exhibitions, but more of an attempt to imbue her poetry with qualities one can find in oral art. Indeed, her texts that reflect qualities of the spoken word also reflect and indulge in qualities of the written word. Her *PALABRARMas* introduced her readers to her particular way of playing with words, her “palabrar” and “palabrir” way of uncovering words for as much meaning possible: “Acercarse a las palabras desde la poesía, o intentar / una poética del palabrar, es antes que nada una forma / de preguntar [...] Palabrir descubre metáforas antiguamente condensadas / en la palabra misma” (59-60). While *PALABRARMas* provides great examples of Vicuña’s textual word games, the work that gives some of the best examples of her poetry’s ability to imbue the written word with oral qualities while displaying a transparent ecological sensibility, however, is Vicuña’s *La Wik’uña* from 1990.

Stemming from her residence in Colombia and four trips taken to the *altiplano* area of the Andes during the 1980s to accompany her then husband, César Paternosto, Vicuña wrote *La Wik’uña* over a period of nine years and in conjunction with her work in various indigenous communities. Specifically, she was invited to spend time with a Guambiano community in the Altiplano while in Colombia and it was during this brief residency that she began to notice how the Guambiano language’s sounds “sincronizaban con el entorno natural” (“Poeta chilena”). Paternosto, an Argentine artist, was working at the time on his book, *Piedra abstracta*, regarding the abstractness of the Andean indigenous paintings and stonework. His and Vicuña’s interest in Andean indigenous cultures would influence

both of their work for years to come. In *La Wik'uña* this influence comes through how Vicuña perceived how the Guambiano and other Andean indigenous languages worked with the altiplano landscape. As she puts it, while working with these communities she had a revelation:

[D]e pronto comprendí que cada palabra se construía por un 'choque' entre el sonido y el silencio, y que si no fuera por este choque, que generaba unas resonancias, la palabra no sería posible. Tomé conciencia de esa relación estructural al interior de cada palabra [...]. ("Poeta chilena")

In *La Wik'uña* this relationship between silence and sound is reflected in the length of the verses and the tonal quality of the words. Both the short verses, which suggest and emphasize the silences that Vicuña perceived in indigenous speech, and the rhythm and tone of the words and sounds points to the adaptation in the written word of oral qualities, and to the poem's ability to create an illusion of orality. "Selvaje Matar" is a poem that demonstrates this adaptation.

Beginning with the title, "Selvaje Matar" uses word play to convey a double message, understood both through reading the text and by listening to an enunciation of the text. The first verses also suggest an unorthodox reading:

Descuajo y resalvo
venturo mental

Raja sueño
de lo lento
y neutral

Empecina
y alienta

Ramita real (Lines 1-8)

The speaker's choice of words elicits images of violence — “Descuajo” and “Raja” — innocence or passivity — “lo lento / y neutral” — and resistance — “Empecina / y alienta,” — while at the same time focuses on their sounds. Here, as in other examples, Vicuña plays with words to create both new meaning and new sounds and rhythms. What “Descuajo y resalvo / venturo mental” means is as important as how it sounds. Each stanza is made up of a few, never more than three, short verses that give the poem a staccato rhythm that advances between quick line and stanza breaks. Perhaps the best evidence of a staccato rhythm is the placement of the acutely stressed lines. Words like “mental,” “neutral,” and “real” from lines two, five, and eight dictate the rhythm both because of their rhyme and because of their acutely stressed quality. As is standard knowledge in the practice of *versificación*, acutely stressed lines in Spanish suggest another syllable but leave off and offer only silence. Because of this rhythm coupled with the inventiveness of the word play involved, “Selvaje Matar” reflects an poetics that pays heed to the signifier as much as the signified:

Te humo
y alabo

Hacho
y menoscabo

Selvaje
matar

Bulldoza
tu sierra

Fuego
y cenizal

Yo espera
y espera

Y tú
dónde vas

.....

En llanos
calmados

Y silencio
feroz

.....

¡Pudre
y aguanta!

Va y va

Flora

en ganancia

Plantá voluntá! (Lines 15-28, 33-36, 45-50)

In this selection of verses we find qualities of orality in word play through mixing languages in the word “Bulldoza,” and in the onomatopoeic word “Hacho,” to give a few examples, but it is its staccato rhythm and its pairing with the overall meaning of the poem where its sonic quality is clearest. The final line especially emphasizes this through its two acutely stressed words placed together as an exclamation in defense of the environment. When we consider that the poem is decrying the destruction that comes with deforestation, the violence and resistance that comes through its sounds and rhythms enhances the enormity and gravity of such ecological destruction. And while “Selvaje Matar” treats subject matter similar to Juan L. Ortiz’s “Ah, miras al presente...” a poem that was analyzed at length in Chapter 1, the way the speaker presents this disturbance of the land as swift and jolting elicits a different, if not completely separate, reading. By emphasizing the relationship between sound and sense in this poem, Vicuña reveals a sensuality in her ecopoetics.

Along the same lines that we have used to read “Selvaje Matar,” we can highlight the oral aspect of her written poetry that references, and recycles, indigenous culture in order to reveal a part of her ecopoetic sensibility — much of which we have already discussed at length. Oral cultures have strong relationships with the natural world, as David Abram explains, because they are more inclined to see nonhumans as equals and their language is founded in the surrounding

landscape and their relationship with it (75, 78). This principle certainly is true in the case of the Mapuche poet Aillapán Cayuleo, quoted at the beginning of this section, for example, who has made it a point to include his bird imitations as part of his poems that he writes as “el hombre pájaro.” His mimicry of nonhumans as a way to relate to his surrounding landscape is similar to how Vicuña explains how the altiplano landscape of Peru influenced her ideas about silence and sound in her poems (“Poeta Chilena”). And though Abram would agree with our assessment of Vicuña’s performances regarding how they support an ecological interrelationship with a corresponding place, he may question how her textual “orality” is part of an ecopoetic sensibility. Nevertheless, we can read Vicuña’s poetry as ecopoetic through its “orality” because it provides another way of embodying poetry by making language more part of an organic process or an extension of the body, pulling writing closer to the senses. This “orality” often comes through her willingness to return and modify her work.

As discussed in the beginning of this current chapter, Vicuña’s work often doubles back on itself. She returns to certain subjects, objects, and ideas and renews them. When she modifies a past work for a new edition she extends the work’s life and underscores her poetry’s vitality.¹⁴ At face value this modification is hardly a new technique that can be ascribed solely to Vicuña. The particularly ecological contextualization of themes in her reappropriation of past art and poetry, however, sets her work apart. Regarding what makes “oral literature” oral, John D. Niles points out that scholars focusing on folklore texts view variants of such texts as proof of their orality. Part of this view has to do with “an attentiveness to the

mouvance of literature — that is, to multiple locations of authority in the production and reception of texts” (205). Vicuña’s utilizes the self-conscious *mouvance* related to her work to reapply it. For example, her mixed-media book of poetry, *Precario/Precarious*, originally published in 1983, has been published at least two other times in anthologies.¹⁵ With each edition Vicuña adds or removes lines, pictures, and even poems. This, with the added change of a different translator in each case, makes for a necessarily comparative reading among the editions.¹⁶ Of course, one could make a good argument that the fragility of the works in this case can only serve the intended “precariousness” of the project. Overall, the variation among editions is understandable if we regard the variants Vicuña produces through her poetry reading performances, something that has been highlighted as part of an embodied poetics. Kenneth Sherwood points out that her tendency to vary her poems in performing them underlines their ephemeral yet material nature, which only adds to, and perhaps complicates, interpretations of her poems (78). Sherwood is writing specifically about if we seriously take into account the poet’s “potentially limitless tellings” of a poem, and if we yield our need to treat the poem as a contained material object to be dissected, we open ourselves to “reconsider the world” in the poem’s terms (78). The differences in the textual versions of her poems, though they may lack the same sort of ephemeral limitlessness, also break with any insistence that the poem is always self-contained to time and place.

In her poetry, by not denying nor obsessing over time, Vicuña puts the reader’s own subjectivity into perspective by forcing him or her to self-consciously yet ambiguously consider time’s importance in a particular interpretation of the

text. This shift of responsibility, is Vicuña's way of reorienting and dispersing the poet's authorial role from director to participant in a dialogue between creation and re-creation. That is, Vicuña highlights the temporality of the creative process and its results by revealing the changes she has made to the words and to the meaning of the work. Thus the "oral" quality of Vicuña's poetry comes through its textual variants because they support an attempt to weaken a text's abstraction of time and place for space (Abram 184). Her documentary *Kon Kon* is an excellent example of how she goes from director to participant and how she revisits and reappropriates her work, while involving various media, perspectives, and voices to ecophrastically present a place dear to her heart.

Where Images Meet: Ecophrastic Weaving

A word in the air

lets you

hear the image

see the sound

-Cecilia Vicuña, "K'isa / Alangó / A Vibratory Disorder"

As indicated in the section above, the digressive 'progression' that underlies the various editions of Vicuña's poems reflects the close connection that she cultivates between her past work and life with her present. When she revisits and revises her work, she brings the past and present together – though she does so without nostalgia. Macarena Urzúa asks Vicuña why she has not returned to Chile on a more permanent basis. Pensively, the poet responds:

Bueno, es que yo ni sé lo que significa volver, porque Chile desapareció, no solamente desapareció la gente, desapareció Chile, entonces yo vuelvo todos

los años, pero (¿)a dónde vuelvo, a qué voy(?). Vuelvo al deseo, al sueño, a la búsqueda de la conexión que me parece que existe, en el sentido de que es un deseo compartido. (“Vicuña: ‘En Chile’”)

The key to her answer, for our analysis, is her “búsqueda de la conexión.” She understands how the passage of time changes things, people, and places, but she feels that an interrelationship can endure. Urzúa follows up Vicuña’s answer by asking her to parse “nostalgia” from “deseo.” Succinctly, the poet and artist distinguishes nostalgia from desire according to the question of action. She says, “el deseo es constructor, la nostalgia es más pasiva.” This desire to return to a still existent connection, despite the loss of a spatiotemporal reality from which it originated, is an ecopoetic desire because it emphasizes the importance on the process of emplacement.

One of the most compelling examples of this desire is her autobiographical documentary poem — as the film is described on its website — *Kon Kon*. In the film, she presents her beloved Concón, the coastal city in Chile where her life in art first flourished, as a place woven out of the interrelationships between humans and nonhumans, and between spaces and times. Through a series of vignette-like segments, Vicuña interconnects poetry and prose with photography, film, music, performance, and painting, which all combine to bring into dialogue her own biography with ecopolitics, landscape, anthropology, economics, indigenous traditions, natural history, ritual, and community as a way to let Concón speak for itself. This ecopoetics of letting a “place” “speak” for itself is her mode of *ecophrasis*. And so while Ortiz’s ecophrastic poetry manifests itself solely through text, as was discussed in Chapter 1, Vicuña’s singular ecophrasis in *Kon Kon* emerges from out of

the several different dimensions, perspectives, and voices she employs and includes by way of her multimedia, multi-genre, and multi-perspectives approach. Similar to Ortiz's ecophrasis, Vicuña's is akin to weaving, a familiar motif in her work as exemplified in her use of the quipu and its power as a metaphor. Indeed, according to Vicuña, *Kon Kon* is set up to be a "quipu digital" with the fourteen "extras" hanging from the main film (Personal correspondence). And so poeticizing place ecophrastically, she disperses her work rhizomatically amongst the images that she and others create — rhizomatic in the sense raised by Deleuze and Guattari that what 'speaks' are not the subjects nor the objects but the reciprocal relationships *between* them. Like the rhizome that "has no beginning or end" leaving it "always in the middle" and making it an "alliance," Vicuña's ecophrasis keeps the focus of her work between the mediums and topics that she refers to and uses (Deleuze and Guattari, 21, 25). Because of its ecophrastic presentation, what *Kon Kon* shows us is that as these reciprocal relationships degrade so does each of their parts, and so, then, does Concón.

As discussed earlier, the reciprocal quality of Vicuña's *precarios* emphasizes the collaboration among the art, the artist, the subject matter, and the material. Indeed, one might think of the process of reciprocity as a sort of *quid pro quo* or as an arrangement where there is a mutual understanding of exchange. Reciprocity in Vicuña's ecophrastic work, however, is more complicated than a binomial relationship. Like the idea of the mesh that we discussed in regard to Ortiz's ecopoetics and ecophrasis, Vicuña's ecophrasis of combining and connecting various genres, mediums, and perspectives is a weaving-like approach to letting a place

speak. In one of *Kon Kon*, the poet speaks directly of weaving as an interrelationship that receives its strength from the tension created by opposite twisting strands that make up a single rope. Similar to the reciprocal quality we discussed earlier, Vicuña connects this “unión complementaria” to the yin and yang principle found in Taoism. She states that if one were to cut a two-strand rope dorsally, one would see a shape very similar to the yin and yang symbol. In the same segment of the documentary, Vicuña relates how she began working with threads in her art from early on in her career and sees a poetic connection between weaving, language, and performance:

El principio poético o la visión del mundo que anima tanto el lenguaje que nosotros hablamos como el pensamiento de los hilos, el universo del tejido y el baile de los chinos, es el mismo. Los tres proceden de una misma fuente: una cultura tan antigua que comienza en los albores de la historia.

The poetic principle of complementary union wrought through weaving also allows for the gaps and spaces between strands of rope, which as a principle of interconnectedness, according to Timothy Morton, “does not allow for perfect, lossless transmission of information” and therefore allows for more dynamic, creative connections (*Hyperobjects* 83). A wonderful textual and visual example of this principle is made manifest in Vicuña’s text that accompanies her project *cloud-net* from 1999.

Vicuña created *cloud-net* out of inspiration from a diverse set of sources such as Sri Aurobindo’s epic poem, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, the ritual use of unspun wool in the Lake Titicaca region of the Andes, a documentary on the effect of deforestation on cloud patterns, and the fervor over the up-and-coming dominance

of the World Wide Web, (Memory 19-20). The project consists of stringing strands of white unspun wool in a net-like pattern from the ceiling while forming a sort of drooping basket that generally covers the entire gallery space. As a consequence or continuation of the project, Vicuña wrote several poems and recycled images of some of her previous weaving projects along with filming a new weaving performance in New York. These poems and images appear in the book, *Cecilia Vicuña: cloud-net*. One poem in particular portrays in stellar fashion the sort of complex reciprocity that we have been discussing.

Recycling a public-art performance piece that she began in 1969 in which she would put a specially woven net over her head in part to show that “Life and death are knotted in a thread / the hanged man’s rope, / and the umbilical cord” (*The*

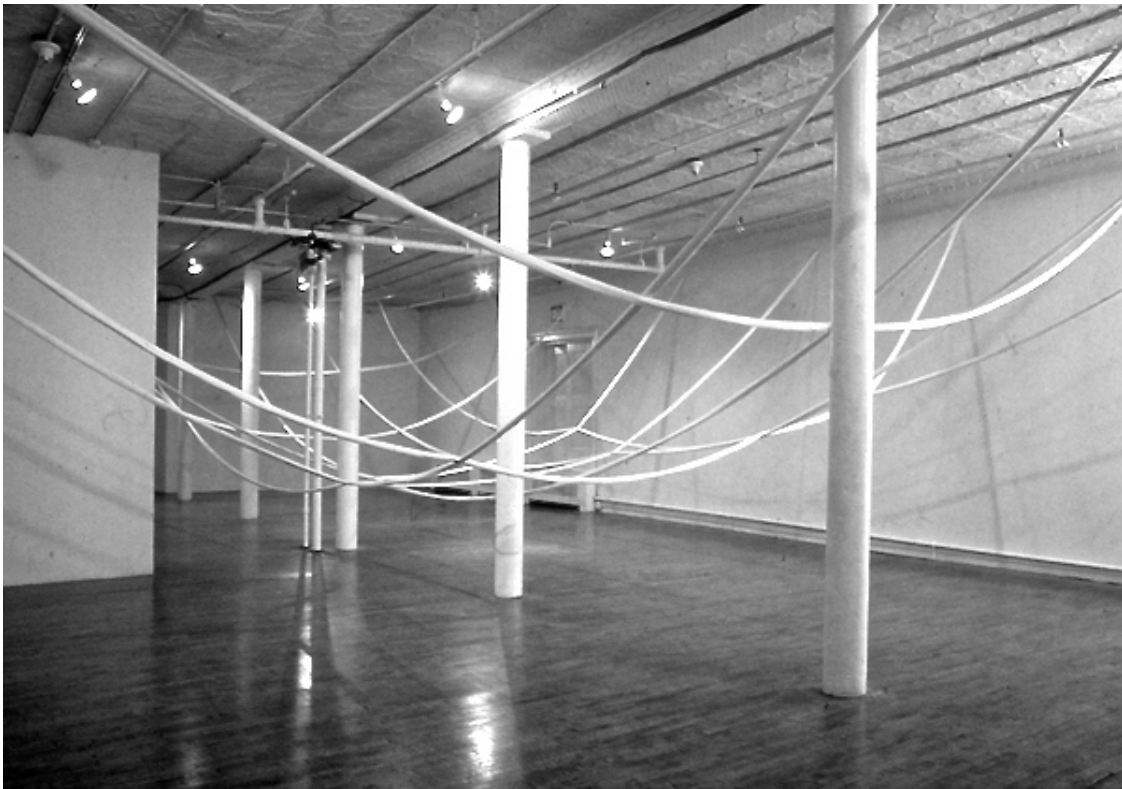


Fig. 4. *Cloud-net*. Art in General exhibition, New York, 1999

Precarious q27), Vicuña created a new poem, “Red cabezal” (*cloud-net* 44, 46). The first seventeen verses of the poem are reminiscent of her poems beginning with *Samara* from 1986 and, even more, *La Wik’uña*. They consist of short lines of at most five poetic syllables and are often cut off mid-word: “caer y vol / ver” (lines 12-13). Her word play is clear and consistent with her poetics, especially from the poems from *PALABRARmas*, as previously discussed. The final verses of the poem, however, offer a visual and poetic dynamism that must be seen to begin to be understood. In fact, there is not a satisfyingly clear way to state how many more verses exist in the poem because of how Vicuña places the words across the page.

Filling one entire page, these twenty-one distiches read as part of yet apart from the rest of the poem. To the reader, this page of short, simple phrases comes as a visual surprise because of the geometric distribution of the words in a grid-like formation. Every distich fills its own space and sits apart from the others as much as the next distich. By the spacing and distribution alone this portion of the poem suggests a rethinking of how one reads a poem. Nevertheless, as it is preceded by more straightforward lines of the poem, this grid of distiches invites the reader to put together the separate phrases. Since each distich is unique, however, there is no obvious connection between any two of them. Indeed, they can all function alone as nominal or verb phrases, or a combination of both, and this contributes to their independence from, yet dependence upon, each other. Hence, the grid of distiches creates a tense, weaving-like reading experience both on a visual and on a linguistic level:¹⁷

la red es jugar	nube y cabezal	la niña tejiendo
	el futuro pasar	
un lento caracol		maestro de escribas
	viejo Pawahtún	
rastra su baba		el trazo inicial
	la mano recuerda	
el antiguo formar		escribir y pintar
	la sangre quemando	
una con tinuidad		el signo esfumar
	la nube ascendiendo	
otra forma de hablar		la calle es la grilla
	cabeza del dios	
el viejo pasar		en bici comprar

The title of the poem points to this experience by underlining both its net-like and contemplative dynamism. Though “Red cabezal” is certainly not Vicuña’s first expression of the intimate connection between words and weaving — *Unravelling Words & the Weaving of Water* from 1992 and *Palabra e hilo* from 1996 come to mind — it demonstrates an ambitious combination of visual and textual effects to present this connection. The reading experience that the poem affords

mimics the complex reciprocity in the poetic principle behind the complementary union that Vicuña speaks of in *Kon Kon*. That is, every distich can connect to any of the others and so readers are encouraged to make different poems by weaving one distich to another, yet each distich can also stand alone. One can read “la red / es jugar” next to “en bici / a comprar” or one can read “la red / es jugar” with “una con / tinuidad,” but there is no overriding logic that forces any reader to make any specific connection. Adding to this invitation to weave the phrases together are the words themselves. Within the twenty-one distiches one can find the words like “grilla,” “trazo,” “red,” and “tejiendo” that more than suggest weaving. Similar to how she sets up the varied distichs to combine and connect or contrast with each other, Vicuña sets up the various media, genres and perspectives to combine and connect or contrast with each other ecophrastically in *Kon Kon*.

Like Juan L. Ortiz, Vicuña’s ecophrasis allows “home” (*eco*) to “speak” (*phrasis*). In the way that *Kon Kon* presents Concón, Vicuña’s ecophrasis is an ecopoetic becoming in the heraclitian sense because it reflects the ever-changing aspect of place. Again, ecophrasis is not about description, as its etymological nearness to *ekphrasis* may suggest. Without repeating some of the differences between ecophrasis and ekphrasis already analyzed in regard to Juan L. Ortiz’s poetry, in the case of Vicuña’s ecophrasis, it is helpful to review W. J. T. Mitchell’s explanation of what makes ekphrasis distinct from multimedia arts:

[T]he ekphrastic encounter in language is purely figurative. The image, the space of reference, projection, or formal patterning, cannot literally come into view. If it did, we would have left the genre of ekphrasis for concrete or

shaped poetry and the written signifiers would themselves take on iconic characteristics. (158)

In the sense that Mitchell spells out here, ekphrastic poetry loses its ekphrastic quality once the image it is supposedly conjuring up appears. That is, ekphrasis as a genre is strictly about how words can replicate visual art via the imagination of the reader. Vicuña's ecophrasis is a collaboration between medias, genres, and discourses. Since Concón as a place is always already a dynamic set of interrelationships, it cannot be "conjured up" like a static object, such as a painting or a photograph. *Kon Kon* clearly acts as a mediation but it does so through presenting and not describing Concón. Unlike ekphrasis, ecophrasis cannot be displaced by what it presents.

Stemming from the philosophy of ecopoetry as a poetry that "presents" rather than "describes" as Jonathan Bate puts forth in *Song of the Earth*, Vicuña's ecophrastic poesis displaces the poet without ignoring him or her (42). The ecophrastic quality of Vicuña's poetics in *Kon Kon* — the way that she allows Concón to speak for itself, relies on the revealed interrelationships of place by way of the interconnected relationships of representation. How the static and dynamic visual, the oral, the textual, and the aural presentations of Concón come together and separate underscores the interrelationships of the community, its pre Colombian past, and its neoliberal and capitalistic present. The nonhuman parts of this community, such as the animals, the sand dunes, the rivers, the ocean, the mountains, even the air, come across as active participants through Vicuña's ecophrasis in the way that *Kon Kon* presents her interrelationships with these

participants. Because of these interrelationships, Vicuña can speak *with* Concón. *Kon* is also *her* story. The title of the film and how she writes the name of the town — separating it into two words — refer to both the Incan god of water and in its repetition, the water cycle (“About”). Just like water in the water cycle, the poet returns to her home, her poetry and art. If the interrelationships are broken, the cycles are broken as well. Vicuña, like Alfredo Veiravé, creates autobiographical ecopoetry but because of her ecophrastic mixture of genres, including performance, Vicuña’s inclusion of herself in her ecopoetics is a part of the place that she is hoping to “let speak.” Effectively, Concón speaks with and through Vicuña.

From the opening scenes in the film the viewer gets a sense of Vicuña’s connection with Concón. For the follower of her work, her tracing lines in the sand and her gathering and placing beach debris on the shore even as the tide rises and knocks them down should seem familiar. These lines and ephemeral sculptures are her previous-mentioned *precarios*. She is once again revisiting her work, though in this instance, like those in other recordings of her work, her performance reaches a certain stasis because of the permanence of the medium. Her voiceover poetry introduces us to the intimate interconnections that the film will present:

Desde niña yo jugaba en estas playas.
 Un día sentí que la mar me sentía.
 En ese instante, comprendí que el cuerpo y la mar
 dialogaban en un lenguaje que yo debía oír.¹⁸

The speaker realizes that her interrelationship with the water is a sensual, extra-linguistic connection. Feeling that she is being felt, the speaker also suggests an extra-sensual reciprocal connection between her and the sea. Vicuña immediately

follows this poem in the film with the genesis of her *precarios* and how each one was, and still is, a collaboration between her mind and body, the debris, and the tide. Just as she discovered when making them the first time (*Precarios, The Precarious* q14-15), the *precarios* are only finished when the sea erases them, “como la palabra se deshace en el aire.” Visually, the viewer sees Vicuña gathering the debris and putting the pieces of plastic, wood, and feather into different formations. Eventually, the water comes from outside the frame and buries or carries away the debris. Like her modifying the different print versions of her poetry from *Precario/Precarious*, as discussed in the previous section, Vicuña is updating her past. This shot of her *precario* being taken by the sea makes a link between her relationship to her art and its relationship to the sea. Both relationships depend upon change.

Tellingly, as a way to make a break in the segment and as a way to transition into the final part of the film’s “introduction,” as it were, a photograph of Vicuña fills the screen with the caption “con cón 1966.” Without the caption it would be ambiguous as to when the photograph was taken. In the photograph she is tracing a spiral in the sand, just as she does in the previous scenes and just like the spiral from *Con-cón 1966* from earlier in this chapter. With the caption including the date, the viewer can understand both the cyclical and historical quality of the poet/artist’s personal connection with Concón. As the film progresses, however, the poet’s biographical connection eventually dissipates, at least as it pertains to her as an individual. What becomes the main focus are the connections between community and place. Vicuña emphasizes these interrelationships through her inclusion of the various rituals such as the chino dancing and the invisible clam

dancing, while relating the disappearance of people by state violence to the disappearance of place by state-encouraged capitalistic economic violence. These various emphases are ways in which she furthers her ecophrastic manner of presenting Concón.

The examples of the rituals, the *baile de los chinos*, the mountain tributes, and the dance of “la minga de la macha invisible,” give clear opportunities for Vicuña to let Concón speak for itself as a physical human-nonhuman interrelationship. As in her film *Caleu está soñando* and her *in situ* filmed performance, *Río Mapocho*, these examples from *Kon Kon* underscore the functionality and spirituality that pre-Colombian rituals of central Chile have when it comes to affecting the various human-nonhuman interrelationships that make up what has been recently called a social-ecological system in studies of human geography (Glaser et al. 77-78). In the case of the *baile de los chinos*, as we briefly touch upon in our discussion of performance and ritual, the social part of the social-ecological system in question is the livelihood and religious faith of a community of fishermen, their families, a town, the fish, the energy or the *sonqon* that the ritual participants expend, and the land itself. The ecological portion of the social-ecological system is made up of humans and nonhumans, including those on the land, air, and in the sea. Vicuña underscores the *baile* to connect the ancient past of rituals to the immanent present of having to face corporate greed including industrial fishing that has caused “la muerte del mar.” The *baile* sequence also serves as an example of a communal effort to reciprocate with the nonhuman world. As Vicuña ecophrastically presents the ritual, however, the ontological and biological ecosystems come together. The leader of the

ritual, the *alférez*, is also the fisherman in focus, the rhythm of the dancing is comparable to the rhythm by which the fisherman rows his boat later in the documentary. And, though the ritual is a petition for a good fishing season, it is also, as Vicuña expresses in the film, an attempt to connect with the earth ontologically:

En el baile de los chinos, también hay una forma de poesía. El alférez dice un poema que es una ofrenda y que es una forma de curación para toda la comunidad. La tierra misma oye la energía - el *sonqon*, como se dice en quechua - la energía del corazón, la intención verdadera del canto. Ese es el sentido principal de todo este pensamiento [el ritual].

The singing and dancing of the ritual is to communicate with the earth while simultaneously communicating and connecting the humans and nonhumans as a community in its hopes for a “curación” to heal the injured ecosystem. Again, this ritual connects the community both in place and in time.

Writing specifically of *Kon Kon* and Vicuña’s interest in the *baile de los chinos* in his article “Rajado: Word and Knot in Cecilia Vicuña’s *Kon Kon*,” Jonathan Skinner points out that the ritual is presented as mestizo. It is “both Christian and indigenous,” in character and in how it joins past to present. Connecting the mestizo ritual to the “unión complementaria” with which Vicuña labels both the braided threads and the dissonant tones in the *chino* flute, Skinner explains that “Only by acknowledging the split at the heart of identity can other worlds be admitted.” The *baile* illuminates the need for one to work on restoring necessary interrelationships and it demonstrates that there will always be an inherent tension, similar to the reciprocal dynamics of a ecosystems that are constantly changing in their input and output of energy flows. As Skinner alludes, the split in the braid and the flute is

analogous to the split in a mestizo identity, and this “clash” of threads, sounds, and heritage as Vicuña contends, is “also an exchange” (“Rajado”). This is the ecophrastic exchange, the complex reciprocity involved in the “unión complementaria.”

Another clear example of this ecophrastic and reciprocal exchange in *Kon Kon* is the section centered on a long-lost ritual. The invisible clam dancing, or the “minga de la macha invisible” presents an opportunity for Vicuña herself to bring back a ritual, despite its high potential for failure. After having learned of an ancient clamming ritual where people would “dance” on the Ritoque beach and in doing so they would dig up clams by the dozens, Vicuña decided to revive it. Day after day, Vicuña explains through her speaker, locals from Concón and other towns nearby would successfully find enough clams for their needs until “llegó la codicia” in the form of large clam dredgers that companies would use to remove around 30,000 clams a day. Eventually, the clams became extinct and all that remains is the ancient and



Fig. 5. Screen shot from *Kon Kon*. Vicuña is pictured at left leading the “minga de la macha invisible.”

recent piles of shucked clam shells on the beach. To reclaim the dance is to seek to reclaim the now extinct interrelationship with the beach and its clams. Since the community of clam diggers no longer existed, Vicuña reached out to the local communities. In a local art magazine and other similar online publications she called for participants to help out in the ritual (“Minga”). This sort of behind-the-scenes organization to gather community only enhances the ritual viewed on screen because it suggests volunteerism and local interest in Vicuña’s work.

Near the end of the segment Vicuña contextualizes the need for the ritual and for the struggle against the disappearance of healthy social-ecological systems that are sustained by the connections that such rituals can make as consequences of a war:

Es una guerra contra las dunas. Es una guerra contra la conexión que nosotros podemos tener con la historia y con la gente. Esto, esta cultura, estas piedras de moler talladas y usadas durante posiblemente cientos de años, estos cántaros de greda, esta no es nada. Y toda la gente que ha vivido aquí no es nadie. Nosotros somos esos nada. Nosotros no somos nadie.

By making a direct connection between the loss of natural habitat and the loss of human culture and identity, Vicuña suggests that humans are “nada” and “nadie” without the reciprocal interconnectedness that comes by way of making and sustaining ontological and biological connections with nonhumans.

Part of the force behind the “guerra” that Vicuña mentions is the change that came by way of political and societal upheaval that initially prompted her exile. This upheaval evolved from a coup to a so called “economic miracle” within a few years and it has affected both ontological and biological connections in Chile. With the

Milton Friedman “Chilean miracle” mentality came changes to Chile, and Concón is no exception. The neoliberal investments and the search for economic growth has brought condos and refineries to Concón, which as Vicuña shows through comparison pictures and overhead angles has devastated ancient burial grounds and is encroaching on a vulnerable sand-dune sanctuary. In perhaps the most powerful section of the film, Vicuña carefully creates a quipu that makes a devastating connection between the violence of the Pinochet era and the violence of the current capitalist greed in Chile.

As the section opens with the title, “el quipu de lo desaparecido,” those knowledgeable of the history of torture and forced disappearances at the hands of military juntas in several different Latin American countries during the 70s and 80s will make the connection. Immediately following the title, the poetic voice takes the viewer back to the beginning of the film where Vicuña sets up a typewriter and



Fig. 6. Screen shot from *Kon Kon*.

writes “aquí estoy escribiéndote y amándote, mi con cón.” The typewriter now appears as she had left it, with a ball of wool yarn in place of paper. This obvious visual metaphor is an indication of the connection between the quipu, and the written word. What follows is the poet’s deliberate and careful construction of a curious quipu. As well as tying knots, she hangs photographs from the yarn. Explaining that just as mothers and wives would hang photographs of their disappeared family members from lines outside their homes, something that Vicuña saw for herself in Argentina, she hangs pictures from her quipu of what is being disappeared in Concón. Here she makes explicit connections between actions, rituals, individuals, community, and place by lamenting their disappearance and its effects on Concón. Concluding this segment she performs a poem as the camera pans along the quipu and attached photographs:

Desaparece la memoria.
 Desaparece el significado de los nombres.
 Se olvida el antiguo arte de nombrar estos lugares.
 Kon kon es la música del paralelo:
 Kon kon, agua agua,
 til til, árido, árido
 llay llay, viento, viento.
 Kon kon, las dos hileras del baile de los chinos.

Memory, naming – which can be replaced by poetry – music, water, land and air, and humanity are all in danger of disappearing. Again, Vicuña makes the disappearance of nonhumans analogous to the disappearance of identity, culture, and of the people themselves. And she does so ecophrastically by letting Concón speak through poetry, film, music, photography, thread, and the relationships among these media.

From the beginning of her career with her *precarios*, Vicuña has developed the connection between poetry and ritual through performance. “Precarious,” as she explains in several of her interviews, is a word that is connected with prayer. Her fragile works of art made of what is found in place are not complete without their renewal and erasure in the waves. *Kon Kon* is similar to these *ofrendas*, or these offerings, because of its ecophrastic insistence on continuity and interconnectedness. She suggests that the tension inherent and necessary in the “unión complementaria” is also the source of the precariousness of this interconnectedness. By adding to the tension disproportionately, even artificially, the complex reciprocity is hampered, and the union dissolved. *Kon Kon* shows that mesh-like connections are possible and necessary, but fragile.

Fertile Ground

*El poeta es sólo el habla
la dirección del llanto
que vuelve a la tierra*

- Cecilia Vicuña, “retrato del escritorio” from *Semi ya*

Cecilia Vicuña’s earnest concern for ecological matters, born early in her life as a child living a quasi pastoral life with her family, has continued throughout her life and career until today. In an interview with Jonathan Skinner for the first issue of the journal *ecopoetics* in the Spring of 2001, Vicuña talks about how at the time of the interview she was still trying to complete the seeding project that she proposed in 1970. As if by Allende’s “prophecy” that her plan would only work at the end of the millennium, in 2000 a Chilean government official asked the poet/artist to

create a special project and she took the opportunity to finally realize her ‘greening Chile’ idea. The end result is her exhibit and accompanying book, *Semi ya*, that she dedicated to the “madre de las semillas.” Making a case for an implicit connection between culture and agriculture, as it were, Vicuña displays the seeds in *Semi ya* as works of art in the discursive space of a museum in Santiago, and later in her art book. She also takes and disperses the seeds out into the urban environment and thus ties ecological practices to the spread of art. As one of the lines of poetry from the books opening page reads: “Una semilla es la palabra de la tierra.” In a real sense, her project to study and spread seeds, and therefore plants, around Chile has germinated more than once and, as she indicates to Skinner and more recently in a 2010 interview with Fernando Pérez and Macarena Urzúa, it continues to occupy her attention. To complete her project, she still gathers seeds when she goes to Chile and she hopes to have children participate as bearers of the earth’s ‘words’ throughout Chile (“Spring” 113; “Vicuña: ‘En Chile’”).

The progressive (re)cyclical realization of her *Semi ya* project is another example of her particular multidimensional ecopoetics analyzed here. Her willingness and ability to revisit and repurpose her ideas and material has as much to do with her life as it does with the vitality of her particular subject matter. That is, the heart of the matter behind environmental crises and reactions to these crises is the quality of human to nonhuman relationships and Vicuña has dedicated much of her life and work to present these relationships as necessarily reciprocal. More and more scholars are reading Vicuña’s work in this vein and it is becoming evident that even as the gravity and scale of the global environmental crisis manifests itself more

clearly by way of data and experience, her ecopoetics remains flexible yet constant. She looks to the indigenous past for a spiritual sense of place that can be accessed as an anchor amidst the present storms of ecological crises. Her ecopoetics is one of hope but also of endurance and she shows no sign of throwing it away.

¹ *The Precarious: The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña* is a collection of critical essays regarding Vicuña's work but it also includes a section that reproduces much of *Precarios/Precarious*. This section is printed inversely beginning at the back of the book as if it were a separate book. It is titled *quipoem* and its pages carry the letter "q" alongside the number.

² Interestingly enough, Allende's words bring to mind a seemingly opposite view of the future in his close friend and ally, Pablo Neruda's posthumous and pessimistic poetry book entitled *2000* (1974).

³ Exceptions to this rule in the case of Latin America include the Cuban scientist Antonio Núñez Jiménez with his 1968 book, *La erosión desgasta a Cuba* and Juan D. Peron's politics outlined in the introduction of this current study.

⁴ Sea figs (*Carpobrotus chilensis*) are a plant similar to the ice plant. Classified as a succulent plant, the sea fig lives near the sea and is quite abundant in Chile.

⁵ All images used with artist's permission.

⁶ In order to represent the deliberate separation of the lines per page, I have added the forward slash between pages. In addition to this I have put the phrase "is the core" in a similar handwriting-like font that appears in the original.

⁷ In *La Wik'uña*, Vicuña quotes the French metaphysicist René Guenon regarding the similarities between spirals and the human ear: "Igual a la oreja humana, la espiral encierra el sonido primordial" (90).

⁸ For reasons of citation clarity, the 2007 version of *Sabor a mí* is the version being referenced here and throughout this chapter.

⁹ Soledad Bianchi's account of *Sabor a Mí*'s history puts the original number of poems to be published as sixty-two (231).

¹⁰ *K'ijllu* and *The Hudson River* are referenced and sampled in *quipoem* (q69, q84-84), while *Quipo Austral* can be found on the *Biennale of Sydney* website.

¹¹ In addition to Paredes, Mclean, and White's scholarship discussed in this chapter, other work such as Juan Manuel Fierro and Orietta Geeregat V.'s article, "La memoria de la Madre Tierra: el canto ecológico de los poetas mapuches" are good examples of this line of analysis.

¹² Vicuña currently maintains a webpage on the social networking website, Facebook. With her page, set up as a "page" as opposed to a "profile," she often shares news articles about her performances, publications, and critical work being done about her. She even shared a link to the *Conference on Ecopoetics* (2013) where the I presented a portion of this chapter.

¹³ The poem's original lines, appearing in *Unravelling Words & the Weaving of Water*, read "collected all / around waterways / in Brooklyn, / Manhattan, Chile, / and the

Bronx, / the land grasses / and the / *cochayuyo* / seaweed / are intertwined / with plastic / nets. / resurrect!"

¹⁴ From Vicuña's first book of poetry, *Sabor a mí* (1973), she has been updating her texts. Originally a much longer book, *Sabor a mí* was edited by Vicuña with the purpose to make it an "urgent response" to the 1973 Chilean coup (*Spit Temple* 73).

¹⁵ These print versions are first, *Precario/Precarious* from 1983, then *Unravelling Words & the Weaving of Water* from 1992, and finally *The Precarious: The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña* included in the *quipodem* portion of the book. Her presentation of the *precarios* in *Kon Kon* is the latest recycling of her work on the Concón beach in 1966.

¹⁶ As Vicuña tells it, the translations in *Unravelling Words & the Weaving of Water* (1992) by Eliot Weinberger and Suzanne Jill Levine, came not from the text but from "the stories I told of what was in the lines (*Spit Temple* 96)."

¹⁷ In order to preserve the design of the poem I have included it here as an image.

¹⁸ I have transcribed all poems and quotes from the film.

CONCLUSION

Interrelational Ecopoetics

*[T]he phrase “poetically man dwells” says:
poetry first causes dwelling to be dwelling.
Poetry is what really lets us dwell. But through
what do we attain to a dwelling place?
Through building. Poetic creation, which lets
us dwell, is a kind of building.*

- Martin Heidegger, “...Poetically Man Dwells...”

In late 2010 the Bolivian Plurinational Legislature Assembly advanced a groundbreaking environmental law. The first of its kind in the world, the *Ley de Derechos de la Madre Tierra* essentially grants human rights to nonhumans. Explicitly defining “Madre Tierra” as “el sistema viviente dinámico conformado por la comunidad indivisible de todos los sistemas de vida y los seres vivos, interrelacionados, interdependientes y complementarios, que comparten un destino común,” the law makes a curious compromise between treating nonhumans as separate entities and treating them as part of a whole (“Ley 071”). The compromise is made through interconnecting the ecosystems and their various participants under an spiritually and culturally significant symbol. Mother Earth, “Madre Tierra,” or *Pachamama* in many Andean cultures is the source of natural beauty and bounty and under Bolivia’s new law this beauty and bounty are recognized as not only diverse and interconnected but also as at enough risk that they need to be protected on par with humanity. *Pachamama* has protected us, the law suggests, and now we must protect her.

Much of the poetry that has been analyzed in this study makes similar comprises to the one that the Bolivian law makes. Juan L. Ortiz’s poems recognize

the differences and disparities between humans and nonhumans and they seek the ethereal “unión universal” that not only interconnects us all separately but that also envelops and joins us as one. Alfredo Veiravé’s interrelational ecopoetics reveal that the connections among objects, subjects, and ideas are essentially infinite and that we cannot stand outside these interrelations but must recognize our participation in them. Perhaps Cecilia Vicuña’s multifaceted and mestizo ecopoetics most aptly reflects the worldview of the new Bolivian law. Her poetry, performance, and art serve as manifestations of the interrelations between ecosystems and “seres vivos” and yet they often appeal to the ontological strength that comes from appealing to ancient sacralization of human-nonhuman interrelations. In Vicuña’s work both *Pachamama* and ecosystems need to be protected.

It may go without saying but the three poets analyzed here are excellent examples of a Southern Cone ecopoetic tradition, though they are not alone. Looking ahead at further avenues of research and investigation regarding both Southern Cone ecopoetics and Spanish American ecopoetics as a whole, one can consider more shifts in ecological discourse than the environmental turn as significant indicators of the status of human-nonhuman interrelations. Even within the twentieth and twenty-first centuries Southern Cone poets and artists such as Pablo Neruda, Atahualpa Yupanqui, and Marosa Di Giorgio have ecopoetically presented interrelations in the face the rise of modern agriculture, rural-urban migration, the globalization of pop culture, and the growing realization of climate change. In order to confront such difficulty and complexity one may want to repeat German romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin’s question, which Martin Heidegger utilizes in his ontology:

“What are poets for in a destitute time?” (89). If we believe our study of Ortiz, Veiravé, and Vicuña’s work, we may also agree with Heidegger when he declares that “Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building” (“Poetically” 213). Whether we build bridges like Ortiz, infinite connections like Veiravé, or strong interwoven textiles with the past and present like Vicuña, poetry’s power to build may have to present itself one interrelation at a time.

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