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IRVINE

Bringing the Anthropocene Home: Literature and Ecology in the Latin American Southern Cone

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Spanish

by

Lucía Cash Beare

Dissertation Committee:
Associate Professor Horacio Legrás, Chair
Associate Professor Ivette Hernández Torres
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2020

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the generous support of the University of California, Irvine, from which I received a Dean's Fellowship and a Graduate Dean's Summer Dissertation Fellowship to write and conduct research, and the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut in Berlin, which not only gave me access to their facilities and extensive archive, but also invited me to their research colloquiums.

I want to thank Horacio Legrás, my Chair, for giving me the freedom to follow my interests, feeding them with readings and conversations over mate. To my committee, Adriana Johnson, Ivette Hernández-Torres and Viviane Mahieux, for providing thoughtful feedback, guidance, recommendations and encouragement. I am also grateful to them as part of the faculty of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at UCI, led my Luis Avilés, from whom I learned so much during these five years. Thank you for re-igniting my love of literature, for introducing me to new writers and for reminding me how enjoyable it is to play with words. I feel very lucky to be part of such a warm, intellectually and creatively stimulating community.

Ángeles Tórres-Méndez and Gilberto Nuñez, my cohort, thank you for your friendship and camaraderie from day one. To Isabella, Gwen, Samari, Martha, José María, Leo, Pati, Lauren, John-David, Carlos, Mell, Marlyn, Marco, Fernando, Christina, James, George, David, and to all of those I have had the pleasure of exchanging ideas, books and films with, in class, at the pub, or over lunch, thank you. You have opened my mind.

I am especially grateful to Gabriele Schwab, for inspiring me to go on this path in the first place, for her detailed feedback, recommendations and genuine interest, and to my family for their constant support. Finally, a deep thank you to Leon, for discussing the project with me, helping me unblock when I could not write, withstanding the emotional rollercoaster, and encouraging me to keep my eye on the ball.

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ABSTRACT

Bringing the Anthropocene Home: Literature and Ecology in the Latin American Southern Cone

By

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Doctor of Philosophy in Spanish

University of California, Irvine, 2020

Professor Horacio Legrás, Chair

This project proposes that, in the context of the Anthropocene and the increased awareness of human-caused ecological crisis in western, scientific epistemology, a novel form of subjectivity is called into existence. The "ecological subject" is defined by a double understanding of the self. On the one hand, it is an individuated being, with a personal history, life experience and singular body, and, on the other, an open and permeable entity in constant constitutive exchange with the ecologies of which it is part. Inspired by the work of artist Tomás Saraceno, this project conceptualizes the ecologies we inhabit as "hybrid webs" composed of interconnected and interdependent spheres and networks. The consequence of accepting this understanding of the self and the webs we inhabit is the embodied realization as, Gregory Bateson suggested, that the organism that destroys its environment destroys itself.

The discursive field, as part of the hybrid web, has figured this growing realization through a variety of literary mechanisms and narrative play, which I call "ecopoetics", thus providing an entrance into the analysis of the formation of this subjectivity. I begin with the activist ecopoetics of the end of the 20th century, with a focus on the work of Eduardo Galeano. I then turn to *El viento que arrasa*, by Selva Almada, and *Falsa calma*, by María Sonia Cristoff, to

analyze the emergence of an ecopoetics of home that thinks how the webs we inhabit and the structures of power that traverse them manifest in our intimate spheres. Though *Distancia de rescate,* by Samanta Schweblin, and *Fruta podrida,* by Lina Meruane, the final chapter focuses on molecular ecopoetics, bringing the analysis to the sphere of the body. The conclusion is that the inherent vulnerability of the subject constituted in exchange with the ecologies it inhabits is exacerbated in today's differentially toxic hybrid webs.

Introduction:

Hybrid Webs – Ecopoetics in the Anthropocene and the formation of the Ecological Subject

This project is an exercise in ecological thinking. I finish drafting it while many remain in quarantine due to the spread of COVID-19, a pandemic that has brought the world to a halt as political leaders struggle to confront a virus that does not see borders with the theoretically and materially limited instruments of the Nation State. The COVID-19 virus, a non-living protein that can inhabit and mutate animal cells, has created a state of global fear and uncertainty due to its ability to penetrate all of our immunizing spheres – the nation, the city, the home, the body – as it travels unseen, becoming-water, becoming-wood, plastic or fabric, becoming-cell. In a matter of months, it has made the underlying molecular interconnectivity of all matter and the vulnerability that this entails strikingly present to human consciousness, altering human behavior in response.

The interconnectivity of matter has been theorized and analyzed from various disciplines, including Physics, Neuroscience, Biology, Geology, and, more recently, the Humanities and Social Sciences in what has been called the "molecular turn". In the 1960s, James Lovelock developed the "gaia hypothesis," which postulates that the Earth is a self-regulating system of living and non-living matter that can be thought of as a single organism seeking to preserve its homeostatic balance. In *The Revenge of Gaia*, published in 2006, Lovelock argues that human activity within the capitalist world system is challenging the Earth's ability to maintain this balance, resulting, for example, in the accumulation of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere that cannot be re-absorbed by the diminishing plant world, leading to human-caused global warming.

The impact of human forms of manipulating and inhabiting the world on the Earth's geology, biosphere and atmosphere have led to the proposal of a new geological era: The Anthropocene.

Paul J. Crutzen and his collaborator, marine science specialist, Eugene F. Stoermer, popularized the term in the year 2000, arguing that "considering . . . [the] major and still growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere, and at all, including global, scales, it seems to us more than appropriate to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by proposing to use the term 'anthropocene' for the current geological epoch"[1] The Anthropocene thus marks a period in which humans have a geological impact previously unseen, which manifests in the sedimentation of materials such as plastic or the intensification of human-caused climate change. The historian Dipesh Chakrabarty was the first to take up the term within the Humanities, arguing that since climate change affects humanity as a whole it demands that we think the human as constitutively one, "a collectivity whose commitment to fossil-fuel based, energy-consuming civilization is now a threat to that civilization itself."[2] Others such as Jason Moore, Donna Harraway, and Tony Weis, have since challenged the use of the term, contending that it does not accurately describe the role that the capitalist political economy has played in this problem and the related issue of differential responsibility. The term "Capitalocene," they argue, is better suited to describe the configuration of ideas and practices that have led to the current conundrum. "The Capitalocene," Moore explains, "signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature—as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology."[3] The argument is based on the notion that capitalist accumulation has relied, first, on the ontological separation of the human

[1] Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, "The 'Anthropocene'," in *IGBP Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17.
[2]Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change," in *New Literary History* 43.1 (2012): 2.
[3] Jason W. Moore, "Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism," in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism,* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016), 6.

from nature and, second, on the construction of "nature" as "cheap," inferior in an ethico-political sense that is translated into a cheap price. Under this view, it is not the human in its species-being but, rather, the capitalist system that has had a destabilizing effect in the Earth's homeostasis.

Discussions about the appropriateness of the concept of the "Anthropocene" hinge on the nature of its subject. Who is in fact the agent? Is it accurate and analytically thorough to put the blame on a human species-being that can obscure the matter of differential responsibility? I argue that due, in part, to its historical positionality within the capitalist world system, Latin American environmental thought and activism has pushed this question further by addressing the issue of responsibility without limiting the conversation to it. I suggest that the reason for this, as we will see in chapter one, is that discussion and action against structural inequality, discrimination, and environmental exploitation have a long history in the region. As I analyze in chapter one, from the 1970s, Latin American ecological thought was very much aligned with the concept of the Capitalocene. However, from that foundation, the conversation has been pushed further to discuss not only the causes for human-caused environmental degradation, but also its localized effects and its ontological and epistemological implications.

In September of 2018, geographers Alexander Koch, Chris Brierley, Mark M. Maslin, and Simon L. Lewis published an article with the conclusions of their extensive quantitative study into the causes of what is called "the Little Ice Age" in the late 1500s and early 1600s. The results were startling: the colonization of the Americas was the catalyst of human-caused climate change prior to the industrial revolution. According to the study, large-scale depopulation after European arrival (in the following century, 90% of the indigenous population died primarily due to epidemics) and subsequent changes in land use resulted in a reduction of carbon dioxide

(CO2) in the atmosphere, which caused the lowering of global temperatures[4]. From then on, the global south became the new frontier of precious stones, raw materials and labor power, providing the "cheap nature"[5] that would feed Europe's nascent capitalist system. As Karl Marx wrote in *Capital, Volume I*, "the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation."[6] While most analysis of the Anthropocene locate its origins at the industrial revolution and its intensification of extractivism and negative accumulation in the form of increased toxicity, pollution, warming, decrease in biodiversity and displacement of human and non-human populations, among others, the study presented above lends credence to the argument that the colonial transformation of the world and the entrenchment of the capitalist world system is at the root of human-caused ecological devastation.

This assertion corresponds to Anibal Quijano's and Immanuel Wallerstein's argument that the process of globalization –the increasing absorption of the world's population, commons, and information into a singular, even if heterogeneous, system of production and exchange– is characterized by the perpetuation of the "coloniality of power".[7] As Nestor García Canclini argues, "what is usually called globalization appears as a collection of processes of

[4] Alexander Koch, Chris Brierley, Mark M. Maslin, and Simon L. Lewis, "Earth systems impacts of the European arrival and Great Dying in the Americas after 1492," *Quaternary Science Reviews* 207, (2019): 13-36.
[5] Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, (New York City: Verso, 2015).
[6] Karl Marx, "Chapter Thirty-One: Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist." In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I,* (Marxists.org, 1995) https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch31.htm, n.d.
[7] Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Americanity as a concept, or the Americas in the modern world-system," *Revista Internacional de Ciencias Sociales* 64, no.4, (1992): 550.

homogenization and, at the same time, an articulated fragmentation of the world that reorders differences and inequalities without eradicating them."[8] Fragmentation and contradiction are an intrinsic part of globalization, which is why García Canclini suggests that a unifying theory that attempts to describe its varied manifestations would always fall short.[9] However, while the diversity of manifestations of globalization means that any singular narrative will inevitably fall into simplifications, it is also true that, when focusing specifically on the manner in which the environmental ecology of former colonies has been integrated into the world capitalist system, colonial imbalances of power continue to be reproduced.

One manifestation was the imposition and spread of the rhetoric and project of "development", which emerged in the second half of the 20th century and integrated former colonies that did not belong to the capitalist western block (the first world) nor the soviet eastern block (the second world) into the post-war world order under the label of "third world". This concept defined the Global South as "underdeveloped", as "behind" in a linear, seemingly unstoppable, and supposedly desirable process of "progress", most visible in the acquisition of standards of consumption and industrialization set by countries in the north who are always already in the future.[10] While the explicit purpose of developmentalist projects is emancipation through the reproduction of an ideal of "progress" exemplified by the capitalist and industrialist countries of the North, in practice, it has often been revealed as what Eduardo Gudynas calls a "zombie concept"[11]. While the developmentalist logic continues to operate as a guiding principle and desired horizon for left and right-wing governments, the foundation on which it is based,

[8] Néstor García Canclini, *Imagined Globalization*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2014), 24.
[9] Ibid., 23.
[10] Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel and Carlos A. Jáuregui, "Colonialism and its Replicants", in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008), Footnote 18, 14.
[11] Eduardo Gudynas, "Buen Vivir: Today's Tomorrow" *Development* 54, no. 4, (2011): 442.

namely, the global proliferation of the standards of production and consumption of industrialized nations, was, from its inception, a fallacy. Not only is the capitalist system based on the existence of cheap labor and resources, which have been historically provided by the global south and the impoverished regions and populations of the north, but the prospect of a global consumption at the rate of "developed" nations is utterly unsustainable.

The contradictions embedded in the development project and the reproduction of inequality, both between north and south and within these societies, have often led, in the Latin American context, to what sociologists Maristella Svampa and Enrique Viale have termed "maldesarrollo". "Maldesarrollo" refers not only to the failure of development projects to create emancipation and wellbeing but also to the proliferation of different forms of "pasivos ambientales" or, as Jason Moore terms it, "negative accumulation", which put in evidence historical patterns of environmental injustice.[12] Negative accumulation can take the form of increased toxicity, social disenfranchisement and displacement, exacerbation of social inequality, deforestation and a decrease in biodiversity, to name only a few. Given Latin America's historical positionality within the capitalist world system as a purveyor of primary goods, maldesarrollo is often a result of what Gudynas calls "extractivismo depredador" [13] or predatory extractivism, characterized by large scale extractivist projects and pesticide-dependent monocultures that result in limited economic gain for local communities that bear the social, cultural, and environmental burdens that these projects entail. This gap between the economic wealth produced by the extraction of natural resources in "developing" nations and the benefits

[12] Maristella Svampa and Enrique Viale, *Maldesarrollo: La Argentina del extractivismo y el despojo,* (Buenos Aires: Katz Editores, 2014): 82.
[13] Eduardo Gudynas, "Más allá del nuevo extractivismo: transiciones sostenibles y alternativas al desarrollo", in *El desarrollo en cuestión. Reflexiones desde América Latina*, (2011), La Paz: Oxfam y CIDES-UMSA, pp. 379-410.

obtained by these countries, conceptualized by Martinez Alier as an "ecological debt"[14], is one of the visible manifestations of the perpetuation of the coloniality of power within the global world system.

Given the above, it is not surprising that ecological thought in Latin America has been tied to issues of social inequality and indigenous and campesino land rights movements in the context of what has been called the "eco-territorial turn"[15]. Referring specifically to the field of political ecology, which studies environmental dynamics of power, Enrique Leff argues that the primary distinguishing characteristic of Latin American political ecology is that it emerges "from a politics of difference rooted in the ecological and cultural conditions of its peoples; from their emancipation strategies for decolonization of knowledge, reinvention of territories and re-appropriation of nature."[16] In the context of ecological devastation due to the global but differential imposition of predatory extractivism, the defense of heterogeneity has become part and parcel of Latin American environmental thought, with an affirmation of subaltern knowledges and the local as the space of action.

Philosopher Ricardo Rozzi identifies three different but interconnected fields from which Latin American ecological thought stems: (1) indigenous, rural and coastal ontologies, (2) regional and international academia, and (3) grassroots environmental movements. [17] The "Buen vivir" movement, which has been particularly instrumental in Andean and Amazonian grassroots organizing for environmental rights, combines these three influences. The movement is anchored

[14] Joan Martinez Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation*, (2002), Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc., 213.
[15] Maristella Svampa, "Commodities Consensus: Neoextractivism and Enclosure of the Commons in Latin America", *South Atlantic Quarterly* 114, no.1, 2015: 69.
[16] Enrique Leff, "Political Ecology: a Latin American Perspective." *Desenvolvimento e Meio Ambiente* 35, (2015): 34.
[17] Ricardo Rozzi, "Filosofía Ambiental Sudamericana: Raíces Amerindias Ancestrales y Ramas Académicas Emergentes", *Environmental Ethics* 34, (2012): 12-13.

in a shared but localized concept, "buen vivir" (*sumak kawsay* in Kichwa, *suma qamaña* in Aymara, and *ñandareko* in Guaraní), which exists amongst various Latin American indigenous groups. Crucially, while the shared idea upholds life, biodiversity and the respect of ecosystemic balance and cycles, its practical manifestations and implications vary depending on the social and environmental ecologies in which it is being enacted. These localized understandings of environmental balance and conviviality dialogue with an ecocritical tradition that emerges from academic discourses and social justice organizations in order to develop alternatives to development that would operate at a regional level. "Buen vivir" is thus a heterogeneous and decolonial project and, at the same time, a "horizon concept", "un pensamiento propositivo, innovador, instituyente, que apunte a generar alternativas emancipatorias."[18] The emancipatory alternatives it aims at are anchored in the substitution of the hegemonic anthropocentric paradigm to a sociobiocentric one, which recognizes the intrinsic value of the web of living and non-living matter, regardless of the utilitarian value ascribed to it by humans. At the core of this paradigm is the maintenance of ecosystemic wellbeing, and a sociobiocentric ethics that combines social justice, environmental justice, and ecological justice. While the first two focus on human populations, the last is concerned with the survival of ecosystems.[19] Throughout this project, I will use the term "environment" to refer to the web of waters, soils, winds, and other non-living matter, and "ecology" to refer to the complex web of living and non-living matter that make a sphere of existence.

Despite the fact that changes in extractivist and developmentalist models have yet to be actualized, the concept of "buen vivir" was included in the Constitutions of Ecuador in 2008 and

[18] Svampa and Viale, *Maldesarrollo,* 356.
[19] Alberto Acosta, "El Buen Vivir en el camino del post-desarrollo. Una lectura desde la Constitución de Montecristi", in *Policy Paper 9*, Ed. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/quito/07671.pdf, 2010, 19-20.

Bolivia in 2009, signaling that the region's governments are finding the conversation on ecosystemic rights increasingly difficult to ignore.[20] What I seek to highlight by bringing forward this example is the centrality of heterogeneity in Latin American conceptualizations and experiences of environmental embeddedness and ecological activism. Heterogeneity emerges, in a first instance, from the delimitation of the "world" within the "cosmos". The cosmos, Enrique Dussel writes, is the *omnitudo realitatis,* that which exists beyond the totalizing and appropriating gaze of the subject. In turn, the "world" is reality as it is experienced, delimited; it is a totality of meaning.[21] Thus, conceptualizations of the world, born from perception and cultural inheritance, are limited and varied. Theorists such as Dussel, Walter Mignolo, Marisol de la Cadena, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, and Josefina Ludmer, among others, all have, from their own fields, emphasized spaces of heterogeneity as a particularly fertile locus for political emancipatory thought and action in the face of the simultaneously homogenizing and discriminatory discourses of the capitalist world system that perpetuate the coloniality of power. Mignolo's "border thinking" and "colonial difference", de la Cadena's "anthropo-not-seen", and Ludmer's "tiempo-aquí", while doing different work, share a focus on the excesses, the conflicts, contradictions and potentialities, present in Latin American social and environmental spheres characterized, given the historical context of colonialism and globalization laid out above, by continuous and non-linear hybridizations. While de la Cadena's "anthropo-not-seen", for example, is used in contexts where heterogeneity is made visible by the absorption of the hegemonic division between human and nature and the simultaneous exceeding of it[22], Ludmer's "tiempo-aquí" refers more broadly to the social and material dynamics within spatialized

[20] Eduardo Gudynas y Alberto Acosta, "La renovación de la crítica al desarrollo y el buen vivir como alternativa," *Revista Internacional de Filosofía Iberoamericana y Teoría Social* 16, no.53, (2011): 76.
[21] Enrique Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y la exclusión*, (Madrid: Trolta, 1998), 241.
[22] Marisol de la Cadena, "Runa: Human but *not only*," *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4, no.2, (2014): 253.

temporal lacunas, with their excesses and contradictions, created by an uneven modernization process.[23] Both of these concepts share with Mignolo's "colonial difference" the search, value and amplification of variance existing within expansive globalizing designs.

Difference, in this historical context, emerges in the messy intersection between globalization and what Édouard Glissant called "worldness". "Worldness", Glissant wrote, "is exactly what we all have in common today: the dimension I find myself inhabiting and the relation we may well lose ourselves in. The wretched other side of worldness is what is called globalization or the global market: reduction to the bare basics, the rush to the bottom, standardization, the imposition of multinational corporations with their ethos of bestial (or all too human) profit, circles whose circumference is everywhere and whose center is nowhere."[24] Worldness thus refers to the basic fact of our inhabitation of a common time and space (Earth in the present). However, worldness is necessarily heterogeneous because our inhabitation of the world we share is conditioned by our environmental, social and mental ecologies. Our delimitation of the world within the cosmos, to use Dussel's words, not only responds to the socio-cultural context that guides our mental construction of the world, but also to the environmental ecologies within which we exist. Anthropologist Rodolfo Kusch coined the term "geoculture" to describe the positionality of the subject as that between a material environment and a symbolic field. "Cultura no es una entidad estática u objetiva, (…) sino que es algo disponible, y que existe únicamente en cuanto un sujeto la utiliza. Cultura es sobre todo decisión", he writes, "(…) "Por su parte, la decisión cultural tiene sus límites. Uno inferior, que sería el suelo o hábitat, y el otro superior, o sea el horizonte simbólico. Entre ambos límites el

[23] Josefina Ludmer, *Aquí América latina: Una Especulación,* (Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia, 2010), 26.
[24] Édouard Glissant, "The Unforeseeable Diversity of the World," in *Beyond Dichotomies: Histories, Identities, Culture and the Challenge of Globalization,* ed. Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, (Albany: SUNY, 2002), 287.

sujeto cultural logra su totalización en tanto integra con su decisión a los mismos."[25] In other words, the mental ecology of the subject exists in a constant constitutive dialogue with the environmental and social ecologies that it inhabits. In the context of the homogenizing impulse of globalization projects, a novel layer of difference emerges, created by the uneven acceptance and absorption of hegemonic ontologies, epistemologies and structures of power. As "buen vivir" activists and the academic theorists mentioned above argue, it is in the heterogeneity of these intervened spheres that dissenting discourses and projects can arise.

1. The Hybrid Web: Of Spheres and Networks

The intertwinement of social, mental, and environmental ecologies hints at the unified field that underlies and traverses everything that is. The awareness of this reality, when unmediated, can cause an uncomfortable and even dangerous feeling of ontological exposure. Spheres of insulation, such as the mind, the body, or the species, separate worlds from cosmos. In addition, humankind has moved beyond the sphere of subjectivity and the body, to create protective enclosures such as the house, the neighborhood, the town, the city, the workplace, the Nation, etc. In his "spheres" theory, Peter Sloterdijk argues that this impulse to enclose is central to a social history of taming that allowed humans to "pull themselves together" and, from that safety, think and speak Being. Responding to Martin Heidegger's theorization of *Dasein* and his privileging of human language as the necessary tool to engage and open up to this naked Being, Sloterdijk argues that language is but one necessary form of enclosure: "Humans are self-fencing, self-shepherding creatures," he writes, "wherever they live, they create parks around themselves. (…) everywhere people must create for themselves rules according to which their

[25] Rodolfo Kusch, "Una reflexión filosófica en torno al trabajo de campo", *Revista de Filosofía Latinoamericana y Ciencias Sociales* 1, (1975): 117.

comportment is to be governed."[26] Spheres, of which language is only one, are fundamental for the experience of ontological safety that allows humans the limited possibility of engaging the formless cosmos.

We have always existed in a web of interconnected spheres, which is what Glissant referred to as *worldness*. The spheres we inhabit are one of the mechanisms by which we create a world out of the cosmos and yet, the largest sphere is, of course, the shared Earth. In the present stage of globalization, the spheres we inhabit are increasingly not only materially but also symbolically interconnected. Sloterdijk uses the metaphor of the foam to describe this increasingly dense tissue where relatively isolated spheres exist in constant communication, co-isolated within a network of adjacent spheres.[27] In this project, I expand on Sloterdijk's sphere's theory by putting it in dialogue with the theorists of globalization mentioned above and by moving beyond human societies to think human-non-human assemblages. In the face of globalizing forces and global environmental dangers such as climate change, pollution, and species extinction, what many theorists, activist, and writers have come to emphasize is the value of engaging the global *from* the local. This means understanding and addressing global issues as they manifest in ecologically specific ways.

Recognizing that there is something particularly human about the current ecological crisis does not entail that responses to it can or should be global in scope. In fact, social ecologist Eduardo Gudynas convincingly argues that, since generalized acceptance of the fact of the ecological crisis and the role of humans in it, northern governments, non-governmental organizations, activists and universities have engaged in an "ecocratic discourse". This ecocratic

[26] Peter Sloterdjik, "Rules for the Human Zoo: a response to the Letter on Humanism", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27, (2009): 25.
[27] Peter Sloteridjk and Julie Di Fillipo, "Foam City", *Log*, 9 (2007), 63-76, 63.

discourse seeks to not only understand but also solve localized manifestations of the ecological crisis without engaging grassroots knowledge about its causes, manifestations, implications and possible solutions, instead seeking to impose "solutions" from different contexts under the guise of an "ecomessianism" that ignores its own blind-spots. In the Latin American context, this has resulted, for example, in the reduction of the manifestations of the ecological crisis to the deforestation of the Amazon basin at the expense not only of other forms of ecological damage, but also of deforestation in regions such as the Chaco and the Patagonia[28]. In contrast, narratives that dialogue with or emerge from specific locations can highlight the complex and localized expressions of regional and global phenomena. They can discursively figure local and contained spheres while also connecting those localized spheres and the events happening within them to a wider network. They figure, in other words, the "hybrid webs" that we inhabit.

I use the term "hybrid web" inspired by Tomás Saraceno's multi-sensory artistic production. The Argentinean architect and artist was the first to create a 3D copy of a spider web, sparking a new phase in his exploration of human and non-human sensory worlds. This exploration led, among other works, to "Algo-r(h)i(y)thms", presented at the Esther Schipper Gallery in Berlin in 2019. Building on previous exhibitions, "Algo-r(h)i(y)thms" featured a white room in which filaments of black string wove across the space, crisscrossing at nodes of contact and clustering into geometric patterns. When touched, some of these filaments emitted an audible vibration that mirrored that produced by the fibers of spider webs to attract mates and prey. Together, the wandering visitors created ephemeral compositions of vibration as they responded with their touch to the sounds produced by others, creating, in the process, an embodied experience of atomic and cosmic embeddedness.

[28] Eduardo Gudynas, "The Fallacy of Ecomessianism: Observations from Latin America". In *Conflicts in Global Ecology*, (London: Zed Books, 1993), 170-178.

Marcus Buehler, an engineer at MIT interested in the study of biomateriomics[29], is working with the 3D scans of spider webs first created by Saraceno. In conversation with the artist, he explained that working with spider webs provides

> a beautiful illustration of joining across the scales, which we cannot see with our eyes, whereas the effects are tangible in the performance characteristic of the web. Similar to the way the spider and the fly communicate, the web is a manifestation of the communication between the nano world and the macro world. The web is the medium by which this is made possible. For example, the strength of the silk that we can measure at the macro scale is due to intricate nanoscale assemblies of proteins into nanocrystals embedded in randomized softer structures. The play with these two elementary concepts—highly organized crystals and deliberately poorly organized protein threads—is a unifying theme across many species of spiders, and the key to their webs' remarkable properties. Nature plays with the relative composition of each to achieve tunable properties depending on the demand of the environment/the ecology."[30]

The combination of crystals and threads is what allows spider webs to respond to the ecology around them and bring together, for example, the spider and the fly. The pattern created at a molecular level produces effects at a molar level that can continue to be expanded "outwards", providing a visual and visceral sense of larger social and cosmic forms of organization. Bruno Latour noticed the generative power of this combination of spheres and networks in one of Saraceno's early exhibitions on the topic, "Galaxies Forming along Filaments, Like Droplets along the Strands of a Spider's Web". He identified in this structure, a bridge between Peter Sloterdijk's "spheres theory" and his own "actor-network theory". While the first, as we saw, theorizes the spatialized social as a "foam" in which discrete spheres define the conditions of existence within themselves in dialogue with the other spheres with which they

[29] "To me, a truly fascinating aspect is the concept that our human perception misguides us as we build our own models of how the world works based on what we see. To truly understand the hierarchical, multiscale aspect of the web we must let this go and consider the web in a more abstract way, to reflect the web as a mathematical "web" that reflects the different levels of the construction from the nano to macro as elements to achieve certain functions. Combining all these into a system facilitates the set of properties that it was meant to offer. This is what we call biomateriomics." Markus Buehler and Tomás Saraceno, "Interview Between Markus Buehler and Tomás Saraceno", *Active Matter*, Ed. Skylar Tibbits, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 31.

[30] Markus Buehler and Tomás Saraceno, "Interview Between Markus Buehler and Tomás Saraceno", *Active Matter*, Ed. Skylar Tibbits, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 30.

come into contact, the second focuses on the infrastructure that allows for any living or non-living actor to effect a change in the present. In other words, it highlights the networks that make any given event possible, thus spatializing and temporalizing living and non-living actants within a wider material, discursive, and symbolic web. Latour has used the word "composition" to describe the combination of spheres and networks. [31]

While my use of the term "hybrid web" shares much in common with Latour's compositionism, a key difference is that "hybrid web" refers not only to this moving structure of spheres and networks but also to the coming-together and breaking-apart of different forms of life and matter at a molecular level. The process of hybridization, in the context of this project, is thought alongside Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's conceptualization of "becoming" as the relationships of affect that are ever-present at a molecular scale, creating fleeting hybrid beings like the human-chair that I am as I write this sentence. At the molecular scale, everything is thus in a constant state of "becoming".[32] In Saraceno's work, a hybrid web is one in which two or more spiders from different species have woven webs in the same space, sometimes using each other's work for support. As Sasha Engelmann argues, the resulting hybrid web is a trace of being.[33] In other words, the remaining hybrid web is the trace of the spiders' inhabitation of the world as they respond to and interact with what is given. In a similar manner, my project explores hybridization in our worldness. It explores, in other words, fluid processes of hybridization as a fact of our material and social existence. Thus, in the context of this project, hybridity refers to the transitory result of affective relationships that are formed and dissolved in

[31] Bruno Latour, *Steps Toward the Writing of a Compositionist Manifesto",* In New Literary History, Vol. 41, 471-490, 2010.
[32] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
[33] Sasha Engelmann, "Social spiders and hybrid webs at Studio Tomás Saraceno," *Cultural Geographies in Practice* 24, no.1 (2017): 167.

the constant harmonious or contentious contact of matter, subjectivities, and cultures. One manifestation of these processes of hybridization is the constant exchange within and between spheres and networks. My use of the term "hybridity" dialogues with Nestor García Canclini's process of hybridization and, admittedly, the fact that his work was criticized for using a term that stems from the biological sciences to discuss processes of cultural change, also drives my terminological choice. [34] In this project, using this term in the context of literary analysis is a way of consciously questioning the engrained binary of nature and culture in order to think the intersections of mental, social and environmental ecologies.

2. The Ecological Subject: Moving beyond the Anthropocene/Capitalocene debate

Having discussed the notion of the hybrid web, we can return to the present stage of globalization, particularly as it relates to environmental degradation and the discussion of the Anthropocene, and its implications for human subjectivity. As was already mentioned, the debate between proponents of the concept of the Anthropocene and those of the Capitalocene seems to hinge on the issue of the responsible subject. Is humanity, in its species being, affecting the world's ecological homeostasis or is it, instead, a particular form of economic organization, capitalism, and its political, social and environmental ramifications that are to blame? This, I argue, is in fact a false opposition to the extent that these two positions are not examining human-caused environmental degradation neither at the same temporal scale nor with the same units of analysis and, because of that, are not actually responding to each other.

The capitalist system and the process of primitive accumulation upon which it was built, as Marx argued and Jason Moore, among many others, elaborated, was premised on the

[34] Néstor García Cancilini, "Culturas híbridas y estrategias comunicacionales," *Estudios sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas* 3, no. 5, (1997): 110.

construction of an understanding of "nature" that defined the non-human world as external to the human body and human societies.[35] The value of this external world was reduced to its use and market valuation, violently ignoring not only other cultural, religious, historical, and affective human constructions of the non-human world, but also its own intrinsic value as part of the hybrid web.[36] The incremental imposition of the capitalist logic solidified the hegemonic notion that human survival is independent from the wellbeing of the non-human hybrid web, what Gregory Bateson called the "epistemological pathology" of the human/nature divide. [37] In the colonial world, this epistemological pathology was extended to other human groups who, deemed lesser through various forms of discriminatory rationalization, were considered part of the new frontiers of "cheap nature", exploited for the capitalist accumulation of wealth.[38]

In an uneven and rhizomatic manner, this foundational moment of the capitalist system cemented the underlying logic that continues to inform developmentalist and extractivist projects around the world but, particularly, in the Global South – one iteration of Quijano's "coloniality of power". As Maristella Svampa and Enrique Viale explain, "En América Latina, esta visión antropocéntrica de la naturaleza se vio potenciada por la creencia de que el subcontinente es el *locus* por excelencia de los grandes recursos naturales. Ciertamente, desde la irrupción violenta de los españoles en el momento de la Conquista, la imagen de una naturaleza primigenia, abundante y extraordinaria fue acompañada de aquella otra visión más productivista acerca del subcontinente como cantera y reservorio de los grandes recursos naturales."[39] Developmentalist discourse is anchored on the nature/human divide to such an extent that it has become

[35] Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 2.
[36] Eduardo Gudynas, "Derechos de la naturaleza: Ética biocéntrica y políticas ambientales", (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2015), 26-27.
[37] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind, Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology,* (Lanham, Maryland: Aronson, 1987), 341.
[38] Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 67.
[39] Svampa and Viale, *Maldesarrollo*, 22.

commonplace for governments to argue for the necessity of environmental exploitation to fund social welfare programs, provide work and build the infrastructures of commerce (railways, ports, etc.). The underlying assumption is that the wellbeing of human societies, understood through the very narrow lens of western modern, industrial, consumer culture, is not only separate from the wellbeing of the hybrid webs within which they exist, but in fact necessitates the exploitation of non-human worlds.[40] Given this context, I argue that the term "Capitalocene" productively engages the historical conditions that have led to the proliferation of negative accumulation and human caused ecological devastation.

However, when we consider human existence in its embeddedness, in its belonging to fluid, heterogeneous hybrid webs, the dynamics of power become more difficult to define, both in the material and symbolic fields. Given the globality and permeation of the capitalist logic, creating clear boundaries between those purposefully and willingly furthering ecological exploitation and those who perpetuate it through their customs, desires, patterns of consumption and engrained societal expectations is often fraught with simplification. Furthermore, as Chakrabarty argued, even when particular individuals, corporations or countries can and should be held responsible for ecological callousness and destruction, the effects of ecological exploitation are experienced, to varying degrees, by all. This is why, throughout this project, I have chosen to use the term "Anthropocene". Given that capitalism is a human construction, its manifestations and implications can clearly be analyzed within the framework of the Anthropocene. However, I argue that by de-centering the history of capitalism, the concept of "Anthropocene" brings forth an ethics that is *not only* anti-capitalist but is *also*, paradoxically, anti-anthropocentric. This ethics is tied to a subjectivity informed not only by the embodied

[40] Eduardo Gudynas y Alberto Acosta, "La renovación de la crítica al desarrollo y el buen vivir como alternativa," *Revista Internacional de Filosofía Iberoamericana y Teoría Social* 16, no.53, (2011): 82.

experience of individuate selves, with unique life circumstances and varying degrees of insulation from the effects of negative accumulation, but also by the knowledge that we are porous and permeable beings, embedded in the hybrid webs that conform the world. In other words, the conscious engagement with the implications of the Anthropocene brings forth what I will call "the ecological subject". The ecological subject knows itself to be, as Bateson put it, a "flexible-organism-in-its-environment", whose survival as an individuated self is tied to the survival of the environment of which it is a part.[41]

While this is not a novel ontological position for many, it is within hegemonic western epistemologies and ontologies of the human. As Arturo Escobar has argued, the intervention into nature at a *molecular level,* which I will explore specifically in chapter three, is bringing about another stage in the dismantling of the idea of a pristine nature, separate from history and human context. [42] The boundaries between that which is constructed and that which is "natural", already given, are blurring with the use of nanotechnology and gene mapping, for example. In addition, the molecular turn in the life sciences has led to an increasing understanding of our molecular existence as a trans-species being, composed of more bacterial than human cells, and in constant molecular exchange with the environments we inhabit.

The ecological subject thus emerges in response to a world differentially altered by human systems of economic exchange and modern standards of consumption, aware of its simultaneous effect on and vulnerability within the webs it inhabits.

[41] Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 320.
[42] Arturo Escobar, "After Nature: Steps to an Antiessentialist Political Ecology", *Current Anthropology* 40, no. 1 (1999): 1-2.

3. Ecopoetics

As we have already seen, the ecological crisis has created new objects of discourse – the Anthropocene, the Capitalocene, the possibility of a human species-being, and, now, the "ecological subject", for example. Literature, as part of the plane of discursivity, has a crucial role to play in the emergence of this ecological subjectivity because it can make relations of affect that make the thick tissue of reality explicit. Language is selective and can never say it all, which means that, in creating a narrative, we are always engaging in a process of selection. We try to identify (or create) lines of territorialization, lines that connect one event, place, time to another to reveal a moment, a material assemblage, a network of socio-material connections. In the human brain it is the thalamus that is in charge of filtering out information that is not immediately relevant to the continued survival of an individual. The story, according to Zygmunt Bauman, does the same, making us focus on particular details of a rhizomatic flow of events at the expense of others:[43]

> Left to its own devices, unlit by the spotlights of the story and before the first fitting session with the designers, the world is neither orderly nor chaotic, neither clean nor dirty. It is human design that conjures up disorder *together with* the vision of order, dirt together with the project of purity. The thought trims the image of the world first, so that the world itself can be trimmed right after. Once the image has been trimmed, the trimming of the world (the desire to trim it, the effort to trim it – though not necessarily the feat of the trimming accomplished) are a forgone conclusion. The world is manageable and demands to be managed, in as far as it has been made to the measure of human comprehension.[44]

Language functions in continuity and interaction with the material world, establishing relationships in the human mind by choosing some at the expense of others. As Enrique Leff writes, "there is no pure thinking floating above the bodies of individuals and society: philosophies, ideologies and theories are embodied in beliefs and imaginaries, in worldviews and

[43] Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives. Modernity and its Outcasts*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004), 17.
[44] Ibid., 19.

existential meanings that determine and orient gestures, postures, practices and actions." [45] A discursive change, of which literature is a part, even if only in its emergent stages, conceptualizes a being from which action stems, from which an ethics stems. It brings about what Jacques Rancière described as a "redistribution of the sensible", a redistribution of "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it."[46] The field of aesthetics has the potential to make available to perception that which would otherwise be invisible. [47] I argue that it is not only that which can be perceived by the senses which can be altered by an aesthetic experience but also that which the mind experiences as epistemological truth, that which is *understood*, thus laying the ground for the emergence of the "ecological subject."

I will use the term "ecopoetics" to refer to the mechanisms by which a work of literature figures human and extra-human relationships of affect and interdependence. While ecocriticism refers to a practice of reading, ecopoetics refers to a practice of writing. The ability of a text's ecopoetics to bring an ecological subjectivity anchored in the recognition of our simultaneous individuated and non-individuated existence to the fore is not, crucially, merely a matter of novel representations of embeddedness. An analysis of ecopoetics also opens the possibility for a critical engagement of the mechanisms by which a text emerges from and dialogues with concrete ecological conditions. Ecopoetics are poetics tied to place. Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of the book as a rhizomatic assemblage is, thus, very productive in the conceptualization and analysis of ecopoetics. "Contrary to a deeply rooted belief," they write,

[45] Enrique Leff, "Political Ecology: a Latin American Perspective." *Desenvolvimento e Meio Ambiente* 35, (2015).
[46] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics – The Distribution of the Sensible*, Trans. Gabriel Rockhill, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 12.
[47] Ibid., 13.

"the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can)."[48] In a rhizome, any point can attach to any other with no fixed order, establishing connections between, for example, language, organizations of power, geographies and social struggles, each in their multiplicity.[49] Multiplicities are themselves not fixed. They have neither subject nor object but are a collection of determinations, intensities, and speeds; if these change, so does the multiplicity.[50] Each form of individuation, be it a human body, a book, a tree, is subtracted from the totality from which it is a part. Hence, every individuation can be expressed as *n*-1.

From this perspective, a book is formed by matters of different kinds – material, social, political, for example. In it there are lines of articulation that create viscous links to specific territorialities and temporalities but also lines of flight which result in movements of deterritorialization, of acceleration and rupture. As a multiplicity, a book continues to make new connections, new vectors of determination. Thus, a text written under certain conditions of possibility, certain relationships of intensity and affect, can create new meanings when in conversation with new socio-political conditions, new readers (all multiplicities in themselves, all *n*-1), new texts that it had not conversed with before, as we will see in chapter one. A book can be understood, in other words, as a sphere embedded in a changing network.

While the literary texts that I will engage clearly have authors, these writers are themselves multiplicities, in a constant state of flux and exchange with the world in which they

[48] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 11.
[49] Ibid., 7.
[50] Ibid., 8.

are embedded and conditioned by the forms of relationality of their socio-political present. When I say "conditioned" I do not mean it in a deterministic way. Rather, what is meant is that everything is constantly responding to the rhizomatic connections that compose the present moment. With this in mind, I seek to explore, specifically as it relates to issues of environmental and ecological degradation, what each text that I engage is composed of, the viscous reality that it dialogues with and of which it is a part. Because of this, my methodology relies on letting the texts "speak", following the paths for thought that they themselves open. The only direction that I provide for our interaction is the ecocritical lens with which I approach them, as I develop further below.

4. The Literary Environmental Turn in Latin America

The term "ecocriticism" was popularized in the United States in the late 20th century after the publication of Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's "The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology" (1996). The journey of ecocriticism in Latin America is, simultaneously, a response to its development in the North American academy and a localized phenomenon that exceeds it. Glotfelty and Fromm define ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." According to them, "ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies."[51] This broad definition has engendered a wide variety of literary practices, some of which I will explore in this project. What is fundamental to ecocriticism, as Gisela Heffes writes, is the category of place, which will function, much like gender, race, or social class, as a lens for literary and cultural analysis.[52]

[51] Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology,* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xviii-xix.
[52] Gisela Heffes, "Introducción. Para una ecocrítica latinoamericana: entre la postulación de un ecocentrismocrítico y la crítica a un antropocentrismo hegemónico," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 40, no. 79 (2014), 12.

Considerations of environmental entanglement can be found in many pre-colonial texts, such as the Mayan *Popol Vuh,* the Incan calendars represented and described in Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's *Nueva crónica y buen gobierno* (1615), or in myths shared through oral traditions across the Americas. This has led some ecocritics today, such as Jorge Paredes and Benjamín McLean[53], to argue for a tradition of Latin American environmental writing that extends beyond the temporal frame of the colonial encounter. However, I will use a narrower definition of ecocriticism that creates an artificial but analytically useful temporal boundary. In this definition, what distinguishes ecocriticism as a practice of literary analysis is that it participates, ideally at least, in a tradition of critical theory concerned with imbalances of power, economic exploitation, and the necropolitics of capitalist and developmentalist projects. Ecocritical analysis focus on these with an eye for environmental repercussions that exceed purely human worlds. An awareness of the entanglement of literary works with a world built upon a capitalist ontology anchored in the separation of "culture" and "nature" is thus central to the form of ecocriticism carried out here. With this in mind, we can locate the precursors of Latin American ecocriticism in the regionalist literary movement.

Film and literary critic, Jens Andermann, identifies the early 20th century as the first phase of the "environmental turn" in literary practices of the region, which coincides with the capitalist expansion towards "the interior" of the nation state at the end of the 19th century.[54] Regionalism emerged during this time as a literary current concerned with the exploitation of natural resources in Latin America by foreign powers as well as their cultural imperialism. Regionalist writers such as Rómulo Gallegos in Venezuela and José Eustacio Rivera in

[53] Jorge Paredes and Benjamín McLean, "Hacia una tipología de la literatura ecocrítica en español," *Ixquic. Revista Hispánica Internacional de Análisis y Creación* 2, (2000): 1-37.
[54] Jens Andermann, *Tierras en trance. Arte y naturaleza después del paisaje,* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones metales pesados, 2018), 177.

Colombia wrote in order to expose exploitative practices in the "natural" spaces of their respective States, such as the plains or the jungle, as well as to highlight the practices of the people that worked and inhabited them. Central to these writers' concerns was the construction of the "imagined community"[55] of the Nation State at a time when intellectuals were reacting to the enshrinement of European culture in Latin American cities.

Given the definition of ecocriticism presented above, one might find the inclusion of writers such as Rómulo Gallegos in a genealogy of Latin American ecocritical practice curious. After all, the revalorization of the "autochthonous" present in many regionalist texts, such as *Doña Bárbara* (1929) was not without its paradoxes. It is these paradoxes that make this literary movement central to Ángel Rama's theorization of transculturation. According to him, the goal of the regionalist project was to avoid the fracture of the Nation State in the face of modernization and "echar mano de las aportaciones de la modernidad, revisar a la luz de ellas los contenidos culturales regionales y con unas y otras fuentes componer un híbrido que sea capaz de seguir trasmitiendo la herencia recibida."[56] On the one hand, regionalist writers thought that the traditions they portrayed, usually tied to life in the countryside or the jungle were the core of a Latin American identity that had to be recovered for the cultural and economic independence of the region. On the other hand, writers like Gallegos represented what Rama called "the lettered city" and could not seem to help but impose the dichotomy of civilization and barbarism popularized by the Argentinean writer and politician Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in *Facundo o Civilización y Barbarie* (1845) and the modernizing project that this dichotomy entailed. In addition to power imbalances with foreign countries, they were also internally responding to

[55] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* (London: Verso, 1983).
[56] Ángel Rama, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina,* (Buenos Aires: Siglo veintiuno editores, 2004), 29.

what they perceived as a problematic "modernidad sin modernización,"[57] as Domingo Miliani writes in his introduction to Gallego's *Doña Bárbara*. Modernization in the context of the discourse of nation building entailed an increase in efficiency of production or, in other words, making the "natural" world, which includes human labor, work as much as possible for the purpose of capitalist accumulation by the Nation rather than by foreign powers. Thus, to a certain extent, some regionalist writers, shared with what Mary Louise Pratt calls the "capitalist vanguard" the indictment of Spanish American society for its supposed "backwardness, indolence, and, above all, the 'failure' to exploit the resources surrounding it."[58]

We can briefly return to the example of *Doña Barbara* to illustrate this point. *Doña Bárbara* tells the story of the *latifundio* "Altamira", located in the plains region of Venezuela and owned by the Luzardo family. Santos Luzardo, educated in the city, returns to the neglected estate to sell it but is soon enamored by the lifestyle of the plains. However, his decision to stay comes with the impulse to "modernize" the region. This modernization is actualized in the protection of private property anchored in law and the related introduction of fencing, as well as the mechanization of the time of work and the production methods of the *latifundio*. His civilizing push is met with the "barbarism" of Doña Bárbara, who owns the neighboring estate and has made her fortune through the appropriation of land and cattle, condoned under the "law of the plains." In the end, Santos Luzardo gets his fences and he also wins over Marisela, a woman who, in contrast to her mother, Doña Bárbara, comes to embody the perfect combination of the wildness of the plains and the civilizing values of the city and formal education.

In the prologue to the novel, Gallegos recounts the trip to the plains on which he based his novel. His ethnographic approach puts in evidence the enterprise of cultural definition that is

[57] Domingo Miliani, "Introducción," in *Doña Bárbara*, (Madrid: Cátedra, 1997), 11–87.
[58] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 147.

central to regionalist writing. What is more, it also frames the story within an "anthropological space", a space in which "the ethnologist's illusion of a society so transparent to itself that it is fully expressed in the most trivial of its usages, in anyone of its institutions, and in the total personality of each of its members."[59] His claim is that one trip to the plains allowed him to understand the culture of the region and how it should change in the push for the modernization of Venezuela. "Necesitaba elegir mis personajes entre las criaturas reales que fuesen causas o hechuras del infortunio de mi país", he writes.[60]

Upon reading the prologue, it is evident that the anthropological space that Gallegos constructs was based on established tropes of the plains. His preconceptions and expectations informed the ways in which he perceived the area, defined by its "inmensidad, bravura, y melancolía"[61] or as "alimentador de bravura, amparador de barbarie, deshumanizador casi."[62] In this context, Santos Luzardo arrives to bring order to *Altamira* through mechanization and the establishment of private property by means of fencing. This civilizing project, which is not only practical but also spiritual, is directly linked to the transformation of forms of production in the plains and therefore, on the transformation of the relationship between humans and the ecologies that they are meant to manage and mold to their comfort. "El hilo de los alambrados," Luzardo declares, "la línea recta del hombre dentro de la línea curva de la naturaleza, demarcaría en la tierra de los innumerables caminos, por donde hace tiempo se pierden, rumbeando, las esperanzas errantes, uno solo y derecho hacia el porvenir."[63] The straight path carved by the fences would be the path towards "progress" as defined by the industrialization model of North

[59] Marc Augé. *Non-Places: Introduction To An Anthropology Of Supermodernity*, (New York: Verso, 1995), 44.
[60] Rómulo Gallegos. *Doña Bárbara*. Ed. Efraín Subero, (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1977), 113.
[61] Ibid., 110.
[62] Ibid., 111.
[63] Gallegos, *Doña Bárbara,* 234.

America and Europe. Regionalist writers such as Gallegos were thus caught between admiration of a capitalist rhetoric coming from the North and the simultaneous rejection of their cultural and economic dominance.

The emphasis on the need for humans to "tame" and organize a natural world perceived as external to the human is why critics such as Paredes and McLean reject the ecocritical analysis of regionalist or telluric novels, arguing instead for the privileging of a genealogy of literary ecological thought stemming from the *Popol Vuh* in Latin American ecocriticism. However, this position contrasts, as Gisela Heffes explains, with Jorge Marcone's[64] ecocritical analysis of the genre of the "novela de la selva" as it pertains to issues of sustainability or Ileana Rodríguez's[65] analysis of tropes of the Amazon linked to notions of State and civilization.[66] The conflict between these literary critics illuminates the variety of literary practices encompassed by the term "ecocriticism" as Latin American thinkers attempt to adapt an academic term that emerged in the United States academy to a history of Latin American environmental writing that exceeds it. While McLean and Paredes are defining a corpus of Latin American literature that deals with environmental concerns and human/non-human relationships, Marcone and Rodríguez are engaging in critical analysis of literary works to theorize about the conceptualization of terms such as "human", "development", and "nature," as well as the human and non-human entanglements that these conceptualizations imply. From this second perspective, any text can be read from an ecocritical standpoint. Thus, one of the differences between these two approaches, which we could distinguish using the terms environmental critique and ecocriticism, is the

[64] See Jorge Marcone, "Cultural Criticism and Sustainable Development in Amazonia: A Reading from The Spanish-American Romance of the Jungle", *Hispanic Journal* 19, no.2 (1998): 281-294.
[65] See Ileana Rodríguez, "Naturaleza/Nación: lo salvaje/civil escribiendo Amazonía", *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 23, no. 45 (1997): 27-42.
[66] Gisela Heffes, "Introducción. Para una ecocrítica latinoamericana: entre la postulación de un ecocentrismo crítico y la crítica a un antropocentrismo hegemónico," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 40, no. 79 (2014), 20-23.

political purpose of their analysis. Paredes and McLean's historicist environmental critique establishes a corpus of Latin American writing on human/nature entanglements that highlights the presence of this philosophical inquiry prior to and alongside the history of colonization and the formation of the capitalist world system. In contrast, the ecocriticism practiced by Marcone and Rodríguez more directly engages the power relations, environmental injustices, and instances of negative accumulation made present in Latin American literary texts and, from that standpoint, discuss ontological and epistemological conflicts that emerge in spaces of colonial difference. This second practice of ecocriticism is the one I engage in in this project, which brings me, once again, to the regionalist writers of the early 20th century.

These writers differed in their relationship to the capitalist project and its temporal and geographic manifestations. For example, *La vorágine* (1924) by José Eustacio Rivera problematizes further than Rómulo Gallegos did the complex web of national, international, and personal interests at play in the exploitation of the ecologies they engage. Yet, what these authors have in common is that they actively engage the repercussions of capitalist expansion into the continent in an increasingly globalized world. It is for this reason that Andermann argues that the regionalist movement in Latin America dealt, already in the early 20th century, with the repercussions of the "Anthropocene". "Al 'hacer hablar' a un universo no-humano que pugna por expresarse y 'actuar políticamente'", he writes, "[las] narrativas [regionalistas] también se anticipan a la hipótesis que hoy día conocemos con el nombre de 'Antropoceno'."[67] In *La vorágine*, Arturo Cova runs away to the plains and then the jungle to escape the suffocating social norms of the city. What he finds, however, is a world marred by the violence of the rubber industry. "Nadie ha sabido cuál es la causa del misterio que nos trastorna cuando vagamos en la

[67] Andermann, *Tierras en Trance*, 183.

selva", explains Don Clemente, the man who guides Arturo Cova through the jungle, "Sin embargo, creo acertar en la explicación: cualquiera de estos árboles se amansaría, tornándose amistoso y hasta risueño, en un parque, en un camino, en una llanura, donde nadie lo sangrara ni lo persiguiera; más aquí todos son perversos, o agresivos o hipnotizantes. En estos silencios, bajo estas sombras tienen su manera de combatirnos."[68] We can identify in this quote the claim that human action has negatively affected the non-human hybrid web to such an extent that it has changed its hybrid being. Human violence has left its mark in the behavior of trees, of forests. In this context, it is not only other humans trying to fight against the *caucheros* or rubber barons but the whole ecology of the jungle. In that endless struggle, the hybrid web of the jungle –the multi-species, living and non-living entanglement of spheres and networks that make this ecology– has become violent. This figuration of a vital hybrid web damaged by capitalist exploitation, where non-human entities such as trees emerge as actants, as active participants in the events of the text, anticipates epistemological and ontological questions brought about by our increased awareness of human-caused climate change and ecological destruction. More specifically and as Andermann argued, they anticipate the Anthropocene thesis, which proposes that human activity is negatively affecting the Earth's ability, as a vibrant multiplicity, to maintain homeostasis.

The regionalist movement was followed by a wave of mid-century critical writers who combined the anti-imperialist critique of previous writers with a communal existentialism bound, particularly, to the struggle of indigenous communities to assert themselves not only politically and economically but also epistemologically. This movement included writers that approached the subject from diverse backgrounds, such Miguel Ángel Asturias (Guatemala), Pablo Neruda (Chile), and Jose María Arguedas (Perú). For example, in *Hombres de maíz*, published in 1949,

[68] José Eustacio Rivera, *La vorágine*, (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1993), 141.

Asturias draws on the mythology of the *Popol Vuh* and explores the ways in which different epistemologies and temporalities coexist, amicably or not, in Guatemala. One manifestation of these conflicts emerges in the different perspectives towards the growing of corn. For those who believed in corn as sacred and connected to the essence of the human, growing corn for commercialization was the equivalent of selling one's children. This ontological claim is anchored on the coexistence in individual bodies of the present of action, where corn is grown, and a mythological time that imbues that present with different meanings. This contrasts with the time of action that is imbued with a future-oriented temporality in those who grow corn to sell and ensure a living in the future. In thinking how different temporalities and epistemologies coexist at a particular moment in Guatemalan history, Asturias critiques the assumption that modernization and the historical nature that it produces -in this case, the resignification of corn as a commodity- eliminates other ontological positions. This assertion of plurality will form the foundation of the decolonial position taken by politically engaged writers towards the end of the century, which will draw on the Latin American Official Archive to read history "against the grain." It is also in this context that the critique and visibilization of environmental exploitation truly reached the public sphere, marking a qualitative difference in the general knowledge and presence of environmental concerns in public discourse and literature.

5. Ecopoetics at the Turn of the Century

My analysis begins at the turn of the century, when we can identify the crystallization of an ecocritical position anchored in a widespread acknowledgment of human-caused ecological degradation. This is also where the Latin American literary "environmental turn", characterized by the imbrication of the artistic gesture not only with the social ecologies that support it but also

with forms of sociability that exceed purely human worlds, becomes a conscious and explicit effort.[69] As we have seen, the increase in public knowledge of the environmental crisis led to the formation of new objects of discourse, such as the Gaia hypothesis, climate change, and the Anthropocene. As we grapple with the ontological, epistemological, and policy challenges posed by this awareness of human impact, the discursive field morphs and diversifies as it integrates the complexity of the problem and its philosophical implications into itself. In dialogue with the theorists of globalization discussed above, this project identifies and tracks one vector of change as it manifests in literary works: a movement towards the local as the sphere of knowledge-making and, as a result, affective and effective action. This change is accompanied by increased awareness and knowledge of our molecular existence. I propose that this process of discursive change creates the potential for the emergence of a new –for some– ontological understanding of the self: the ecological subject. While much of academic ecological thought in Latin America has focused on jungle or Andean ecologies, my project centers on narratives anchored in the Southern Cone regions of the Chaco, Pampa, and Patagonia, which, given their local histories, environmental particularities, and positionality in the capitalist world system, present their own challenges to ecological thought, thus adding to the growing field of Latin American ecocriticism.

The end of the 20th century in the Southern Cone was marked by repressive military dictatorships and a diverse movement in favor of socialist revolution and reform, both conformed in dialogue with international events like the Cold War and the Cuban revolution. Grand narratives of social organization and transformation vied for the podium of explanatory power. In this context, the literary works of engaged writers concerned with environmental injustice in

[69] Andermann, *Tierras en trance*, 323.

Latin America were often informed by an eco-marxist perspective, which located the roots of modern ecological degradation in the violent colonial encounter and the subsequent formation of a capitalist world system premised on the separation of humans from nature, the construction of the latter as an endless source of resources and the former colonies as the primary loci of extraction. Eduardo Galeano, one of the most vocal and popular representatives of this current, summarized this political stance in the title of his first book, *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (1971). In chapter one, I analyze the work of Galeano, specifically *Memoria del fuego – Los nacimientos* (1982) and the anthology *Úselo y tírelo* (1994), to identify some of the characteristics of what I characterize as an "activist ecopoetics", prevalent at the end of the 20th century. In Galeano's literary production, the historicist approach that is central to eco-marxist thought is accomplished by means of a critical engagement with the Latin American discursive field, creating works of "archival fiction" that defy any constrains of genre, drawing on "official" and "unofficial" sources to create accounts of Latin American history that denounce the violence that the region has suffered and highlight the dissident voices that have always been a part of its fabric. His critique is informed by a utopianism that affirms the value of Latin American heterogeneity in the face of a hegemonic capitalist logic of accumulation and a developmentalist idea of "progress" that perpetuates the coloniality of power. This affirmation of heterogeneity goes hand in hand with the spatialization and temporalization of the sources he uses and the stories he chooses to tell. The result is a body of "cartographic literature"[70] that figures the Latin American hybrid web in its heterogeneity but also its shared colonial history of exploitation and rebellion.

[70] Andermann, *Tierras en Trance*, 225.

Galeano's historicist and cartographic approach is made possible by the inhabitation of a liminal position, that of the "revolutionary subject"[71], vis a vis the Latin American hybrid web, as he writes from within the social and environmental ecologies that conform his subjectivity while also locating himself in a distant symbolic space that allows him to engage the region in its heterogeneous totality. In chapter 2, I analyze *El viento que arrasa* (2012), by Selva Almada, and *Falsa calma* (2005), by María Sonia Cristoff, two works that exemplify a transition, in the 21st century, to a discursive and political positionality that increasingly moved away from the ideological dichotomies of the 20th century, anchoring instead in localized environmental and social ecologies, where markers of ecological injustice take more spatially and temporally specific forms. This discursive change reflects a renewed emphasis on local manifestations of environmental destruction to engage the global crisis and accompanies the emergence of movements such as Buen Vivir, deepening the engagement with the concept of "environment" as it is intimately lived. The critical power of this discursive refocusing is that it foregrounds the material, social, and emotional affective ties that conform our spheres of inhabitation, creating, in the process, what I call an "ecopoetics of home".

In this chapter, I first analyze the mechanisms of sphere-making figured in the texts to then reveal these spheres in their intrinsic porosity and permeability. The ability to create human spheres in any time and place is necessarily conditioned by the environmental "outside" that the sphere is trying to define itself against. Furthermore, it is determined by socio-historical conditions and relationships of power within human social worlds. In other words, the spheres that humans construct are embedded in human and non-human networks that connect them to

[71] Juan Duchesne-Winter, *La guerrilla narrada, acción, acontecimiento, sujeto*, (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2010), 24.

other spheres and delimit their horizon of possibility. In their collective existence, spheres and networks form hybrid webs traversed by differential affective powers.

Texts are themselves spheres that form rhizomatic relationships with the world outside them. In order to spatialize the texts within the ecologies that they dialogue with and determine some of the vectors of determination of this relationship, I examine the territorializing tools that Almada and Cristoff employ to locate the reader in the Chaco and Patagonia regions, respectively. In contrast to Galeano's use of the cartographic gaze to create a common regional history and environmental action, Almada and Cristoff turn to the symbolic mapping of Argentina to establish the isolation and peripherical positionality of the spheres that they then bring the reader into. Without ever claiming or desiring to construct closed "anthropological spaces" and provide transparent representations, Cristoff's reliance on testimony to construct the Patagonian spheres she visited and Almada's familiarity with the Chaco's environmental ecology and vernacular allow them to close the distance between the ecoregions that informed their work and their own discursive constructions of them. Unlike the regionalist narratives of the early 20th century, which established and reproduced tropes of the countryside and the jungle that were then symbolically imposed on the environmental and social ecologies existing beyond the texts, *Falsa calma* and *El viento que arrasa* challenge romanticized representations of life outside of the city for the benefit of National myth by anchoring their narratives in the lived, spatially and temporally anchored experience of diverse individuals. In so doing, they put in evidence the "territorialization of knowledge"[72], the specificity with which embodied mental ecologies are constituted in dialogue with the environmental and social ecologies within which they exist.

[72] Enrique Leff, "Political Ecology: a Latin American Perspective." *Desenvolvimento e Meio Ambiente* 35, (2015): 36.

Given the isolation of these spheres and the dominance of non-human living and non-living others, I identify the issue of ontological insecurity, of human insignificance when faced with the cosmos, as a key motivator in the formation of spheres in both texts. Mental ecologies, while seemingly safely contained within our skull and subjectivity, are revealed, in the process, in their openness, in their relationality. In addition, I put the texts in explicit conversation with the socio-historical context they dialogue with to analyze how the social spheres presented formed in contentious exchange with the world outside them, focusing particularly on immigration, religious proselytizing, and the creation of "commodity-cities" around development projects.

In figuring the mechanisms by which porous spheres of inhabitation are formed, these narratives help us think not only the wider web of spheres and networks that compose the regions of the Chaco and Patagonia, the Argentinean nation, Latin America and, ultimately, the modern world, but also the relationships of affect and interdependence that make the hybrid webs contained within these ecologies. Chapter three takes us even deeper into these spheres and into the hybrid web, identifying how global, local, and molecular scales of existence constitute each other in the texts analyzed. I turn to *Distancia de rescate* (2015), by Samanta Schweblin, and *Fruta Podrida* (2007), by Lina Meruane, and propose the concept of "molecular ecopoetics" to analyze the literary mechanisms by which they figure bodies in their molecularity, simultaneously embedded in material environmental ecologies and globalized systems of exchange. I argue that, in the articulation of different scales of existence, these texts think material and symbolic interconnectivity as it manifests in local ecologies marked by the presence of negative accumulation and ecological injustice.

Through a somatic gaze built upon the use of metonymy in *Fruta podrida* and a theory of detail in *Distancia de rescate,* these texts center on bodies as they exist in their simultaneous molarity –in their individuated forms– and their molecularity. Inhabiting environmental and social ecologies defined as "environmental sacrifice zones"[73], they are exposed to pesticide poisoning, exploitative working conditions, and a biopolitics aimed at the standardization and mechanization of all forms of life for the purpose of accumulation of knowledge and profit occurring somewhere else. Both novels think how the dominant model of agroindustry in the Southern Cone, centered on the production of monocultures for export, particularly of soy in the Argentinean pampa and of fruit in the Chilean central valley, manifest in the bodies, soils, and fruits through which this system of extractivism is actualized. The exchange and interdependence of matter that is intrinsic to our existence at a molecular scale is, in these contexts, a source of increased, even deadly, vulnerability and, as a result, fear. I, thus, end the chapter with a reflection on the ontological implications of inhabiting the increasingly toxic world of the Anthropocene with the awareness of our simultaneous existence as individuated beings and molecular multiplicities.

The journey from chapter one to chapter three is one of immersion, as the progression of literary works has been organized so as to increasingly plunge the reader into the scale of the formless. I discuss the regional and utopian imaginary of activist ecopoetics, the complexities of sphere-formation in a world structured by unequal power relations that inform an ecopoetics of home in the Southern Cone, and the emergence of a molecular ecopoetics that responds to the dangers of inorganic becomings in the context of the Anthropocene. Each ecopoetics is differentiated by the positionality of the writer vis a vis the ecologies from and about which they

[73] Svampa and Viale, *Maldesarrollo,* 84.

write. As the lens of the writer narrows, the reader can glimpse further into the structure of the hybrid web of the text's world. While the cartographic ecopoetics of chapter one foreground the historical formation of the Latin American regional hybrid web, the ecopoetics of home of chapter two think how this wider web constitutes local, environmentally rooted, spheres of existence. Finally, the ecopoetics of chapter three integrate the previous scales of vision into an exploration of the hybrid web in its molecular existence. All are traversed by manifestations of negative accumulation and environmental injustice. Through this intertextual play with scale, the human is figured as a "flexible-organism-in-its-environment", interdependent with and embedded in the hybrid web. With this awareness, an embodied ecological subject that can respond to the challenges of the Anthropocene can arise.

Chapter 1:
Eduardo Galeano and the Activist Ecopoetics of the 20th Century

The end of the 20th century saw the emergence of a practice of ecological writing, which I refer to as "ecopoetics", tied to an explicit critical engagement with human-caused ecological damage in the context of the eco-territorial turn. While it is clear that others had written about environmental injustice before, it was during this time that the awareness of human-caused toxicity, climate change, and extinction reached the public sphere with an unprecedented force, creating new objects of discourse and analysis.

The work of artists and writers in the 1970s, such as the international land art movement in which Latin American artists like Nicolás García Uriburu (Argentina) participated, anticipated the intensification of socio-cultural mobilization against environmental destruction that took place as of this time but especially in the 1980s and 90s. In 1970, the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) created the program *Man and Biosphere* (MAB), which distanced itself from conservationist approaches that excluded human life from protected spaces. In 1972, the UN created the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), meant to foster policy informed by awareness of environmental concerns. Despite the fact that the imposition of western environmental thought on the supposed "developing" world is problematic, as I argue in the introduction, the formation of these programs points towards the new place of environmental concerns in public discourse towards the end of the 20th century. In Latin America, the indigenous struggle for land became increasingly tied to issues of ecological injustice and the emphasis on alternative environmental ontologies as exemplified by the Zapatista movement in Mexico.

In the literary academic setting, the 1990s saw the crystallization of this new awareness in the formation, in 1991, of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) and its accompanying journal, ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment), in the United States.[74] During this same year, Homero Aridjis, Mexican writer and environmental activist, and the environmental coalition of the *Grupo de los Cien* held the first interdisciplinary meeting in Morelia, the capital of the Mexican state of Michoacán, titled *Hacia el fin del milenio.* The conclusions of this meeting, published under the title "Declaración de Morelia," were presented at the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit, held in Río de Janeiro. This meeting was followed by the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, a commitment to reduce greenhouse emissions in light of climate change research linking human activity to global warming. Writing in 2020, it is clear that these developments did not lead to real change in human patterns of extraction and consumption. Yet, they show the popularization of environmental critique that would lead to the widespread recognition of human caused ecological devastation.

In the Latin American literary sphere, this environmental awareness is evident in the proliferation of works that directly engaged the legacies of colonization and capitalist imperialism, especially as it pertained to the degradation of the Latin American hybrid web. Latin American ecocritical thought distinguished itself by the recognition that the exploitation of "natural" spaces, of soils, mountains, waters, non-human animals and vegetation could not be divorced from the simultaneous disenfranchisement of humans whose labor enriched a few but allowed them only survival.

[74] Gisela Heffes, "Introducción. Para una ecocrítica latinoamericana: entre la postulación de un ecocentrismo crítico y la crítica a un antropocentrismo hegemónico," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 40, no. 79 (2014), 14.

Ángel Rama characterized the literary work of the end of the century, emerging out of a socio-historical context marked by exploitation, as "literatura contestataria"[75]. The "novísimos," as Rama called this group, sought for their writing to engage the world that exceeded it, a world defined by the possibility of systemic change through socialist revolution. According to Carlos Fuentes, the great task of new Latin American literature in the 1970s, was to "darle voz a los silencios de nuestra historia, en contestar con la verdad a las mentiras de nuestra historia, a apropiarnos con palabras nuevas de un antiguo pasado que nos pertenece e invitarlo a sentarse en la mesa de un presente que sin él sería la del ayuno."[76] Many authors of this period saught to recover the referencial potential of literature, illuminating how writing had participated in the formation of systems of oppresion through the creation of an official Archive that perpetuated dependency and what Homi Bhabha called "colonial mimicry"[77], enshrining white, european culture and military liberating figures while ignoring the region's heterogeneus experiences, epistemologies, and ontologies, thus preserving structures of inequality.

In this chapter, I analyze the ecopoetics and ecocritical stance of the end of the century through the work of one of its most prolific and widely received voices: Eduardo Galeano. I begin by introducing the writer, as his personal history and ideology are central to his self-identification as an engaged writer. I then analyze some of the key elements of his poetics to then examine his ecopoetics more specifically as I identify it in his anthology, *Úselo y tírelo* (1994). His ecopoetics, I argue, is anchored in three proposals that traverse dominant critical ecological thought at the end of the century: a historiographic approach that identifies the moment and

75 Ángel Rama, *Novísimos narradores hispanoamericanos en marcha: 1964-1980, (*México : Marcha Editores, 1981).
76 Carlos Fuentes, "Una reflexión latinoamericana," en *El País* (October 22nd, 1977).
[77] Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," in *The Location of Culture*, (Philadelphia: Routledge, 1993) 85.

process of colonization as the foundation of destructive environmental practices in the region, the inextricability of social and environmental injustice, and a utopian imaginary that informs his critical stance and positions him outside of the dominant developmentalist discourses of the time.

Most of Galeano's literary works can be described as what Roberto González Echevarría termed "archival fictions", drawing on a body of discursive work that serves to inform and authorize his own. However, as we will see, Galeano pushed the boundaries of genre and form, responding to established understandings of discursive authority by challenging not only the official Archive as the locus of historical knowledge by diversifying his sources to include myths, songs, literature, journalism and oral histories, but also by historicizing the act of writing itself, making the creation of the Archive a topic of inquiry and critique. In the process of challenging the official Archive, Galeano defines his own. His act of poiesis draws from the rich and heterogeneous discursive web of the region to form an interdisciplinary, genre-bending body of work that examines the historical conditions that created the present of the turn of the century –defined, in part, by a new awareness of human-caused ecological devastation– without being constrained to the sphere of the possible as defined by the debate between the political right and left. In so doing, he carves a liminal critical space from which he can dialogue with the Latin American hybrid web in its complex heterogeneity and defy the entrenched opposition between ecological sustainability and social wellbeing.

1. The Writer-Activist: Eduardo Galeano and the *fin de siècle*

Eduardo Hughes Galeano, born in Montevideo, Uruguay in 1940 began his journalistic career as a teenager, submitting political caricatures to local newspapers. By the early 1960s he was already managing editor of the leftist magazine *Marcha*, after which he led the independent

newspaper *Época.* At this time, the communist revolution had triumphed in Cuba and, combined with local histories such as the Peronist movement in Argentina that were already responding to the social, political and economic unrest of the post-war period, they ignited guerilla movements throughout the region. As the historian Tulio Halperin Donghi explains, "la isla rebelde, aislada políticamente de [el continente], estaba obsesivamente presente en él a través de la imaginación colectiva, y la imagen fuertemente estilizada que ésta acogía gravitó decisivamente en la renovación cultural e ideológica tan intensa en esos años."[78] Part of this cultural renovation was the realization of what Franz Fanon described as a historical experience of "false independence" coupled with the emergence of subaltern groups as a novel political subject.[79] André Gunder Frank's "dependency theory" informed much of Galeano's literary production, as we will see. Revolutionaries and their supporters were met with the full strength of governing bodies, often backed by the United States under the *Plan Condor*. The use of violent methods by some guerilla groups as well as the fear of a communist takeover in the context of the Cold War were invoked by many Latin American States as justification to use the power of their militaries to re-establish "order" and a wave of repressive military dictatorships that would last over a decade spread over the region.

Galeano's political convictions, anchored firmly in a belief in the socialist project and the value of utopian thought, permeated not only his journalistic but also his literary work. In 1971, he published the book that made him famous and also forced him into exile: *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (1971). This work not only made him one of the main voices of the intellectual left, but also crystalized some of the systemic critiques of capitalist accumulation and exploitation coming from Latin America during the time. Galeano's narrative voice in this text

[78] Tulio Halperin Donghi, *Historia contemporánea de América latina* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2005), 543.
[79] Diana Palaversich, *Silencio, voz y escritura en Eduardo Galeano,* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 1995), 85.

was characterized by the combativeness of the 1960-70s Latin American left, strong in its critique of the fallacies of developmentalist narratives and the environmental, social, and systemic violence suffered by the region since its colonization in 1492. Due to this journalistic and literary trajectory, Galeano was exiled during the Uruguayan military dictatorship (1973-1985), fleeing first to Argentina, where he helped start the magazine *Crisis,* and then to Spain. *Las Venas* was banned by the military governments, putting in evidence the extent to which Galeano's thought and wide receptivity to his work were deemed dangerous to a capitalist, patriarchal world order. He returned to Uruguay in 1985 and founded *Brecha*, a magazine for which he served as advisor until his death in 2015.

Twelve years after the publication of *Las venas*, however, prior to the release of the trilogy *Memoria del fuego* (1982-1986), Galeano looked at the work that had made him famous with critical eyes, arguing that while he stood by its indictment of the economic, political, cultural and ecological oppression suffered by Latin America, the situation was more complex and more dynamic than he had made it seem. "No me arrepiento," he wrote, "y sin embargo creo que *Las venas* reduce la historia a una sola dimensión. Y si al decir historia digo realidad, memoria viva de la realidad, digo vida viva, vida que canta con voces múltiples; y en América, tierra donde se mezclan todas las culturas y todas las edades humanas, esa diversidad de voces parece infinita. No sé si mi boca será digna de ellas; y en cambio sí sé que ninguna obra literaria podría abarcarlas. Pero resuenan tan intensamente que son una tentación irresistible."[80] This recognition of multiplicity and heterogeneity will manifest in a literary project that will become, as of *Memoria del fuego,* increasingly rhizomatic. His texts, usually structured as an assemblage of vignettes, of voices and places, will be composed in dialectical conversation with an eclectic

[80] Eduardo Galeano, "Apuntes para un auto-retrato," *Cahiers du monde hispanique et luso-brésilien,* no. 43 (1984): 155.

archive that he deterritorializes and re-activates in new literary and extra-literary relationships. These assemblages, however, continue to be animated by the same questions that ignited *Las Venas* and will characterize, as we will see, the point of departure of Galeano's ecopoetical work: "este mundo nuestro, este matadero, este manicomio, ¿es obra de Dios o de los hombres? ¿Qué tiempo pasado ha parido este tiempo presente? ¿Por qué unos países se han hecho dueños de otros países, y unos hombres dueños de otros hombres, y los hombres dueños de las mujeres, y las mujeres de los niños, y las cosas dueñas de las personas?"[81]

In this quote, we can identify some of the concerns that underpin Galeno's ecopoetics or, in other words, the relationships of correlation, causality, interdependence, and embeddedness put forward in his works. He establishes, firstly, the necessity to find a cause (or locus of responsibility) for the inequality, injustice and violence he sees, not only at a systemic, world scale, but also in interpersonal relationships. This means that the temporal dimension of events is central to the construction of his ecopoetics. This is emphasized further by his placement of the present within a linear flow of time where events succeed each other in a causal manner, establishing the historiographical -even if idiosyncratic- approach that will characterize most of his work. Secondly, he establishes his opposition, through words such as "matadero" and "manicomio", to the systemic conditions of the present and their causes. As part of the "literatura contestataria" movement already mentioned, Galeano sought for his writing to engage the world and, ideally, change it. "No me propongo esas graves palabras: contribuir-al-cambio-social," he clarified in an interview with Raquel García Borsani, "sino a algo más chiquito: ayudar a multiplicar en los demás la capacidad de imaginación, de creación. Cuando escribo me propongo ayudar a encender fueguitos, los fueguitos de la memoria, y la capacidad de asombro e

[81] Eduardo Galeano, "Apuntes," 155.

indiganción."[82] Because of this emphasis on the potentiality of literature, of its ability to read the world and return to it an image of itself that changes it, the process of mimetic feedback described by Paul Ricœur[83], I qualify Galeano's ecopoetics, like those of many of the committed writers of this period, as "activist ecopoetics".

2. *Memoria del fuego*: Galeano's Literary Voice

Before addressing Galeano's ecopoetics and ecocriticism more specifically, I will highlight some of the characteristics of his work and narrative voice, focusing on three main aspects: his positionality in the category of archival fictions, the repeated use of literary devices such as irony, citation, and rhetorical questions, and the search for engaged readership. I will focus particularly on the first volume of the trilogy *Memoria del fuego* as its influence in *Úselo y tírelo,* a text I will analyze in the following section, is defining of Galeano's ecopoetical work.

Galeano's literary production is characterized by its intertextuality. Like many authors during this time, he turned to the Latin American archive to construct a critique of the present. It is there that he finds not only the whispers of voices and languages side-stepped by official narratives but also the glaring silence of their absence. As Svampa and Viale explain in *Maldesarrollo,* the period of the 1960s was marked by a growing realization of the fallacy of the rhetoric of development. This realization was coupled with resistance in the form of increasing political power on the left, guerilla movements, but also committed artists like the "novísimos" in literature or the filmmakers of the New Latin American Cinema movement. The Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado, for example, exposed the "Other Americas" in a series that

[82] Raquel García Borsani, *Reconstrucción de la historia: Un análisis literario de Memoria del Fuego de Eduardo Galeano,* (Montevideo, Ediciones Biblioteca Nacional, 2008), 197-198.
[83] Paul Ricœur and Mario J. Valdés. "The function of fiction in shaping reality", in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination,* (Toronto: U of Toronto, 1991).

highlighted, on the one hand, the spirit and resiliency of people living in the outskirts of society in Latin America and, on the other, their abandonment, their invisibility to systems of power and welfare. All of these artists were attempting a "re-distribution of the sensible," as Jacques Rancière explains, affecting the "laws that separate and exclude, aesthetically dividing the seen from the unseen, the heard from the unheard, what can be said from what cannot."[84] Most of these artists, unified against the imperial and capitalist exploitation of Latin America, found in socialist ideology and politics the answer to the time's socio-economic and cultural issues and a common future for the betterment of the Latin American hybrid web.

In the literary sphere, authors such as Galeano participated in the continuation of the myth of "latinoamericaneidad" inaugurated by writers and politicians such as Simón Bolívar and José Martí. This myth was informed by a shared history of colonization and subsequent exploitation. In this context, the Archive, understood as the discursive foundation of national and regional identities, became a contested space, engaged with in novel ways that subverted its authority. This critical current, it is worth clarifying, also extended to the field of History itself, which was starting to question its claims to objectivity in the context of the "linguistic turn." As the historian Carlos Pabón wrote many years later, this time saw the increasing realization that "la historia y el pasado no son la misma cosa."[85] This means that selection and emplotment are key aspects of the telling of history and, therefore, the subjectivity of the historian, his or her mental and social ecologies, condition how the (hi)story is told. This fact was the drive behind Galeano's monumental retelling of Latin American history in the trilogy *Memoria del fuego* and his use of archival material.

[84]Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, (London: Continuum, 2004), 12.
[85] Carlos Pabón, "El giro 'lingüístico': ¿desvanecimiento de la historia?", in *El pasado ya no es lo que era: La historia en épocas de incertidumbre*, (San Juan: Ediciones Vértigo, 2005), 30.

Galeano is not a historian nor a sociologist; he is a storyteller. Academic and journalistic work appeals mostly to the reasoning capacities of the human mind. In order to create an attitude of analysis and rational understanding, they transform events into objects that can be looked at from afar in order to be analyzed, dissected, and intellectually understood. In contrast, rather than creating distance, storytelling, even when it is non-fiction, can open the reader up to an "other," as Derek Attridge writes[86], ideally creating an affective impact that is not usually possible within the rhetoric of academic or journalistic work concerning the same events. Thus, rather than an affect of distance, literature can figuratively bring an "other" (a person, event, place) closer, which is Galeano's goal in tackling the diverse archive on which his work is based.

The Archive is a locus of authority and power. Analyzing its etymology, Jacques Derrida explains that "Arkhe" refers simultaneously to commencement and commandment. It thus encloses two principles: it describes the origin (the ontological principle) and, from this origin, authority and social order are derived (the legal principle). [87] In *Memoria del fuego,* Galeano plays with these principles, using the power of the official Archive to his advantage while at the same time challenging its claim to Truth. Each vignette in the trilogy is followed by a reference number that points towards the text he was informed by. The bibliography of the three volumes occupies approximately a third of the length of each text. The small number at the end of each vignette carries power, signaling that the events being told happened. Crucially, however, the "event" can be the situation that took place or its narration. For example, while Mercedes López-Baralt's "Guamán Poma de Ayala y el arte de la memoria en una crónica ilustrada del siglo XVII," published in 1979 in *Cuadernos Americanos,* is used as a source of information on the historical figure in its title, *Los cuatro viajes del Almirante y su testamento* (1977), Columbus'

[86] See Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature,* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[87] Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995), 9.

diaries and will, are used to show the early construction of America as the biblical Eden ("El Paraíso Terrenal").

Two forms of engaging the archive thus emerge. One that seeks to use the ontological and legal principles of the archive to build a story upon its authority on the past and another that subverts it by making the telling itself the focus. This double use of the archive is central to what González Echevarría calls "archival fictions." Much like the representatives of the "literatura contestataria" movement, González Echevarría argues that narrative is not self-contained but is in dialogue with other forms of discursivity. "By letting loose the arcana, by breaking open the safe, the novel-Archive unleashes a ghostly procession of figures of negation, inhabitants of the fissures and cracks which hover around the covenant of writing and the law,"[88] González Echevarría explains. He explores particularly how archival fictions draw on mediating discourses from the fields of anthropology, law, and science.

Galeano's archival fictions, one intertextual step beyond the works analyzed by González Echevarría, work with narratives anchored in the law –chronicles, letters, *cartas de relación*–, chronicles from explorers and royal servants that use the logic of science to give authority to their texts, and also works like that of Alejo Carpentier, mediated by anthropological discourse. In addition, he uses academic texts themselves from the fields of history, sociology, and anthropology, as well as songs and myths shared through orality. Thus, he defies any hierarchy of forms of knowledge, creating his own Latin American archive by ascribing historical authority to texts and voices not traditionally imbued with this power.

This approach to and construction of the Archive, combined with the author's blending of genres and his emphasis on fragmentation and discontinuities through the frequent use of

[88] Roberto González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), *34.*

vignettes can be understood as a postcolonial gesture. However, I argue that Galeano's positionality towards history as well as towards the hybrid webs that make Latin America figures a decolonial stance that seeks the centering of "others", other voices, other narratives, and, as a result, other Latin Americas. As Enrique Dussel explains, the decolonial position does not negate reason, it denounces the irrationality and violence of the myth of modernity and developmentalism. "Contra el irracionalismo posmoderno," he states, "afirmamos la 'razón del Otro'."[89] I choose to identify Galeano's work as "decolonial" rather than "postcolonial", firstly, because of Galeano's historiographical approach, which highlights that decolonial work is coeval with colonization and not a phenomenon that ocurred after decolonization and, secondly, because, as we will see, a central aspect of his critique, which manifests in his ecopoetics, is the continuation of the coloniality of power in present day Latin America.

The first volume of the *Memoria del fuego* trilogy, *Memoria del fuego I: Los nacimientos*, begins with a section on pre-Columbian myths that present a variety of indigenous ontologies. Indigenous myths will continue to appear throughout the trilogy. This means that, by starting the first volume with this gesture and following it with vigenettes ordered according to the linear temporality of history after 1492, he is not implying that indigenous ontologies are somehow in the past. Instead, this section marks the prominence of indigenous voices within this narrative of Latin American history and its rejection of hierarchies of discourse and epistemology. In this trilogy, a vignette that relates a myth provides as much information as a vignette that dialogues with the diaries of Columbus, with a work of 20th century literature or an anthropological analysis. This expansion of the Archive, coupled with the difussion of authority,

[89]Enrique Dussel, "Eurocentrismo y modernidad (Introducción a las lecturas de Frankfurt," *Capitalismo y geopolítica del conocimiento: El eurocentrismo y la filosofía de la liberación en el debate intelectual contemporáneo,* Comp. Walter Mignolo, (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Signo, 2001), 69.

allow Galeano to engage the discrusive sphere of the Latin American hybrid web in its complexity, without restricting what voices and texts can speak history.

In addition to drawing on mediating discourses, the second characteristic of archival fictions as defined by González Echevarría is "the existence of an inner historian who reads the texts, interprets and writes them."[90] Galeano's positionality vis a vis not only the discursive but also the material and social hybrid web of Latin America, particularly in *Memoria del fuego*, is one of liminality: he is both firmly anchored in the material, discursive and historical multiplicity of Latin America as well as his own personal biography, while at the same time seeking to engage the region and its histories as an "other", from an imagined geographical and temporal outside.

> Tatarabuelos de Gran Bretaña, Italia, España y Alemania; cara de cónsul sueco en Honduras. Y sin embargo, desde siempre supe que soy tan latinoamericano como las piedras de Machu Picchu o el más humilde guijarro de mi país. Y lo supe, lo sé, como se saben de verdad las cosas: viajando por mis adentros desde las entrañas hasta la cabeza, y no al revés. Pertenezco a una tierra que todavía se ignora a sí misma. Escribo para ayudarla a revelarse — revelarse, rebelarse — y buscándola me busco y encontrándola me encuentro y con ella, en ella, me pierdo.[91]

In this quote, Galeano asserts not only his belonging, but also his subjective position. He does not claim objectivity in his literary construction of Latin America but instead acknowledges that its social and environmental ecologies pass, necessarily, through his mental ecology, emerging, in their final form, from an internal self that responds to a genealogy but also -maybe even primarily- to his lived experience. And yet, his aspiration is that this individualized experience and interpretation of Latin America's archives and socio-economic conditions at the

[90] González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive*, *22.*
[91] Eduardo Galeano, "Apuntes para un auto-retrato," *Cahiers du monde hispanique et luso-brésilien,* no. 43 (1984): 153.

end of the century will be able to illuminate, even if only partially, a reality that exists beyond himself.

He faces the hybrid webs that compose this reality from the positionality of what Juan Duchesne-Winter terms "the revolutionary subject"[92], who is defined by its being "out of place" ("fuera de lugar"). It is this liminal positionality that allows it to critique the systems in which it does not wish to participate but, simultaneously, cannot escape. However, rather than occupying the impenetrable jungle that Duchesne-Winter's revolutionary subject, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, operates from, Galeano's "out of place" is, firstly, his exile in Spain from where he wrote the trilogy *Memoria del fuego* and, secondly, an imagined discursive space. The prologue to *Memoria del fuego I: Los nacimientos*, is, in fact, called "umbral" or "doorway". As Raquel García Borsani argues, this section functions to establish a pact with the reader.[93] Every vignette is informed by an archive on which the trilogy is anchored and from which Galeano's role as *histor,* as the interpreter and mediator, draws authority. At the same time, Galeano exposes and embraces the curatorial practice of historiography by narrating events not only in his own, idiosyncratic narrative voice, characterized by the use of irony, metaphors, and neologisms to expose rhetorical contradictions in the justifications of the status quo, but also from an explicitly partial political position. In this way, as Diana Palaversich writes, "Galeano 'peca' contra las prohibiciones de la institución histórica, colocando en la misma superficie del texto el aparto crítico que orienta su discurso."[94] Upon starting the trilogy, the reader is then asked to suspend the expectation of objectivity traditionally accorded to historical work while at the same time believing that was is said "happened."

[92] Juan Duchesne-Winter, *La guerrilla narrada, acción, acontecimiento, sujeto,* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2010), 24.
[93] García Borsani, *Reconstrucción de la historia*, 34.
[94] Diana Palaversich, *Silencio, voz y escritura en Eduardo Galeano,* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 1995), 155.

In addition to establishing the activist bent of his writing, his explicit political position, and inviting the reader into the pact described, "Umbral" establishes Galeano's liminal positionality vis a vis the Latin American hybrid web: "La historia oficial latinoamericana se reduce a un desfile militar de próceres con uniformes recién salidos de la tintorería. Yo no soy historiador. Soy un escritor que quisiera contribuir al rescate de la memoria secuestrada de toda América, pero sobre todo de América Latina, tierra despreciada y entrañable: quisiera conversar con ella, compartirle los secretos, preguntarle de qué diversos barros fue nacida, de qué actos de amor y violaciones viene."[95] Rather than building his historiographical narrative with epic heroes, Galeano figures an ecosystemic heroism that emerges out of small moments of rebellion carried out by subaltern subjects, mountains, animals, and the "dead" voices of myth. It is the form of the vignette that allows him to include this plurality of historical actants.

In order to write this narrative, Galeano creates a discursive position for himself that exists beyond time and space. From this positionality, he faces the immensity of Latin American geography and history and puts its official and unofficial archives to work, reviving these works by putting them into motion, deterritorializing them and creating new relationships of inter- and extra-textuality. For example, the text *Supersticiones del río de la Plata,* originally published in 1896 by Daniel Granada starts as follows: "Nada hay inútil para el historiador y el filósofo, de cuanto el vulgo conserva tradicionalmente en hábitos y creencias. El observador hallará, entre unas y otros, cosas que mueven a risa y aun a lástima, por la simplicidad e ignorancia de quien las ejecuta o tiene por ciertas."[96] The author of his source material clearly disregarded indigenous myths as a source of knowledge, social organization, and collective history. Yet, Galeano used the text to inform himself of the myths of indigenous groups in the region of the Río de la Plata

[95] Eduardo Galeano, *Memoria del fuego I: Los Nacimientos,* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1982).
[96] Daniel Granad*a, Supersticiones del río de la Plata,* (Montevideo: A. Barreira y Ramos, 1896), v.

and to highlight the link between current practices in the area and indigenous imaginaries, for example, in the drinking of *mate.* Thus, Granada's book now forms part of a new discursive ecology that uses its knowledge while subverting its original ideology.

Galeano's discursive positionality, out of time and place, is constructed by the dialectical relationship between the unrooted Archive from which the stories he tells emerge and the specific locations and cultural contexts in which each story actually took place. Each vignette that does not relate a myth but an event located in the linear temporality of western History is preceded by the place and year in which it took place. As the text progresses, stories that make the past of Latin America are spatialized and temporalized, creating an alternative discursive web to the official Archive "of military parades" that is inscribed into the geographic and social webs of the region. Galeano's text could thus be described as "cartographic literature" in the sense developed by Jens Andermann following Fernando Aínsa. "Este sistema distribuye a través del espacio recorrido por el héroe unos valores residuales que en su conjunto forman mapas del Estado-nación como trama espacializada de conflictos y tensiones."[97] Galeano as the "revolutionary subject" moves across the discursive cartography that he creates, sometimes occupying two spaces at once. In 1493, for example, the narrative moves from Barcelona, to Rome, to Huexotzingo. The residual value that he leaves behind is a discomfort in the reader who fills in the narrative gaps opened by Galeano's use of irony, citation, and open questions from his or her own mental ecology. I will explain the important function of the reader in Galeano's work further below.

The liminality of Galeano as a "revolutionary subject" is thus composed of the double movement by which he positions himself towards his topic. On the one hand, he occupies the

[97] Andermann, *Tierras en Trance*, 225.

imagined discursive positionality described and exemplified above, which allows him to *hold-together* an eclectic mix of stories that he presents to the reader as the foundation of a different "latioamericaneidad". On the other hand, he explicitly denies the possibility of separating the text from the mental ecology that created it. His own embodied experience, the stories that he's inherited, his political ideology, the multiplicity of vectors of determination that compose him, act as a sieve through which his work must pass in order to emerge into the world. Thus, he is both unquestionably inside Latin America, since his subjectivity is constructed and defined by his belonging to it, but also necessarily outside.

Gonzalez Echevarría's third and final characteristic of archival fictions is "the presence of an unfinished manuscript that the inner historian is trying to complete."[98] *Memoria del fuego*, just like *Una historia casi universal* (2008), another of Galeano's works, is an *opera aperta*, as García Borsani suggests.[99] Rather than having an unfinished manuscript as part of the plot as in, for example, Alejo Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* (1953), *Memoria del fuego* is itself the unfinished manuscript. The use of vignettes highlights the inevitable silences present in a retelling of history. The blank spaces around each text speak, highlighting the infinity of stories not included, each gap a million books in itself. Because of this, Galeano's history of Latin America could have been infinitely longer or, alternatively, much shorter. The openness of this work is anchored further in the role of the reader, who is constantly being asked to fill in the narrative gaps, in the completion of that which is told. Fulfilling this task is not a choice but a necessity in the work's ability to create meaning. According to Umberto Eco,[100] who developed the concept of the *opera aperta*, openness is in fact central to aesthetic enjoyment since it allows

[98] González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive, 22.*
[99] García Borsani, *Reconstrucción de la historia*, 31.
[100] It is worth clarifying that, according to Eco, all art is ultimately open.

the receiver to intervene in the aesthetic construction of the piece through their own mental ecology. The aesthetic experience is thus characterized by its plurivocality. Aesthetic works from the 1960s, the decade during which Eco developed this concept, were characterized, according to him, by their *explicit* plurivocality.[101]

It is their form that highlights the social commitment of these works, which brings us back to Rama's "literatura contestataria" and the committed artists of the end of the century. Having an engaged reception was an explicit goal of filmmakers such as Fernando Birri (Argentina), Humberto Solás (Cuba) and Glauber Rocha (Brazil) and writers such as Eduardo Galeano. This was, as the German playwright Bertolt Brecht explained in his conceptualization of *epic theater,* a necessary condition for the fostering of a critical mind in the context of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movements of the time. The *Verfremdungseffekt,* commonly translated as an "alienation effect"[102], described the experience of estrangement or curiosity awakened in the audience of this kind of work, which was meant to jolt them out of passive reception. "Los breves capítulos de *Memoria del fuego*," Galeano explains, "son ventanas para una casa que cada lector construye a partir de la lectura; y hay tantas casas posibles como posibles lectores. Las ventanas, espacios abiertos al tiempo, ayudan a mirar. (…) El lector entra y sale de esta casa de palabras como quiere, cuando quiere y por donde quiere, leyéndola de principio a fin o del fin al principio, de corrido o salteando o al azar o como se le ocurra."[103] The form of *Memoria del fuego* is open to the reader because, while there is a logic in how the vignettes follow each other organized by theme, time and/or place, they are also independent units. There are also several literary elements that Galeano includes in his writing that demand

[101] Umberto Eco, *The open work*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 123.
[102] Peter Brooker, "Key words in Brecht's Theory and Practice of Theater," in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, Ed. Peter Thompson and Glendyr Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 193.
[103] Eduardo Galeano: "Apuntes sobre la memoria y sobre el fuego", in *Ser como ellos*, (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1993), 6.

the readers participation in completing was is being told that I will now analyze further: his use of irony, citation, and open questions.

The use of irony allows for the emergence of two conflictive and ideologically antagonist points of view in the same syntactic space.[104] Two types of irony emerge in Galeano's work: the verbal irony of the author's voice and, more often, a contextual irony that is not spelled out by the author but is made clear to the reader. For example:

> Para los indios, las hierbas hablan, tienen sexo y curan. Son las plantitas, ayudadas por la palabra humana, las que arrancan la enfermedad del cuerpo, revelan misterios, enderezan destinos y provocan el amor o el olvido. Estas voces de la tierra suenan a voces del infierno a los oídos de la España del siglo XVII, ocupada en inquisiciones y exorcismos, que para curarse confía en la magia de las oraciones, los conjuros y los talismanes más que en los jarabes, las purgas y las sangrías.[105]

In this passage, it is the lingering but unstated irony of the situation described that does the work of the critique: to the opposition modern European/primitive indigenous Galeano contraposes two medical systems: one based on experimentation with plants and de-toxification practices, the other based on religious prayer and exorcism. To the 20th century mind, the blindness of the colonial gaze presented is glaring.

Galeano's use of citation can also be conceptualized in a dual manner: in the case of negative intertextuality, the cited speaker is disqualified by his own voice; in the case of positive intertextuality, the cited voice coincides ideologically with that of the author.[106] It is up to the reader to infer whether the citation falls under one category or the other. One example of positive intertextuality appears in the vignette "¿Dónde está lo verdadero, lo que tiene raíz?". This piece, set in 1493 in the valley of Tlaxcala, centers on a meeting between Tecayehuatzin, king of the Huexotzingo, and the poets of the region. Galeano cites their conversation from the text *Los*

[104] Diana Palaversich, *Silencio, voz y escritura en Eduardo Galeano,* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 1995), 225.
[105] Eduardo Galeano, *Memoria del fuego I: Los Nacimientos,* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1982), 194.
[106] Palaversich, *Silencio, voz y escritura en Eduardo Galeano,* 227-228.

antiguos mexicanos (1977) by Mexican anthropologist and historian, Miguel León-Portilla: "¿Son acaso verdaderos los hombres? ¿Será mañana todavía verdadero nuestro canto? (…) Sabemos que son verdaderos los corazones de nuestros amigos."[107] It is especially in contrast to the previous vignette, that this citation takes meaning. While the cited text presents a group in the yet-to-be-conquered region of Mexico pondering philosophical questions about human life, love, and the Real, the previous vignette, set in Rome during the same time period, presents the controversial figure of Pope Alexander VI "cutting the world as if it were chicken," dividing the land of what would be the Americas between the Spanish and Portuguese crowns. It is in the contrast that the irony rests.

A case of negative intertextuality appears in "Del testimonio de John Underhill, puritano de Connecticut, sobre una matanza de indios pequot." This vignette is a literal transcription, Galeano adds nothing to the voice of the cited speaker:

> Ellos no sabían nada de nuestra llegada. (…) No pudimos sino admirar a la Divina Providencia cuando nuestros soldados, inexpertos en el uso de las armas, lanzaron una descarga tan cerrada que parecía que el dedo de Dios hubiera encendido la mecha con el pedernal. (…) Si Dios no hubiera preparado los corazones nuestros para Su servicio, hubiéramos sido movidos a conmiseración. Pero habiéndonos Dios despojado de piedad, nos dispusimos a cumplir nuestro trabajo sin compasión, considerando la sangre que los indios habían derramado cuando trataron bárbaramente y asesinaron a unos treinta de nuestros compatriotas. (…) Cayeron hombres, mujeres y niños; los que escapaban de nosotros, caían en manos de nuestros indios aliados, que esperaban en la retaguardia. (…) Se podría preguntar: ¿Y por qué tanta furia? (Como alguien ha dicho.) ¿No deberían los cristianos tener más clemencia y compasión? Y yo respondo recordando la guerra de David. (…) A veces las Escrituras declaran que las mujeres y los niños deben perecer junto a sus padres. A veces se dan casos distintos, pero no vamos a discutir sobre eso ahora. Suficiente luz recibimos de la Palabra de Dios para nuestros procederes.[108]

By leaving this quote without commentary, Galeano lets the words of the testimony undo themselves. The speaker's justification of extreme violence in the conquest of North America,

[107] Galeano, *Memoria del fuego I*, 48.
[108] Ibid., 183.

supposedly aided and approved by God, is much more striking in his own voice due to the truth value of direct testimony.

The final characteristic of Galeano's poetics that I will touch upon is his use of open questions. When narrating the conquest of Cuzco he writes: "Nace un altar en la plaza. Los pendones de seda, bordados de águilas, escoltan al dios nuevo, que tiene los brazos abiertos y usa barba como sus hijos. ¿No está viendo el dios nuevo que sus hijos se abalanzan, hacha en mano, sobre el oro de los templos y las tumbas?"[109] In some instances the question is the author's, in others it is mediated by the voice of the subject of the vignette: "Miran vigilando. No mueven ni las pestañas. Desconfían. Ese pincel que les está robando la imagen, ¿no les estará robando el alma? El pincel es mágico como el espejo. Como el espejo, se apodera de la gente."[110] While the question is posed by the Incan person being painted in Cuzco, informed by their own cosmology and ontology of the self, one can also hear Galeano's question, which instead asks whether the creation of the painted representation will not lead to a paradoxical invisibility, to an essentializing gesture that will become a tool of conquest.

The use of irony, citation, and rhetorical questions create a multi-vocal discourse, not unlike Mikhail Bakhtin's "double-voiced discourse," which "serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions."[111] In Galeano's work, however, it is not two voices that emerge in the text, but thousands. One of those is, in fact, the reader's. Ironically, as explicit as Galeano's political ideology is, it is rare that it does not rely on the reader's completion of the

[109] Galeano, *Memoria del fuego I*, 81-82.
[110] Ibid., 142.
[111] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 324.

meaning-making capacities of the text for it to emerge. He demands a "poliauditory"[112] reader that can literally "read between the lines." This inclusion of the reader in the meaning-making process is at the core of Galeano's construction of the *Verfremdungseffekt* and is key to his understanding of writing as praxis.

Given the emergence of environmental concerns in the public sphere during the 1970s as well as Galeano's elevation of writing as a tool for the awakening of an ethico-critical positionality in the reader, it is unsurprising that he turned to the issue of environmental exploitation at the turn of the century. I will now analyze more specifically the elements of his activist ecopoetics as they include, as we will see, elements common to critical environmental thought at the end of the 20th century and to the engaged artistic production of the time.

3 *Úselo y tírelo:* Galeano's Auto-(eco)criticism

Úselo y tírelo, published in 1994, is a hybrid text, much like all of Galeano's work. It is at times an essay, a biography, or a poetic retelling of past events. Given his social commitments, Galeano wants to make his texts available to as many readers as possible and, as Frederic Jameson argues, "genre is essentially a socio-symbolic message, form is immanently and intrinsically and ideology in its own right."[113] Combining genres is a way to reach a variety of mental ecologies, at the same time that it allows him to circumvent the requirements of any particular form.

However, *Úselo y tírelo* is different from previous works in that it is a quasi-anthology created by the author himself that combines literal and paraphrased excerpts of previous pieces with new texts. His engagement with the archive is much different in *Úselo y tírelo* than in

[112] Palaversich, *Silencio, voz y escritura en Eduardo Galeano*, 231.
[113] Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 141.

previous works. Even though he maintains some of the direct citations that appear in texts such as *Memoria del fuego,* he no longer provides sources nor a bibliography. If the reader wants to find where a direct quote came from, s/he has to go to back to, for example, *Memoria del fuego,* and follow the path to the original source there. Thus, the reader of *Úselo y tírelo* receives a series of discursive reverberations, the same kind of diffuse memory that inhabits oral histories and storytelling. It no longer matters where the story comes from, only that it is told. In this sense, the text functions as an explicit environmental critique rather than an archival fiction. The connecting thread between all of the vignettes or essays in *Úselo y tírelo* is that they all deal with the issue of environmental destruction in Latin America. Thus, this work provides a unique opportunity to analyze the ecopoetics of an author who, in the process of selection and reorganization of vignettes from his previous texts, carried out an ecocritical analysis of his own work. Furthermore, given the prominence of his voice within the intellectual left of the *fin de siècle,* this analysis will also serve to highlight some of the characteristics of ecological thought in Latin American activist literature of this period.

Most of the texts in *Úselo y tírelo* that come from previous works come from *Memoria del Fuego,* particularly the first volume. This is because the first volume encompasses, in addition to pre-Columbian myths, the period from 1492 to 1700 and central to Galeano's ecocriticism is his conception of "the original sin"[114]: the colonization of the Americas led to the process of primitive accumulation and the creation of a capitalist system structured around the maintenance of inequality. This is, of course, also the main argument of *Las venas abiertas de América Latina,* the second text from which Galeano takes most for *Úselo y tírelo*.

[114] Eduardo Galeano, *Úselo y tírelo,* (Buenos Aires: Booket, 2012), 27.

The text starts with original vignettes that describe the lies upon which, according to Galeano, the continued exploitation of Latin American ecologies at the end of the century rests. Galeano is part of a wave of eco-marxism that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, which considers not only anthropocentrism to be at the root of environmental issues, but also exploitation within the capitalist world system. Yet, changes in his thought and poetics from *Las Venas* to *Memoria del Fuego* put in evidence that he does not, like many eco-marxists, oppose the concerns of deep-ecology, which eco-marxists have tended to frame as disengaged with the social injustices of the present due to the width of its temporal scope.[115] Nevertheless, he positions himself firmly with eco-marxist thinkers who have used the term "capitalocene" to describe the current era, many of whom also subscribe to Gunder Frank's "dependency theory." As was already discussed, in response to the popularization of its alternative, the "Anthropocene", "Capitalocene" puts the blame of human caused geological and climatic impact on the excesses of the capitalist system and the individuals, companies, and countries that have reaped the most benefits rather than on the human as a species-being. "La generalización absuelve: si somos todos responsables, nadie es,"[116] Galeano states in this section of *Úselo y tírelo*. However, as it was already discussed in the introduction, while we might not all be directly responsible for it, we do all suffer the consequences of environmental devastation:

> Muy recientemente nos hemos enterado que la naturaleza se cansa, como nosotros, sus hijos; y hemos sabido que, como nosotros, puede morir asesinada. Ya no se habla de *someter* a la naturaleza: ahora hasta sus verdugos dicen que hay que *protegerla*. Pero en uno y otro caso, naturaleza sometida o naturaleza protegida, ella está *fuera* de nosotros. La civilización que confunde a los relojes con el tiempo, al crecimiento con el desarrollo y a lo grandote con la grandeza, también confunde a la naturaleza con el paisaje, mientras el mundo, laberinto sin centro, se dedica a romper su propio cielo.[117]

[115] Gisela Heffes, "Introducción. Para una ecocrítica latinoamericana: entre la postulación de un ecocentrismocrítico y la crítica a un antropocentrismo hegemónico," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 40, no. 79 (2014), 17.
[116] Galeano, *Úselo y tírelo,* 10.
[117] Ibid., 21.

Galeano's starting point is thus the ontological affirmation of the world as a hybrid web, a "labyrinth with no center;" that is destroying itself. This destruction, he argues using neologisms and repetition, two common elements in his poetics, is caused by confusions of what is and is not real. Acceleration and endless consumption, embedded in the title phrase "úselo y tírelo," create a frenetic world where convenient confusion and simplification reign. Clocks are not time, development is not growth, nature is not outside of us. Galeano positions himself against both extractivist and protectionist environmental movements that, ill or well intentioned, obfuscate the reality of human embeddedness in the hybrid web and the consequent interdependence of all, human and non-human, worlds.

The second section of *Úselo y tírelo* is composed of texts taken mostly from *Memoria del Fuego I* but also other works such as *El libro de los abrazos* (1989) that relate the colonial encounter, particularly from indigenous perspectives. These vignettes frame a section taken from *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* on the history of sugar production in the Americas. A conversation thus emerges between antagonist epistemic positions, presented through *Memoria del Fuego* and *Las Venas* especially, that struggle not only for material environments but also for the right to define where the boundaries of the human community lie and, therefore, where the frontier of accumulation is.

The text ends with a series of prophecies taken from *Memoria del Fuego II – Las Caras y las Máscaras* (1988), which encompasses the historical period between 1700 and 1900 and the contentious formation of Latin American nation-states, and a new piece titled "Ventana sobre la utopía." Thus, I will focus on three aspects of Galeano's activist ecopoetics and ecocriticism as evidenced in *Úselo y tírelo:* colonization as the original sin, the human body and group as a locus

of environmental exploitation, and the vision of a socialist utopia, sometimes infused by indigenous cosmologies, as the horizon of possibility of human and non-human co-habitation.

3.1. "Nuestra América": The Colonial Legacy

Underpinning much of Galeano's political thought as well as the construction of his ecopoetics and his auto-ecocriticism is the notion of the "original sin". This concept signals a turning point in the Latin American hybrid web, the beginning of a new order sparked by European colonization characterized by violent inequality and the extractivist logic of a nascent capitalist world system. The focus on the moment of colonization provides an origin, a starting point to an alternative narrative that seeks to explain the role of Latin America as provider of labor and raw materials in the economic world order. In addition, it also provides a "founding narrative" for the imagined community of Latin American that was central to emancipatory projects as of the early 19th century and were fundamental to eco-marxist thought of the end of the 20th century. Across Galeano's work, this is most clearly seen in the cartographic impulse of his texts, which, as was already mentioned, bring together moments from across the Americas to form a cohesive narrative of collective violence and rebellion.

In order to show the centrality of the "original sin" in Galeano's ecopoetics and ecocriticsm, I will return to *Memoria del fuego.* The myths retold in the trilogy engage a variety of hybrid webs conceptualized in indigenous ontologies. The myth of how the *mate* plant came to the Guaraní peoples of the south, for example, brings together ethical, chemical, and social epistemological elements:

> La luna se moría de ganas de pisar la tierra. Quería probar las frutas y bañarse en algún río.
> Gracias a las nubes, pudo bajar. Desde la puesta del sol hasta el alba, las nubes cubrieron el cielo para que nadie advirtiera que la luna faltaba.
> Fue una maravilla la noche en la tierra. La luna paseó por la selva del alto

> Paraná, conoció misteriosos aromas y sabores y nadó largamente en el río. Un viejo labrador la salvó dos veces. Cuando el jaguar iba a clavar sus dientes en el cuello de la luna, el viejo degolló a la fiera con su cuchillo; y cuando la luna tuvo hambre, la llevó a su casa. «Te ofrecemos nuestra pobreza», dijo la mujer del labrador, y le dio unas tortillas de maíz.
> A la noche siguiente, desde el cielo, la luna se asomó a la casa de sus amigos.
> El viejo labrador había construido su choza en un claro de la selva, muy lejos de las aldeas. Allí vivía, como en un exilio, con su mujer y su hija.
> La luna descubrió que en aquella casa no quedaba nada que comer. Para ella habían sido las últimas tortillas de maíz. Entonces iluminó el lugar con la mejor de sus luces y pidió a las nubes que dejasen caer, alrededor de la choza, una llovizna muy especial.
> Al amanecer, en esa tierra habían brotado unos árboles desconocidos. Entre el verde oscuro de las hojas, asomaban las flores blancas.
> Jamás murió la hija del viejo labrador. Ella es la dueña de la yerba mate y anda por el mundo ofreciéndola a los demás. La yerba mate despierta a los dormidos, corrige a los haraganes y hace hermanas a las gentes que no se conocen.[118]

Complex ecological webs abound in this myth. The anthropomorphizing of the moon figures a cosmic web where earth and heavens are intertwined, in dialogue. Within that cosmic web, the farmer's family exemplifies through their actions how generosity can create a web of sociability and reciprocity. This precept is shared within the discursive web of the Guaraní peoples in the form of myth to highlight its value to their social web. The *mate* plant reinforces this social web because of the common and codified practice of drinking it in groups, from a shared gourd. The plant is not only conducive to sharing and conviviality but also to contribution to the community as it "corrects the lazy". This points towards the interconnection between the social web and the material web that composes it. Mate contains caffeine and has energizing qualities. The chemical infrastructure of the human body, infused with mate, thus becomes visible, expressed in human bodies that are energized and awakened through the drinking of the plant.

[118] Galeano, *Memoria del fuego I*, 34.

This myth figures an entanglement of cosmic, social, discursive, and material webs traversed by the plant of mate. And yet, in the ecocritical selection of his own work for *Úselo y tírelo*, Galeano did not gravitate towards ontological-environmental texts such as this. Instead, he selects the "prophesies," the myths that predicted the end of the world as it was known at the time of colonization. "Humillarán al mundo," paraphrased from *Memoria del fuego I,* is an example:

> Echado en la estera, boca arriba, el sacerdote-jaguar de Yucatán escuchó el mensaje de los dioses. Ellos le hablaron a través del tejado, montados a horcajadas sobre su casa, en un idioma que nadie más entendía.
>
> Chilam Balam, el que era boca de los dioses, recordó lo que todavía no había ocurrido:
>
> —*Dispersados serán por el mundo las mujeres que cantan y los hombres que cantan y todos los que cantan…Nadie se librará, nadie se salvará…Mucha miseria habrá en los años del imperio de la codicia. Los hombres, esclavos han de hacerse. Triste estará el rostro del sol…Se despoblará el mundo, se hará pequeño y humillado…*[119]

While they are not cited in *Úselo y tírelo*, this text is informed by the Mayan books of Chilam Balam, anonymous handwritten works from the 16th and 17th centuries, some of which recount the colonization of the Yucatec peoples and the hybrid webs they inhabited. The cosmic web is still present in this text, figured in the dialogue that the jaguar priest has with the gods and his ability to "remember what had yet to occur," to know the transformation of worlds that would come. This discursive play with tenses is common in Galeano's ecopoetics as it allows him to figure a causal sequence of events that extends into the present of the reader and at the same time makes indigenous bodies, ontologies and epistemologies the main actants in his stories, decentralizing the colonization narrative. This temporal play is a literary decolonial gesture that marks a qualitative shift in the social ("Dispersados serán por el mundo las mujeres que cantan y los hombres que cantan y todos los que cantan…"), subjective ("Los hombres, esclavos han de

[119] Galeano, *Úselo y tírelo*, 37.

hacerse."), and environmental ("Se despoblará el mundo, se hará pequeño y humillado…") hybrid webs of the Americas from the moment of colonization. Furthermore, by telling what would come from the positionality of the Mayan priest, Galeano is shifting the locus of sense-making to the Other of the colonization process. "Allí ocurre una ruptura de una cierta armonía, llena de contradicciones, es verdad, y de barbaridades, monstruosidades y horrores," he explains in an interview with García Borsani, "Pero la realidad, por debajo de esas estructuras de poder, aún en sociedades muy centralizadas y despóticamente organizadas, como las había en la zona del actual México y Perú, mostraba una base social que era infinitamente más igualitaria que la sociedad europea en el mismo período."[120] While indigenous communities in the Americas were clearly not devoid of injustice and violence, Galeano sees critical and revolutionary potential in the foregrounding of their ontologies and epistemologies.

In *1492: El encubrimiento del Otro,* Enrique Dussel argues that the colonization process was characterized by an "en-cubrimiento" (as opposed to "des-cubrimiento"), a concealment or ignorance, of alterity[121]. Rather than engaging the world previously unknown to Europe in its complexity, encountering it in its otherness, the colonization process saw instead the definition of Europe as "modern" in contrast to non-European subjectivities, cosmologies, practices, and environments that, by opposition, were obscured in their complexity and diversity under the label of "unmodern" or "primitive."

The violence of not recognizing bodies and cultures extended to the hybrid web as a whole, not only in the Americas. By making the prolonged moment of colonization the starting point of a new form of environmental exploitation, Galeano draws our attention towards the

[120] García Borsani, *Reconstrucción de la historia,* 203.
[121] Enrique Dussel, *1492: El encubrimiento del Otro. Hacia el origen del "mito de la modernidad,"* (La Paz: Plural Editores, 1994), 8.

shared dualist logic (Europe/not-Europe, modern/primitive, civilized/barbaric, and, of course, culture/nature) that underscores the violence against human bodies and cultures in the global south –made possible by the disavowal of alterity as a value– and the denial of ecological embeddedness. Both are premised on a refusal and/or inability to recognize otherness in its complexity, seeking to dominate it through the gaze of the outside observer that simultaneously essentializes the Other and reinforces a bounded notion of self. Using the method of the rhetorical question, the author wonders: "¿Cuántos ardieron en la hoguera, por el delito de creer que toda tierra es sagrada? Adorando a la naturaleza, los paganos practicaban la idolatría y ofendían a Dios. ¿Ofendían a Dios o más bien ofendían al Capitalismo naciente? De aquel entonces proviene la identificación de la propiedad privada con la libertad. La libertad de exprimir al mundo como fuente de ganancia y objeto de consumo."[122] The phrase "de aquel entonces" makes explicit the emplotment of colonization and the disavowal of alterity that it entailed within a causal timeline leading to the formation of the capitalist world system and the negative accumulation –in the form of physical violence, displacement, unrestrained extractivism, and denial of self-assertion, to name a few– that it entailed. The injustice left lingering in the silences of the unanswered questions leave the task of recognizing the inextricability of human and environmental exploitation, another central tenet of Galeano's ecocritical position, to the reader.

3.2. Ecological Degradation: The Human as Synecdoche

A defining characteristic of Latin American critical environmental thought, as Jens Andermann argued, is the rejection of the separation between the degradation of non-human worlds through continued and unrestrained extractivism and that of human worlds marked by

[122] Galeano, *Úselo y tírelo,* 23.

inequality and violence. This is a key premise in Latin American eco-marxism such as Galeano's but also in Leonardo Boff's "ecotheology of liberation," and the "Buen vivir" movement in its academic and activist expressions. As Boff argued in his book *Grito de la tierra, grito de los pobres*, "sin un mínimo de justiciar social es imposible alcanzar una justiciar ecológica efectiva. La una involucra a la otra"[123]. Underlying this argument is, as José Carlos Mariátegui put it in his collection of essays about Perú, the problem of land[124].

Imperial dominance existed in Latin America prior to the colonial period. Yet, the extent of displacement and death suffered by the indigenous communities of the Americas after colonization was so devastating that, as was already mentioned in the introduction, it caused a "little ice-age" due to the sudden increase in vegetation in previously farmed lands.[125] This necropolitics extended to other continents, as Africans were enslaved and brought to the Americas to work the new plantations of sugar, coffee and cotton. "El botín de la conquista no incluía sólo [metales]," Halperin Dongui explains, "sino también hombres y tierras. Lo que hizo del área de mesetas y montañas de México a Potosí el núcleo de las Indias españolas no fue sólo su riqueza minera, sino también la presencia de poblaciones indígenas, a las que su organización anterior a la conquista hacía utilizables para la economía surgida de ésta."[126]As social, political, and economic conditions changed, this displacement took the form of the transformation of the Incan *mita* system into a structure of forced labor in the Andes, the *encomiendas* system of labor, the formation of enormous *latifundios,* and the later imposition of developmentalist projects that

[123] Leonardo Boff, *Grito de la tierra, grito de los pobres: Hacia una consciencia planetaria,* (Ciudad de México: Ediciones Dabar, 1997), 45.
[124] José Carlos Mariátegui, *7 ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana,* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 2007).
[125] Alexander Koch, Chris Brierley, Mark M. Maslin, and Simon L. Lewis, "Earth systems impacts of the European arrival and Great Dying in the Americas after 1492," *Quaternary Science Reviews* 207, (2019): 13-36.
[126] Halperin Donghi, *Historia contemporánea de América latina,* 19.

have successfully promoted the fallacy, as Joan Martinez-Alier explained[127], that environmental sustainability and social welfare are contradictory objectives. The ironic engagement with this fallacy is the second aspect of Galeano's ecocritical stance that I focus on now.

As I mentioned, *Úselo y tírelo* combines vignettes published in previous works as well as new texts. "El paraíso" is an original vignette but expresses a common theme in Galeano's work: the questioning of internalized "common sense" that merely reproduces the unfulfilled promises of capitalist development.

> Si nos portamos bien, está prometido, seremos todos iguales, sin distinción de raza, color, sexo, idioma, religión ni opinión. Todos veremos las mismas imágenes y escucharemos los mismos sonidos y vestiremos las mismas ropas y comeremos la misma comida y estaremos solos de la misma soledad dentro de casas iguales en barrios iguales de ciudades iguales donde respiraremos la misma basura y seremos conducidos por los mismos automóviles y programados por las mismas computadoras, en un mundo que será maravilloso para todo lo que no tenga piernas ni patas ni alas ni raíces.[128]

The run-on sentence, stitched together by the repetition of the conjunction "and" creates the sensation of speed, mirroring the frenetic rhythm by which new desires, constructed as needs, are created and reproduced within the narrative of developmentalism. Consumption and homogeneity are at the core of what the rhetoric of developmentalism sells. In this sense, it is clear why Galeano emphasizes the continuity between colonialism and developmentalism. Both rely on a modern subjectivity dialectically constructed in relation to an Other deemed inferior but who, crucially, holds the potential to be the same. As Dussel explains, existing *in potentia* is a state of present non-being.[129] In other words, the alterity of the present subjectivity, with all of its complexities and particularities, is denied in favor of the inhabitation of a state of potentiality

[127] Joan Martinez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation,* (Northampton, MA: Eduard Elgar Publishing Limited, 2002).
[128] Galeano, *Úselo y tírelo*, 118.
[129] Enrique Dussel, *1492: El encubrimiento del Otro,* footnote 43, 31.

aimed at the perpetually moving target of being called "developed", with its corresponding levels of consumption.

The sense of irony that builds as the run-on sentence continues to grow is confirmed with a final reversal. The vignette starts with "Si nos portamos bien", an expression that signals that what comes will be desirable. The collective "we" for whom Galeano speaks is in the position of a child who will obtain the consumer goods and social capital desired if they are "good," thus implying a paternalistic Other who has the power to grant or deny them. The condition of inclusion into the "developed" club and the proliferation of consumption is a mimetic relationship to those already defined as such, as Homi Bhabha describes[130]. The death drive that is embedded in the striving to be a "modern", "developed" Other (defined in the dominant Other's terms) is finally revealed when Galeano slightly shifts that childish "we". While the first "we" is us, readers in the modern world caught in endless capitalist promise and desire, the "we" at the end of the sentence is dead. The world where the "we" has obtained all of their consumerist desires is one where nothing living, nothing with legs, paws, wings, nor roots, can exist. The irony of the vignette emerges when the reader finds that these two collectivities are one. The Earth cannot sustain the standards of production and consumption touted as "developed" and, yet, its promise keeps those in supposedly "under-developed" nations working towards this ever-elusive title, mortgaging bodies, waters, soils, entire ecosystems for a slice of the toxic pie.

This paradox is felt most strongly in more vulnerable spheres, those ecologies (human and non-human) that can be deemed disposable, collateral damage for a collective good. "The

[130] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

division of life into vegetal and relational, organic and animal, animal and human, (…) passes first of all as a mobile border within living man, and without this intimate caesura the very decision of what is human and what is not would probably not be possible," Agamben writes.[131] The body of the slave, he argues, occupies a liminal space in the modern separation of the "human" from the rest of existence. The animality that is ascribed to the enslaved or merely socio-economically poor body serves as a way of delimiting frontiers of disposability. To have power, to be truly sovereign within the modern capitalist world system is, as Achille Mbmebé argues, to have the ability to determine who is disposable and who is not.[132]

This necropolitical system does not only apply to human bodies but to entire ecosystems. "Palabras que quieren olvidar el olvido" is another vignette written specifically for *Úselo y tírelo*:

> Ciudad de Goiana, Brasil, setiembre de 1987: dos juntapapeles encuentran un tubo de metal tirado en un terreno baldío, lo rompen a martillazos, descubren una piedra de luz azul. La piedra mágica transpira luz, azulea el aire y da fulgor a todo lo que toca.
>
> Los juntapapeles parten esa piedra o bicho de luz y regalan los pedacitos a sus vecinos. Quien se frota la piel, brilla en la noche. Todo el barrio es una lámpara. El pobrerío, súbitamente rico de luz, está de fiesta.
>
> Al día siguiente, los juntapapeles vomitan. Han comido mango con coco: ha de ser por eso. Pero todo el barrio vomita, y todos se hinchan, y un fuego de adentro les quema el cuerpo. La luz devora y mutila y mata; y se disemina llevada por el viento y la lluvia y las moscas y los pájaros.[133]

This vignette refers to the worst nuclear catastrophe after Chernobyl that, as he explains in a more explicit essay in the vignette that follows it, has been ignored by local authorities and international systems of law. The title, which plays with repetition and alliteration in a manner common to Galeano's poetics, establishes the "purpose" of its inclusion in the anthology: to

[131] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, Trans. Kevin Attell, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004), 15-16.
[132] Achille Mbembé, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no.1, (Winter 2003): 27.
[133] Galeano, *Úselo y tírelo,* 143.

correct a forgetting. As is also common in his ecopoetics, Galeano starts by locating us in space and time. Not only do we know that we are in northeastern Brazil in 1987, we also immediately know we are in a poor area as the main actants are two "juntapapeles", an informal term for someone who works collecting paper. The narration in present tense positions the reader as another unknowing participant, curious about the mysterious vile of bright liquid. The knowledge acquired by the reader is only that provided by the subjects. It is only in the following vignette that we discover that the substance was radioactive Cesium-137. In the vulnerable context in which the vignette takes place, basic human impulses, curiosity and sociability, suddenly becomes deadly. The clinic, which is left unnamed, continued to operate after the mortal leak. The area is a locus of negative accumulation, a space that, due to its lack of political and economic power, suffers the toxic and mortal consequences of a positive accumulation process taking place somewhere else. "The poor sell cheap," Martinez Alier writes, "not out of choice but out of lack of power."[134]

However, given that environments do not have actual material boundaries, the toxicity is not limited to the vulnerable community and its human inhabitants. "It is carried by the wind and the rain and the flies and the birds," Galeano writes. The author thus figures a hybrid web of living and non-living actants that coexist and communicate, joined not only by interdependent survival but also by the involuntary sharing of toxicity within a system that deems certain ecologies (in their human and non-human multiplicities) disposable. This is why Gisela Heffes argues that a new critical episteme is needed that combines eco-criticism and bio-criticism, which, pushed by environmental conflicts in Latin America, exceeds the limits of the ecocritical episteme coming from North American and European universities. She tentatively calls this new

[134] Martinez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor*, 30.

episteme "bioecocriticism."[135] The difference between the two terms, ecocriticism and bioecocriticsm, is a matter of emphasis, with the second foregrounding the inextricability of injustice perpetuated against environmental ecologies and human bodies. While I understand the epistemological work that Heffes is proposing through the use of this term, I chose to continue to use the term "ecocriticism" to highlight the fact that the prefix "eco" already includes the human as part of the ecologies it emerges from, inhabits, and returns to. The inextricability of social and environmental injustice still stands, therefore, as a defining characteristic of Latin American ecocriticism, as we can see in Galeano's positionality towards environmental exploitation and we will identify in 21st century narratives in following chapters. Broadly speaking, however, a distinction between late 20th activist ecopoetics and the 21st narratives that I will analyze, is that the ecocritical work of writers like Galeano is tied to a hope for socialist transformation for the continent. Hence, the cartographic impulse of his work and the emphasis on a shared history of violence and rebellion. This leads me to the final element analyzed in Galeano's ecopoetics: utopianism.

3.3. Utopia as Praxis

Galeano's ecopoetics are characterized, thirdly and finally, by a utopianism developed in dialogue with a Gramscian neo-marxism focused, as we have seen, on the ironic engagement with hegemonic "common sense" and its repercussions on the American hybrid web. *Úselo y tírelo* ends with the vignette "Ventana sobre la utopía": "–Ella está en el horizonte –dice Fernando Birri–. Me acerco dos pasos, ella se aleja dos pasos. Camino diez pasos más allá. Por mucho que yo camine, nunca la alcanzaré. ¿Para qué sirve la utopía? Para eso sirve: para

[135] Gisela Heffes, "Introducción. Para una ecocrítica latinoamericana: entre la postulación de un ecocentrismocrítico y la crítica a un antropocentrismo hegemónico," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 40, no. 79 (2014), 32.

caminar."[136] By appealing to one of the referents of New Cinema, Fernando Birri, Galeano is aligning his own ethico-artistic effort with that of other socially committed artists of his time. "Si yo no pudiera soñar con un futuro mejor para todo," Birri states in the documentary *Ata tu arado a una estrella* (2017), by Carmen Guarini, "yo personalmente no encontraría una razón para seguir viviendo (…)."

In a way, utopianism has always colored the way in which the Latin American hybrid web was engaged with. Even before colonization, the Guaraní, for example, migrated to find *yvy marane'y,* or the land-without-evil. After colonization, America's symbolic existence within the western-European imaginary was marked by speculation of possible worlds. Columbus wondered in his diary whether he had stumbled upon the garden of Eden when he reached the Orinoco river. Later, as Fernando Aínsa argues, America was constructed as a territory of possibility. "Utopia transfers to man the duty and responsibility to transform the world, a privilege that in the past belonged only to the gods. Man could do everything, foresee everything and most of all organize the new reality. The utopian project would thus be essentially a matter of organization. Its ends would depend on its own means."[137] This colonial utopian imaginary, however, was constructed around the promise of infinite riches and bountiful nature. In other words, it was the promise of endless extractivism that could fund the creation of a new and better human world for colonizers as well as modern defenders of the value of industrialized, export-oriented, development.

This form of utopian thought is far from that performed by the committed artists of the end of the 20th century. As Galeano states in "Ventana a la utopía", utopia is not a place to be

[136] Galeano, *Úselo y tírelo,* 184.
[137] Fernando Aínsa, "The Invention of America: Imaginary Signs of the Discovery and Construction of Utopia," *Diogenes* 37, no.145 (March 1989), 109.

found, an end point that can be reached. Rather, it is a tool for ethico-critical engagement with the world that seeks to make visible the limits of current systems. Frederic Jameson explained it as follows:

> For where in the older society (as in Marx's classic analysis) Utopian thought represented a diversion of revolutionary energy into idle wish-fulfilments and imaginary satisfactions, in our own time the very nature of the Utopian concept has undergone a dialectical reversal. Now it is practical thinking which everywhere represents a capitulation to the system itself, and stands as a testimony to the power of that system to transform even its adversaries into its own mirror image. The Utopian idea, on the contrary, keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is.[138]

Utopian thought, in this context, is a form of political praxis that highlights the irrationality and violence of the present by focusing on the lived experience of those it excludes. Galeano writes from a paradigm that is "other", characterized by critical and utopian thinking centered on diversity –in contrast to the hegemony of the discourse of uniformity within developmentalist narratives– as a universal project. It does not seek to be "new" or refer to abstract universalities. As Mignolo writes, "Un paradigma otro, complementario a la transición paradigmática, emerge en su diversidad, en y desde las perspectivas de las historias coloniales; en el conflicto entre las lenguas, los saberes y los sentires (…); esto es, en/desde las historias locales a las que le fueron negadas potencial epistémico y, en el mejor de los casos, fueron reconocidas como 'conocimiento local' o localizado, tal como maneja el concepto, hoy, el Banco Mundial."[139] The liminal position of the writer as revolutionary subject allows Galeano to make distant others present. While *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* figured the victim in its negativity, in its absence, *Memoria del fuego* and the works that followed seek to figure a

[138] Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 110-111.
[139] Walter Mignolo, *Historias locales/diseños globales: Colonialidad, conocmientos subalternos y pensamiento fronterizo*, Trans. Juan María Madariaga and Cristina Vega Solís, (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 2003), 22.

diversity of victims in their positivity, giving them, to the extent possible, a space from which to speak. Thus, as the philosopher Arturo Andrés Roig wrote in his prologue to Horacio Cerutti's *Filosofar desde nuestra América*, in contrast to colonial utopian thought, utopia as praxis does not evade the social present. Rather, it deterritorializes and dearticulates it by looking at it head on and putting in evidence its lacks.[140] It makes "the Real" present to "neutralize"[141] it through narrative twists like that in "Palabras que quieren olvidar el olvido," analyzed in the previous section.

Thus, utopian thought in Galeano's work is not a tool for social planning. Rather, it is an affirmation of the desire to desire, as Jameson put it.[142] Galeano's utopian vision, confirmed at the end of *Úselo y tírelo* as the habitus within which his literary voice speaks, the wave that it rides, is informed on the one hand, by its critique of the present and, on the other, by his attempt at perspectivism. According to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, to take a perspectivist position in the Latin American context is "to discover what a point of view is *for* the indigenous: the *concept* of the point of view at work in Amerindian cultures, which is also the indigenous point of view on the anthropological concept of the point of view."[143] Rather than trying to explain indigenous ontologies and epistemologies through a western-European lens, a perspectivist position does not try to explain alterity away. The form of the vignette, the use of poetic language, and direct citation allow Galeano to include the voices of indigenous "others" in a text that remains anchored in western Marxist critique without having to explain them in terms foreign to them.

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[140] Arturo Andrés Roig, "Prólogo," *Filosofar desde nuestra América. Ensayo problematizador de su modis operandi*, by Horacio Cerutti (México: Centro Regional de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias, 2000).
[141] I use this term in the sense developed by Jameson in Frederic Jameson, "Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse," *Diacritics* 7, no.2 (Summer 1977): 2-21.
[142] Frederic Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994), 90.
[143] Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics; For a Post-structural Anthropology*, Trans. Peter Skafish, (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2014), 77.

"Pachamama," for example, is a concept that originates in the Andes, especially among the *Aymaras, Quechuas,* and *Kichwas,* and is present in many indigenous communities in Latin America but cannot be explicitly defined. It is entirely local, responding to the cultural, environmental, and subjective conditions of each group that speaks it into being. It defines an ethics of environmental conviviality that not only includes terrestrial human and non-human elements but also the whole cosmos. The shared and at the same time spatially specific character of this term, as well as its expansive notion of "community" make it central to the theoretical proposals of the *Buen Vivir* movement.[144] Eduardo Gudynas explains that:

> Lo que a veces intenta simplificarse como una relación simbiótica es (…) más complejo y está basado en vínculos de reciprocidad, complementariedad y correspondencia entre los humanos, la comunidad ampliada y la Pachamama. (…) Es un vínculo en el cual no hay una 'adoración' en el sentido tradicional del término (no se 'adora' a la Madre Tierra), sino más bien una 'relación' de inserción (se es 'parte' de ella). (…) La Pachamama tiene voz, envía mensajes y le habla a las comunidades. En unos momentos alberga y cuida, pero también puede enojarse y castigar.[145]

Rather than defining what "Pachamama" is, Gudynas provides a series of general characteristics that can take on different forms and meanings in different ecological webs. Galeano, whose ecocriticsm as it has been analyzed so far mirrors the values defended today by proponents of *Buen Vivir*, presents Pachamama in a vignette taken from *Memoria del fuego II: Las caras y las mascaras* (1984):

> "En el altiplano andino, mama es la Virgen y mama son la tierra y el tiempo.
>
> Se enoja la tierra, la madre tierra, la Pachamama, si alguien bebe sin convidarla. Cuando ella tiene mucha sed, rompe la vasija y la derrama.
>
> A ella se ofrece la placenta del recién nacido, enterrándola entre las flores, para que viva el niño; y para que viva el amor, los amantes entierran sus cabellos anudados.
>
> La diosa tierra recoge en sus brazos a los cansados y a los rotos, que de ella han brotado, y se abre para darles refugio al fin del viaje. Desde debajo de la tierra, los muertos la florecen."[146]

[144] Gudynas, *Derechos de la naturaleza*, 141-142.
[145] Ibid., 143-144.
[146] Galeano, *Úselo y tírelo,* 39.

Galeano makes no effort to explain how the earth can get angry. It is an "earth-being," which Marisol de la Cadena, informed by her ethnographic work in Peru, defines as "non-human entities conjured to the political sphere."[147] He lets this Andean perspective linger in the readers' mind without "defending" it by explaining its mechanisms in western terms. Furthermore, he figures the extended community, the rest of the hybrid web, making the Earth not only an actant but also a receiver, an indirect object. "Desde debajo de la tierra," he writes, "los muertos la florecen." The passive character of this sentence, of an earth bloomed by the dead, is an ecopoetic choice that figures an active hybrid web where no singular actant rules over the rest.

The utopianism of Galeano's ecopoetics emerges in the conflict between passages like this and that of the nuclear catastrophe in Goiana, between the critique of the destructiveness of the current system and the possibilities opened by paradigms that are *other*. Galeano brings fourth, in other words, the baroque ethos[148], the coexisting multiplicity, of Latin America in the hope that, as Marx wrote, "The world has long since dreamed of something of which it needs only to become conscious for it to possess it in reality."[149] The praxis of Utopia from the liminal positionality of the revolutionary subject allows him to align himself with ecomarxists critiquing the material and political historical conditions that have led to a social and environmental world marked by violence and injustice. However, it also positions him against the developmentalism of the left as it opens the space to engage alternative paradigms that exist alongside hegemonic thought, moving beyond the immediate social and economic demands of the present to address ecological wellbeing in its complexity and get a glimpse of what could be.

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[147] Marisol de la Cadena, "Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections Beyond 'Politics'", *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (2010): 336.
[148] Bolívar Echeverría, "Ethos barroco," *Modernidad, mestizaje cultural y ethos barroco*, (Mexico: UNAM/El Equilibrista, 1994).
[149] Cited in Frederic Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994), 75.

…

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st saw this hope for a Marxist transformation challenged. Octavio Paz and Jurgen Habermas were some of the voices who, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the disappointments of 20th century leftist movements, announced the end of the paradigm of revolution. In "La izquierda: reforma y revolución", published in 1990, Bolívar Echeverría tackled this debate, asking: "¿Despejarse la cabeza de ilusiones revolucionarias milenaristas tiene que significar para la izquierda un abandono de su orientación revolucionaria? ¿0 puede constituir, por el contrario, una oportunidad de precisar y enriquecer su concepto de revolución?" [150] Certainly, maintaining the hope for a collective uprising guided by utopian socialist values and anchored in a common history of exploitation, the same hope that animated much of Galeano's ecopoetics and ecocritical work, has proven challenging in the increasingly fragmented social worlds of the 21st century. Yet, the growing awareness of the fragility of our hybrid web continues to challenge writers and readers to face the negative accumulation it continues to be subjected to. While grand narratives of international social transformation might have lost their central place in the young 21st century imaginary, the increased awareness and embodied experience of environmental degradation and climate change have given way to new forms of spatially and temporally anchored ecopoetics that I will explore in the next chapters.

[150] Bolívar Echeverría, "La izquierda: reforma y revolución," *Utopías* 6, (1990), n/a.

Chapter 2:

Hybrid Worlds: Ecopoetics of Home

1. Return to the Local: Ecopoetics in the 21st Century

In the previous chapter, I identified some of the key characteristics of 20th century activist ecopoetics through the work of Eduardo Galeano. Given the variety of approaches that Latin American writers have taken to think about human/non-human assemblages and relationships of interdependence, this was a methodological decision that in no way exhausts the topic of 20th century Latin American ecopoetics. In this chapter, a similar decision is required. Gisela Heffes identifies a continuity between the utopian imaginary of the late 20th century, which aimed at constructing the possibility of a natural space accessible and inhabitable by all, and the dystopian narratives of the 21st century, where the natural world beyond the human has become extinct.[151] We can find a clear example of this ecopoetics in the work of Dominican writer, Rita Indiana. This imaginary shares with that discussed in the first chapter a critique of the negative accumulation inherent to the capitalist world system. In other words, it focuses on the accumulation of waste, toxicity, and social disenfranchisement, particularly in the peripheries of a global system of extractivism, production and exchange, and constructs a literary world engulfed in its repercussions. The continuity in ecological imaginaries traced by Heffes is unquestionable. However, in this chapter, I take a different route: I focus on narratives that respond to the same phenomena of globalization but do so by figuring the territorialized, intimately local manifestations of this world system, working against totalizing narratives of environmental sustainability –what Eduardo Gudynas has called "ecomessianism"– by

[151] Gisella Heffes, *Políticas de la destrucción/Poéticas de la preservación: Apuntes para una lectura (eco) crítica del medio ambiente en América Latina*, (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2013), 26-27.

highlighting the specificity of the manifestations of globalization and negative accumulation. This "ecopoetics of home" emerges from the spaces portrayed, from the mental, social and environmental ecologies that compose them. As a result, these narratives make manifest the specificity with which global networks permeate deceptively isolated ecologies.

I turn to the novels *Falsa calma* (2005), by María Sonia Cristoff, and *El viento que arrasa* (2012), by Selva Almada, to analyze how they think human embeddedness in the ecoregions from which the narratives emerge: The Patagonian steppe and the semi-arid Chaco, respectively. The term "ecoregion" defines an area in terms of the communities that inhabit it and its environmental conditions. Thus, it is a form of identification and categorization that does not rely on artificially constructed boundaries. It allows our mind the diffuse transition from one region to the next that better corresponds to the actual blurred lines between material ecologies. An ecoregion is, in other words, an ecological sphere of existence with permeable boundaries.

Living beings construct material and social spheres of belonging in their search for an embodied experience of safety. I use the term "sphere" in accordance with Peter Sloterdijk's theory of globalization. Sloterdijk argues that, in the present stage of globalization, we inhabit spheres that form a foam-like tissue where, "whatever the degree of isolation established by respective individuals, they are always co-isolated islands that are momentarily, or chronically, connected to a network of adjacent islands constituting midsized or larger structures"[152]. Thus, these spheres are not completely isolated structures, but are in fact in constant communication. Despite the degree of insulation that the variety of spheres that we inhabit provide, there is no absolute "inside" and, therefore, no absolute "outside". There is always a degree of permeability to any human sphere. A central tenet of this chapter is, therefore, that "the local" is defined by

[152] Peter Sloteridjk and Julie Di Fillipo, "Foam City", *Log*, 9 (2007), 63-76, 63.

environmental and social spheres that are in dialogue with a wider network of nodes, forming together a hybrid web of distinct but interconnected worlds.

As I argued in the introduction, sphere-making is the mechanism by which, to use Enrique Dussel's terminology, out of the "cosmos", "worlds" emerge. The *omnitudo realitatis*, the naked Real, is organized into a sphere where the possibility of meaning-making allows for quotidian existence that would otherwise remain impossible.[153] The creation of "world," in this context, demands a subject that perceives and organizes reality into manageable spheres of inhabitation. The recognition of this process of meaning-making holds the critical potential, as Dussel argues, of provincializing human ontologies and the social constructions that stem from them.[154] *Falsa calma* and *El viento que arrasa* help us think how social spheres have come to form in response to the environmental ecologies in which they are embedded and the global network of cultural and economic exchange that they are also part of. In other words, they figure mechanisms by which the Real is organized into manageable spheres in response to the pressures of a hegemonic economic and political order that attempts to define and spatialize spheres within a global system of exchange.

Falsa Calma is a collection of paraphrased testimonies published in 2005 by the Argentinean author María Sonia Cristoff. This text explores how a space as vast and isolating as the Patagonia is lived by combining testimonies that the author collects as she travels through the Patagonia with her own reflections, stemming from her biography growing up in the city of Trelew, in the province on Chubut, and the wealth of discursive production about the region. Cristoff untangles how a common experience of actual or perceived isolation manifests

[153] Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de la liberación,* (México: Edicol, 1997).
[154] Enrique Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión,* (Madrid: Trotta, 1998), 241.

differently for each person she interviews, slowly revealing that, for the Patagonian environment and human subjects alike, "lo fantasmal no implica el vacío."[155]

Selva Alamada's *El viento que arrasa,* published in 2013, takes place in an isolated car repair shop and revolves around the characters of Pearson, a travelling Protestant pastor, his teenage daughter, Elena (Leni), el Gringo Brauer, the mechanic who owns the shop, and his helper/son, Tapioca. After one of the infamous storms of the Chaco region forces the pastor and his daughter to stay for the night, conflict ensues between Pearson, who is trying to convert Tapioca to Protestantism, and Brauer. Ultimately, the boy chooses to follow the priest and his daughter, convert to Protestantism and leave the mechanic. The haeccity –an individuation consisting of movement and affect, of "a set of speeds and slowness between unformed particles, a set of nonsubjectified affects"[156]– of the wind that pierces through the material sphere of the shop and its surroundings –el viento que arrasa– mirrors the affect of Reverend Pearson's words on Tapioca's mental ecology and, more broadly, the influence of Protestantism in the region's social ecology.

In this chapter, I analyze how these literary works create an ecopoetics of home, delimiting spheres of safety within the environmental and social ecologies in which the stories take place. In contrast to the cartographic gaze of Galeano's work, analyzed in chapter one, Cristoff and Almada's texts position the reader as an observer inside the home spheres they construct. In so doing, they rearticulate tropes of the Patagonia and Chaco regions, moving away from the traditional characters and romanticized representations of life outside of the city present in the regionalist narratives of the early 20th century. Unlike Ricardo Güiraldes' *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926), for example, which is based upon and feeds the national myth of the joys and

[155] María Sonia Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, (Buenos Aires: Seix Barral, 2005), 9.
[156] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 263.

perils of life in the Argentinean pampas by centering on the figure of a taciturn, wise, and respected *gaucho, Falsa calma* and *El viento que arrasa* do not lend themselves as readily to symbolic representation of the Nation. This is because, rather than being framed within transparent "anthropological spaces"[157], where the characters unreflectively embody the Nation's ethos, these narratives emerge from the inside of home spheres composed in dialectical and conflictive relation to the ecoregions in which they exist and the State that they belong to.

The chapter is split into two sections. The first analyzes the mechanisms of trans-textuality by which the worlds within the texts dialogue with the environmental and social ecologies from which they emerge. Written language necessarily selects, organizes, and fictionalizes, creating a reality that is in dialogue with, but separate from the social and material world from which it emerges.[158] In other words, the text is also a sphere, but it forms rhizomatic connections with the world that informs it. I focus particularly on the structuring function of cartography, the use of oral and localized registers, and the genre of testimony as territorializing tools. The second section explores a variety of mechanisms of sphere-making figured in the texts, as well as the networks that these spheres are informed by, challenging tropes of emptiness associated to the Patagonian steppe and the semi-arid Chaco. I focus specifically on immigration, religious missions and developmentalist projects as vectors of determination that reveal these spheres in their openness to outside influence. In other words, I examine how *Falsa calma* and *El viento que arrasa* figure hybrid worlds, where ecologically grounded spheres respond to and are determined by vectors of determination that connect them to a wider, global system of networks and nodes. I end with a brief commentary on the hybridity of environmental ecologies, which I will explore further in the third chapter.

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[157] Marc Augé. *Non-Places: Introduction To An Anthropology Of Supermodernity*, (New York: Verso, 1995), 44.
[158] Ana María Amar Sánchez, "La ficción del testimonio," *Revista Iberoamericana* 56, no.151, (1990):447

2. Trans-textuality

Analyzing a text's ecopoetics entails examining how the relationships of affect and reciprocity that it presents figure the hybrid webs that compose its world. While this form of analysis could be applied to any text, *Falsa calma* and *El viento que arrasa* pose a further challenge: they are in explicit dialogue with a world that exists outside of the text. While *Falsa calma,* informed by testimonial accounts and a diverse textual archive about the Patagonia, falls in the liminal space of non-fiction, *El viento que arrasa* is a fictional story that emerges from the material, social and symbolic reality of the semi-arid Chaco. These texts' rhizomatic structure, their relationship to the world beyond them, is central to the construction of hybrid webs inside them. Because of this, I begin by analyzing the mechanisms of trans-textuality by which Cristoff and Almada dialogue with the social, environmental and mental ecologies in which their narratives are set. I will, firstly, examine how they localize the specific spheres of Brauer's shop, Cañadon Seco, Las Heras, and other towns visited by Cristoff within the readers' mental map of Argentina. This section explores, in other words, the territorial regime of signification that Cristoff and Almada put to work in their literary construction of isolation in the Patagonian Steppe and the semi-arid Chaco, respectively. I will then analyze the characterization of Almada's literary voice as a "province writer," focusing particularly on her recourse to local vernacular. Lastly, I explore the role of testimony and intertextuality in Cristoff's *Falsa calma.*

2.1. Mapping Isolation

The cartographical element in these texts stems from the opposite impulse as that which animated Galeano's cartographic literature. Rather than working to create a shared, totalizing narrative that unites the Latin American region, in its diversity, against exploitation, Crisoff and

Almada's cartography functions as a territorializing tool that highlights the particularities of the environmental and social ecologies in which the narratives take place. This act of symbolic territorialization is necessary for the literary register to be able to figure two central characteristics of the locations at play: their isolation and their peripherical positionality. Thus, the symbolic mapping of the Argentinean territory, I argue, is a central vector of determination in the construction of the worlds of *Falsa Calma* and *El viento que arrasa.*

The physical movement that makes possible the narratives of *Falsa calma* and *El viento que arrasa* is not one akin to a travel chronicle where, as Mikhail Bakhtin analyzed, the spatial and temporal dimensions of the text are composed by constant movement. Instead, the narratives analyzed here position themselves within the spheres they arrive at; the movement necessary to get there has mostly already happened. In order to achieve territorialization without travel, Almada and Cristoff make use of a tool that can be shared between their and the readers' mental ecologies: the symbolic map of Argentina, with its topographical markers, highways and names.

"Luego de varias semanas de recorrer la provincial de Entre Ríos –fueron bajando desde el norte por el margen del río Uruguay hasta Concordia y allí agarraron la ruta 18, atravesando la provincia justo por el medio hasta Paraná–, el Reverendo decidió seguir viaje hasta Chaco."[159] After a brief window into a future interaction between Reverend Pearson and Brauer, Almada locates the reader in the narrative present where, with weeks of travelling behind them, Pearson and Leni's car has broken down just past the town of Gato Colorado, on the border between Santa Fé and Chaco, on their way to a parish in Castelli. Reverend Pearson and Leni do not have a home-base due to the Reverend's proselytizing efforts, a fact that Leni resents deeply. Unlike her father, who grew up in Paraná, the capital city of Entre Ríos, she has no sense of

[159] Selva Almada, *El viento que arrasa,* (Buenos Aires: Mardulce, 2018), 15.

territoriality, no subjective and affective spatial relationships, because she had never stayed anywhere long enough to develop an emotional attachment. Through their eyes, provinces, cities, rivers, highways become points or lines on a symbolic map that the reader never actually enters. Because of this itinerant life and affective detachment, they cannot see people's daily movements, how they interact with each other and the ecologies in which they exist. The territoriality first made available be to the reader is, thus, one where the intimate ways in which humans relate to each other and the ecologies they inhabit is inaccessible. Like Michel de Certeau watching New York City from the top of the Empire State Building, Pearson and Leni's panoptical gaze is "a 'theoretical' (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices."[160] From Leni's point of view, the area where their car has broken down is indistinguishable from many others she's driven through with her father. This initial act of narrative territorialization from the Reverend and his daughter's perspectives not only beings to reveal the characters' affective world, but also serves to localize the reader within the map of Argentina, more specifically, in the southwest of the Chaco province.

Once they arrive at the mechanic's shop, this effort to territorialize the narrative within the Argentinean map is furthered by the characters of Brauer and Tapioca. In their cases, it is not constant movement that results in a panoptical gaze over the Argentinean socio-geography, but its lack. When he was eight years old, Tapioca's mother left him at Brauer's shop, declaring that he was his biological father and that she needed to go to the city of Rosario to find work. Little by little, Brauer ingratiated himself with the child by telling him the stories of the various car carcasses in the lot:

[160] Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Cultural Studies Reader,* Ed. Simon During, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 153.

> Brauer había buscado una pila de mapas de rutas del Automóvil Club y, por las noches, después de cenar, le mostraba los puntos por los que, según él, habían andado esos vehículos. Con su dedo grueso, manchado de grasa y nicotina, iba siguiendo las líneas y le explicaba que el color y el grosor de cada trazo daba cuenta de la importancia de la ruta que ilustraba. (…) Otras veces la punta del dedo del mecánico pasaba a los saltitos por una línea punteada, un puente levantado sobre un río. Tapioca no sabía lo que era un río, ni lo que era un puente así que Brauer se lo explicaba. Y otras veces el dedo se movía sinuoso y despacio por un camino de montaña. En una ocasión el dedo llegó a donde se terminaba el mapa y el Gringo [Brauer] le habló del frío, un frío que jamás conocerían en el Chaco, un frío que lo ponía todo blanco. A Tapioca le dio miedo un sitio así y pensó que qué suerte que ellos estaban bien arriba en el mapa y no ahí donde se terminaba el mundo.[161]

Tapioca only knew the town where he was presumably born, Sáenz Peña, and the area of Brauer's shop. The mechanic was born in Villa Ángela, where his parents had a "fonda" or rural bar/convenience store, he worked as a cotton picker in Machagai, as well as in Pampa del Infierno. Each side of the triangle of movement that Almada creates for Brauer and, to a lesser extent, for Tapioca, can be traversed in approximately an hour and half by car. When one looks at a map of the area, these towns appear as points along two crossing lines, highway 16 and highway 65, outside of which there is only empty space. For the reader, just like for Tapioca, the expanse and diversity of Argentina's ecologies only emerge as abstract, unknowable blank spaces on a symbolic cartography. Almada traces lines with her pen for the reader as Brauer does with his oily finger for Tapioca. The combination of the four characters' panopical gaze localizes Brauer's shop in the periphery, not only of Buenos Aires, but also of any major urban center. This is further emphasized by Pearson's assertion that he prefers to share the word of God in remote areas rather than in cities: "Rara vez accede a trasladarse a las grandes ciudades. Prefiere el polvo de los caminos abandonados por vialidad nacional, la gente abandonada por los gobiernos, los alcohólicos recuperados que se han convertido, gracias a la palabra de Cristo, en

[161] Almada, *El viento que arrasa,* 49-51.

pastores de pequeñas comunidades (…)."[162]As we will see, the only space that emerges in its complexity, in its ecological depth, is the vicinity of Brauer's shop. Is is there that the reader is allowed the gaze of de Certeau's walker, of the voyeur, who cannot see the whole, but can see the living of the minute in detail.

Official mapping is an act of territorializing space within the national imaginary. When it is not accurate, as Cristoff found in the Patagonian Steppe, it proves not only dangerous for the traveler, but also highlights a town's degree of inclusion in this symbolic imaginary. Las Heras, for example, is characterized by Cristoff as a "pueblo esquivado"[163] because highway 43, which crosses the Patagonia from east to west, curbs around it, diminishing the likelihood of anyone stopping at the town on their way across the area and the associated influx of revenue and possibility of social interaction. What is more, Las Heras appears on maps to rest by a river, the Río Deseado. Upon arriving there, however, Crisoff found that the map had deceived her because the river, which is born in the Andes and dies in the Atlantic Ocean, becomes at Las Heras an underground current. "Uno mira el mapa antes de viajar, de llegar a las Heras, y después se siente como esos navegantes medievales que cuando finalmente se animaban a avanzar más allá veían que donde el mapamundi decía ´Tierra Incognita´ había en realidad un paisaje acuático."[164] The experience of being deceived by a map poses the existential danger of finding oneself lost in the Patagonian Steppe because of the lack of markers that could provide direction and intention to movement. Without those markers, one becomes an aimless wonderer, a dangerous position to be in when the nearest town can be miles away.

[162] Almada, *El viento que arrasa*, 71-72.
[163] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 202.
[164] Ibid., 200.

Cristoff responds to the danger posed by the deficiencies of official mapping in the Patagonia by turning to the locals' tools for territorialization. This unofficial mapping results, I argue, in a third gaze that walks the line between de Certeau's theoretical and voyeuristic observers, that of the circulator. When Cristoff arrives at El Caín, the only town on the Somuncurá plateau in the province of Río Negro, she stays at the local girls' school due to the lack of alternative lodging. There is no public space for her to work in so she spends her time exploring the town's surroundings: "Circulación III: salgo del pueblo caminando hacia el norte, para el lado donde dicen que hay una roca gigante que parece una mujer acostada boca arriba, vista de perfil."[165] In each instance of "circulation", as she calls it, she departs from the small town and heads to a specific place, such as a shrine or a lake, and then returns to the town. Any marker outside of the sphere of movement defined by this two-way trajectory is, for someone not familiar with the area, floating in a threatening, roadless geography. "Circulating" implies the existence of a map within which one moves in a somewhat ordered and directed manner, always starting from and returning to the same place, but this map does not need to be "official." Instead, it can rely, as we see in the example above, on the acquired knowledge of local inhabitants, such as the shape of rock-formations, to safely move outside of the delimited spheres of the towns. Circulation is, thus, not blind to the habits, practices, and materiality of a sphere, like the panoptic gaze, but it is also not absorbed in the detail of the voyeur's gaze. Instead, it relies on the abstraction of space to get a glimpse of the town's social ecology and its positionality within an environmental ecology existing beyond it.

The panoptical gaze of the official map in *El viento que arrasa* and the gaze of the circulator in *Falsa Calma* allow the writers to territorialize the spheres that they will enter within

[165] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 124.

the larger social and environmental ecologies with which they dialogue. This is crucial to the construction of the spheres' territorial regimes of signification that, as Josefina Ludmer theorizes, demarcate the conditions of inhabitation within a sphere, relating bodies to territories by delimiting the possibilities of movement.[166] A key characteristic of the spheres' within which the characters move in both texts is their isolation. While waiting for someone to travel down the dirt road where their car has broken down, Leni ponders their chances: "Desde Tostado hasta acá no se habían cruzado con nadie. (…) Este sí parecía un sitio abandonado por la mano de los hombres. Paseó la vista por el paisaje de árboles achaparrados, secos y torcidos, los pastos pinchudos que cubrían los campos. Desde el mismo día de la creación este había sido un sitio abandonado por la mano de Dios."[167] The species-specific experience of distance is characterized not only by the time necessary to move from one point to another but also, in the human umwelt[168], by the lack of human inhabitation, of demarcated spheres where humans have settled, that would break this temporal extension. Therefore, isolation is defined not by emptiness, but by the lack of human presence.

Brauer's shop and the towns that Cristoff writes from exist between urban centers, quintessential human spheres. While in El Caín, Cristoff experiences a sense of claustrophobia that evoked memories of her teenage years, a time when the isolation she cherished as a child became, as it did for 19th century Argentinean explorers, something negative:

> Para ellos, había sido la amenaza de lo no dominable, del territorio que se rebelaba a formar parte de una nación incipiente; para mí había empezado a ser lo que me alejaba del país donde ocurrían las cosas, de la gente que quería conocer, de los libros que quería leer. Se trataba de una cualidad que hacía de la Patagonia un espacio trastocado por

[166] Ludmer, *Aquí América Latina*, 132.
[167] Almada, *El viento que arrasa*, 41-42.
[168] I use the term following Jakob Von Uexküll's theorization of umwelts, "bubbles" or closed unites that result from the combination of a species' perceptual tools and the effector tools that extend their embodied capacities to alter their environments, such as, in the case of humans, cars, computers, factories, etc (Jakob Von Uexküll, "A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men" in *Instinctive Behavior – The Development of a Modern Concept*, (New York: International Universities Press, 1957), Ed. Claire Schiller, 6).

> alguna lógica pesadillesca en el que yo caminaría y caminaría sin dejar de estar siempre en el mismo lugar. Los estrategas argentinos habían fracasado en muchos de los proyectos que pensaron para el Sur, pero habían sido eficaces en propagar esa idea de que la vida argentina pasaba por Buenos Aires.[169]

While, as a child, life in the Patagonia was exciting to her, as it was for the European migrants who, with the support of the State, colonized this supposedly empty land in order to make it "productive", as a teenager she started to experience the contrast between a national cultural identity that centered in Buenos Aires and her access to that culture. This experience caused her to feel, despite the vast expanses of land and sky that were a part of her daily material existence, a fear of confinement. Her mental ecology and its discursive world were composed of more references than she had material access to, causing her to feel constrained. In El Caín, Cristoff once again felt bound by the natural ecology, the remoteness of the town, and its social ecology, where she could find no public or private places to read. The severing of a craved mental ecology that extends its tentacles to the authors and the worlds they create, causes the three ecologies –mental, social and environmental– to feel claustrophobic, enhancing the feeling of alienation from the material and social ecology in which she existed.

Paradoxically, it is this isolation that allows Cristoff and Almada to figure social and environmental ecologies in their complexity, putting in evidence the simultaneous nodular and radiating character of hybrid webs. In other words, isolated spheres become a tool for thinking how territorialized social and environmental ecologies conform ecological spheres embedded in a wider web. They can reveal the relations of affect that make what Ludmer calls the "tiempo-aquí,"[170] the spatially and temporally located rhizomatic relationships that make a situated present. In this context, the cartographical element is crucial for the delimitation of the spheres

[169] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 8.
[170] Ludmer, *Aquí América Latina*, 117.

that the characters will inhabit within the Argentinean territory and is a central vector of determination in the construction of Almada and Cristoff's narrative voices. This dialectical approach to the spheres of which they write is present not only with regards to the map but also to the social worlds of which they write, putting in evidence the multiplicity of vectors that simultaneously territorializes the narratives and expand the horizon of what can be said beyond the writers' lived experience.

2.2. Selva Almada: "Una escritora de provincia"

It was literary critic Beatriz Sarlo who first referred to Almada as a "province writer" in her review of *El viento que arrasa:*

> ¿De dónde sale este libro sorprendente? Eso me preguntaba mientras leía *El viento que arrasa*, la novela de Selva Almada. No por curiosidad biográfica, sino porque es un objeto insólito en la literatura argentina. (…) Selva Almada se desplaza en el mapa de la ficción: no es literatura urbana, no es literatura sobre jóvenes ni sobre marginales, tampoco sobre gente que se la pasa tomando merca. Es literatura de provincia, (…). Regional frente a las culturas globales, pero no costumbrista.[171]

Sarlo identified in Almada's text a geographical and cultural specificity that contrasts with a more globalized urban literature. Yet, it does not represent life outside of the city by using established tropes of the countryside and the customs associated to it. In addition, she does not rely on other discourses as did regionalist narratives on, for example, anthropology.[172] Rather than writing from a positionality of romantic nostalgia, she privileges the intimate familiarity with the present of the social and environmental ecologies within which her stories are set. *El viento que arrasa* rests on characters familiar to those who inhabit the provinces of Santa Fé and Chaco, whose presence makes the social ecology of the region but who have not found their way

[171] Beatriz Sarlo, "Fin del mundo," *Perfil,* April 1, 2012, n/a.
[172] Enrique Pupo-Walker, "Reflexiones para otras lecturas del relato costumbrista," *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 24, no.2, (1990): 19.

into the provincial imaginary. It is not tradition that determines these characters' behavior but their dialogue with a world that communicates. The "provinciality" that Sarlo identifies in Almada's text is accomplished, firstly, by the cartographic territorialization described above, secondly, by the use of the regional vernacular, and, thirdly, by the deep description of the environmental and social ecologies in which it is set, which I will analyze further in following sections.

When Pearson and Leni's car breaks down outside of Gato Colorado, just past the border between Santa Fé and Chaco, they were on their way to Castelli, a small town in the dry area of the Chaco ecoregion, where another pastor and friend, an eastern-European former-alcoholic named Zack, had built a new parish. After hours of impatient waiting, a pick-up truck drives by and offers to take them to the shop of "el Gringo Brauer", a local mechanic:

> -El Gringo Brauer tiene un taller a pocas leguas. Él se lo va a arreglar seguro. Le llevaría al pueblo, pero hoy sábado con semejante calor, difícil que encuentre alguien que le dé una mano. Se han ido todos a Paso de la Patria o al Bermejito buscando la fresca. Mismo yo: llego a la casa, agarro el reel, cargo unos compinches y hasta el lunes, encontrame si sos bueno.
>
> El hombre se rió.
>
> -Bueno. Si nos hace el favor.
>
> -Pero claro, chamigo. No les voy a dejar a pata acá, en el medio de la nada. Ni las ánimas se le animan a esta calor.[173]

Several elements in the language of this passage allow the reader to locate themselves within the ecology inhabited by the characters, whether it be through the experience of familiarity or contrast. The use of leagues, rather than kilometers, as a measure of distance bring into being an environmental and social ecology characterized by large expanses of space with no human presence. Furthermore, it locates Brauer's shop within that expanse, between one human center and another. The relative scarcity of population in comparison to an urban space means

[173] Almada, *El viento que arrasa,* 45.

that there is not enough demand to warrant keeping shops open on a hot Saturday. Instead, the inhabitants of the town migrate to Paso de la Patria, located on the Paraná river on the western border with Paraguay and the province of Corrientes, or the Bermejito River, which runs along the border between Chaco and the province of Formosa. Any of these destinations would require hours of driving, which does not seem to be a problem for a population used to long distances. The drive is also worth it in the face of the extreme heat of the dry season. "Ni las ánimas se le animan a esta calor," the pick-up driver explains. Expressions such as these, with the use of the feminine demonstrative adjective, "esta" in combination with a usually masculine noun, "calor," reveal the speaker to belong to the periphery of an urban culture that privileges the use of "este calor" as a marker of exposure to the standardized, dominant form of Argentinean Spanish more commonly associated to the lettered city. In addition, the use of colloquial expressions such as "hasta el lunes, encontrame si sos bueno," "chamigo," or "No les voy a dejar a pata acá, en el medio de la nada" reveal a familiar affect commonly associated to settings where cooperation and, therefore, kindness are necessary for survival. After all, we do not know how Pearson and Leni, both familiar with the long roads of the Argentinean provinces would have escaped the abrasive heat without outside assistance. This is not to essentialize life outside of the city as a wholesome ecology of conviviality. Almada herself has denounced the poverty, violence and toxic masculinity often present in these spaces, especially as it relates to the proliferation of unresolved femicides. What is emphasized, rather, is that, despite the need for higher self-reliance than in a city, this kind of setting paradoxically makes human dependence on others more evident.

Another linguistic element that territorializes this narrative is the use of cultural references that are not necessarily understood by someone unfamiliar with the region. Sitting in

one of the car carcasses in Brauer's shop, Leni shares her earphones with Tapioca, introducing him to music he had not heard before:

> Disgustarle no le disgustaba. Ahora gustarle, no sabía. La radio siempre estaba puesta y a veces el Gringo le subía el volumen a tope cuando pasaban uno de esos chamameces maceta, que se escuchaban bien alegres. El Gringo siempre acompañaba con un sapucay y hasta hacía algunos pasos de baile. A Tapioca le daba gracia. Ahora que se ponía a pensar a él le gustaban más los otros, los tristones, que hablaban de aparecidos y amores trágicos. Esa música sí que era bien bonita, hacía que el corazón se le arrugara a uno. No daban ganas de bailarla si no de quedarse quieto, mirando hacia la ruta.[174]

The directness of Tapioca's voice, the transparency of the experience embedded in his choice of metaphors ("hacía que el corazón se le arrugara a uno"), and the materiality of his imagination territorialize his lived experience, which is limited to the nearby town in which he was born and the isolated plot of Brauer's shop. He associates the melancholy of listening to sad songs, for example, with quietly facing the endless road, as the experience of emptiness outside serves to mirror and, therefore, externalize, the heavy hole inside. This territorialization is further emphasized by the joyful songs heard by Brauer, the "chamameces maceta", which refer to a genre of music from the Argentinean north-east with folkloric roots characterized by its upbeat tempo.[175] Journalist Blanca Rébori adds that the word "maceta" is associated to the dancing of a barefoot man whose feet have hardened due to walking in the countryside.[176] Brauer's dance is also accompanied by a "sapucay," a high-pitched rhythmical exclamation. The use of this terminology is thus specific to a social ecology (that of north-eastern Argentina) that responds to an environmental ecology (the Chaco ecoregion) and figures a particular human body formed by its inhabitation of both ecologies.

[174] Almada, *El viento que arrasa*, 38.
[175] Emilio Pedro Portorrico, *Diccionario biográfico de la música argentina de raíz folklórica,* (Buenos Aires: E.P. Portorrico, 1997), 17.
[176] Blanca Rébori, *La tierra sin mal,* (Buenos Aires: Lugar Editorial, 1991), 39.

Thus, Almada's narrative voice, her choice of words, is specific to the environmental and social ecologies within which the story is set. In other words, the discursive web of the text is composed in relation to a territorialized social and environmental world that exists beyond it. The oral register emerges as a marker of difference, locating the text in the periphery of Buenos Aires and other urban centers and their respective vernaculars. It functions, as Antonio Cornejo Polar writes in relation to the Peruvian setting[177], as an affirmation of heterogeneity that encloses within itself a conflictive socio-cultural reality, which will be explored further in following sections.

2.3. María Sonia Cristoff: The Bi-frontal Voice

The multiplicity of vectors of determination that compose these texts is explicitly engaged by Cristoff, who characterizes the narrative voice of *Falsa Calma* as a "bi-frontal voice." According to the author, *Falsa Calma* is written by a "voz bifronte" that results from the combination of her mental ecology, with its multiple vectors of determination, and "the atmosphere" of the Patagonia. Her mental ecology responds to two main vectors of determination, which are multiplicities in themselves: her personal history growing up in the province of Chubut and the extensive literary field about the Patagonia. "The atmosphere" of the Patagonia, the other half of the bifrontal voice, results from human testimony, non-human animal behavior, and the environmental ecology of the Patagonian steppe. Therefore, she does not obfuscate the centrality of her own subjectivity in the construction of the narrative –it is, after all, half of the equation–but contends that the multiple worlds that she dialogues with also structure the text. She is asserting, in other words, the book as a rhizome.

[177] Antonio Cornejo Polar, *Escribir en el aire,* (Lima: Editorial Horizonte, 1994).

"Todo el tiempo traté de mantener el control," she states, "pero, tengo que reconocerlo, hay momentos en los que esa atmósfera habla a través de mí."[178] The text's referential power is anchored on the doubling of the testimonial act. The "I" of the testimonial voice, unlike that of the autobiography, has a metonymic effect by which it comes to figure a collective "we" that it stands for and represents, as John Beverly argues.[179] Cristoff describes the creative experience of writing *Falsa calma* as one of opening to the ecological Other, the living and non-living multiplicity that is the hybrid web, becoming an antenna for stories as they emerged in each town and its surroundings. "Dispuse de infinidad de horas para recorrer pueblos cuyo perímetro se recorre en una sola. Me senté en una esquina a ver los perros pasar. Me entregué por completo a ese estado de sopor que generan el exceso de luz o de viento o de silencio,"[180] she writes. In *Falsa calma*, it is not only those interviewed that provide testimony, but also the author herself. She "cannibalizes" the stories of others, as she states comparing herself to the character of Hannibal Lecter.[181] This cannibalization, however, is not a process of destruction of the other, but, rather, a digestion of the other into the self that makes them, if only partially, present in the text's construction.

The testimonies are interspersed with the author's travel chronicle, composed in response not only to the physical spaces she traverses and the stories she hears, but also by the discursive field of fictional and non-fictional texts that compose her mental ecology as well as her own experience growing up in the ecoregion of the Patagonian Steppe. Cristoff's experience in Chubut, despite her growing up in the urban center of Trelew, was marked by the dominance of Buenos Aires in the Argentinean cultural sphere and the feeling of isolation that this caused for a

[178] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 9.
[179] John Beverley, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 40.
[180] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 9.
[181] Ibid., 91.

teenager attracted to the globalized world of literature offered by the capital city. The existential experience of isolation, she later found, is central to *all* literary characterizations of the Patagonia. The testimonies of the towns that she writes from and about are interspersed with her personal reflections and citations from a variety of textual references, from newspaper articles, to sociological reports, to travel chronicles and Argentinean and international works of fiction. In their correspondences and contradictions, these texts and her lived experience conform the mental ecology on which her personal narrative voice is anchored. The narrative emerges in the dialogue between this literary and lived mental ecology and the testimonies of those she speaks to. Sandra, for example, is a woman from the town of Las Heras, in the province of Santa Cruz, that shares her suspicions about a corrupt gambling ring, which she holds responsible for the proliferation of mental illness in the area. Cristoff intersperses the retelling of her testimony with fragments from *La lotería de Babilonia*, by Jorge Luis Borges, and a sociological report by Antonio Grant, a local official, titled "Diagnóstico socio-económico de Las Heras" that details the high suicide rates in the period between 1996 and 1999 in the town. The first creates a line of flight, of deterritorialization, that links Sandra's story to a wider imaginary about the power of underground networks of illegality. The second, in turn, gives credence to her characterization of the town's precarious social ecology. Thus, through a play with intertextuality, Cristoff embeds the personal testimonies heard within a discursive network that exceeds them, simultaneously highlighting the local struggles while relativizing them within a larger discursive and social frame.

The text inhabits the edge between truth and fiction, which is what, according to Ana María Amar Sanchez, gives non-fiction its "demystifying" power as it foregrounds the

constructed nature of any written work.[182] It acknowledges, as Julio Ramos wrote, that "la representación, aun cuando busca *contener* al otro, al asumirlo como objeto del discurso, nunca es un hecho pasivo."[183] Cristoff's role as compiler is made evident in that she rarely cites her interviewees directly, choosing instead to paraphrase them. However, others' voices are not subordinate to her own. This decision puts the emphasis on the heterogeneous collective construction of a social ecology, with its subjective truths and falsities, rather than the Truth value of any one voice, including her own. The result is a consciously rhizomatic text that purposefully leaves the often-painful stitches that make the hybrid webs of the spheres it figures visible.

3. The Outside Inside – Spheres and Networks

As already stated, humans have an existential need to create, materially and symbolically, spheres of protection and insulation around themselves. The primary sphere we inhabit, which I will engage further in chapter three, is the sphere of the body. Despite the fact that we know our skins to be permeable and our minds to be in constant communication with an "outside" world, there is comfort in the privileging of the experience of monadic individuality. Yet the experience of individuation is not enough to feel secure in the world, which is why we build houses to inhabit, neighborhoods to live in community, even Nations to limit our symbolic belonging. Every inhabited space, Gaston Bachelard argues, carries the essence of the notion of home: Whenever humans have found a form of shelter, "we shall see the imagination build 'walls' of impalpable shades, comfort itself with the illusion of protection –or, just the contrary, tremble

[182] Ana María Amar Sánchez, "La ficción del testimonio," *Revista Iberoamericana* 56, no.151, (1990): 448
[183] Julio Ramos, *Desencuentros de la modernidad en América Latina: Literatura y política en el siglo XIX,* (Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2003), 48.

behind thick walls, mistrust the staunchest ramparts."[184] However, spheres are permeable and porous. They protect, they enclose, they separate, but this does not mean that they insulate. *El viento que arrasa* and *Falsa calma* thematize isolation, as we have seen, but they also put in evidence that, even the apparently remote and disconnected is in fact constantly in dialogue with adjacent spheres with which it "foams", to use Sloterdijk's metaphor. This section begins, firstly, by analyzing the dialectical relationship between mental ecologies and territories, exploring variation in experiences of territoriality within the same environmental ecology. Secondly, it studies how the ontological insecurity of facing the "cosmos" is managed within these ecoregions by the characters portrayed. Thirdly, it explores the often-contentious fact of heterogeneity within these social ecologies by focusing on the regions' histories of immigration and religious proselytism. Finally, it examines the place of these ecoregions within the symbolic construction of the State, particularly as it relates to the modern push for industrialization and development, and its effects on their environmental and social ecologies.

3.1. Mental Ecologies and Territorialities

Analyzing a temporally and spatially situated hybrid web, with its multiple vectors of determination and their varying articulations necessarily entails a process of selection. The mental and social ecologies of the living beings that inhabit an environmental ecology determine the discursive and, to a certain extent, the affective construction of that material ecology. Each person, family, and community is itself composed of and acting in accordance to countless vectors of determination that they have acquired throughout their lives. Relationships, inherited traits, life experiences, and personal idiosyncrasies complicate what Enrique Leff, following

[184] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at how we Experience Intimate Spaces*, trans. Maria Jolas, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 5.

Deleuze and Guattari called the "territorialization of knowledge" [185], the embeddedness and embodiment of knowledge within an ecologically contained hybrid web. This is why Cristoff's experiences of the Patagonian towns she visits differs from those who live them, becoming one more testimony in the collage of voices that construct the text's world. In the process, the text thinks the variety of human territorialities that, responding to the idiosyncrasies of mental ecologies, can emerge in relation to the same environmental ecology.

Cristoff, as we have seen, is not only the conveyor of others' testimonies about life in the isolated towns of the Patagonian Steppe; hers is another testimonial voice in the literary construction of these Patagonian spheres. The emergence of Cristoff's own subjectivity within *Falsa calma* has a delimiting function, as it repeatedly highlights her status as an outsider within the ecologies that she observes. While in the remote town of El Caín, for example, Cristoff writes: "Circulación II: salgo del pueblo con Atilio Namunucrá que es pariente de Ceferino y que es capaz de ver, aún yendo a más de ciento cuarenta, matices de toda índole ahí donde yo sólo veo la masa compacta de la Meseta de Somuncurá."[186] Cristoff and Namuncurá face the same environmental ecology and, yet, their eyes recognize different information. Where Namuncurá sees signs, she sees silent rocks and variations of color. The Somunurá Plateau emerges in Cristoff's mental ecology in its symbolic existence, as it is described in texts or drawn on maps. Yet, she has no territorialized knowledge of the region, meaning that she has not acquired the embodied familiarity with the plateau's ecology that would allow it to "speak" to her.

[185] Enrique Leff, "Political Ecology: a Latin American Perspective." *Desenvolvimento e Meio Ambiente* 35, (2015): 36.
[186] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 122.

Everything, whether animate or inanimate, has a language that it communicates, as Walter Benjamin argues.[187] The language of the Somuncurá Plateau does not communicate the plateau itself but the language-Somuncurá, the plateau in communication, that which it can express about itself in the form its language takes –its variations in color, texture, and vegetation, for example. However, this does not mean that that which the plateau communicates about itself is immediately accessible to the interlocutor confronting it. Cristoff cannot "hear" Somuncurá because she does not have the tools within her mental ecology to understand its language, nor the ability to translate its language into hers. Translation, as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro argues, always entails equivocation, the inescapable disconnect that exists between two or more entities when the basic concepts and material elements that structure their existence differ. Equivocation, however, "is not what prevents (…) relation, but what founds and impels it. To translate is to presume that an equivocation always exists; it is to communicate through differences (…)."[188] Somuncurá's language is more accessible to Namuncurá, who through lived experienced has related to it, even if only through the limited perceptual tools available within the human umwelt, and has acquired the territorialized knowledge that allow him to partially translate its communications. By emphasizing Namunucrá's territorialized knowledge and the corresponding ability, even if limited, to translate the plateau's communications, Cristoff is simultaneously acknowledging the boundaries of her own mental ecology. Despite having been born in the Patagonian city of Trelew, she is an outsider to the sphere of the Somuncurá plateau and, as a result, her territoriality is different from that of her interlocutor.

[187] Walter Benjamin, "On Languages as Such and on the Languages of Man" in *Walter Benjamin – Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 1996, 62.
[188] Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics; For a Post-structural Anthropology*, Trans. Peter Skafish, (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2014), 89.

The author's status as an outsider is explicitly thematized in the town of Cañadón Seco through Cristoff's interaction with a common non-human interlocutor: dogs. Speaking particularly in relation to human-animal interactions, Derrida argues that opening to non-human communication "would not be a matter of 'giving speech back' to animals but perhaps of acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, as something other than a privation."[189] Dogs emerge in *Falsa calma* as actants whose ability to communicate Cristoff's non-belonging exceeds that of their human neighbors. For the human inhabitants of the town to express their rejection of her quiet presence would entail a breaking of societal norms that would define them as unwelcoming or even aggressive. The chronicler, Cristoff writes, is usually received with a welcoming attitude, as humans keen on sharing their stories open their homes and biographies to them. She spent this period of social generosity wandering the once prosperous town, experiencing its temporal structure, how it moves during the day, the night, and even the "ghostly" siesta time. During her explorations, the street dogs ignored her, watching her pass as did most of the human inhabitants, until the day in which they became the messengers of the town's collective rejection: she had overstayed her welcome. "Para el escritor," she explains, "no siempre es fácil determinar exactamente el instante en el que la malla que conforma al lugar empieza a cercarlo -como la piel que genera un pus alrededor del elemento extraño -antes de expulsarlo definitivamente. (...) En Cañadón Seco, los perros me señalaron con exactitud ese momento. Fueron claros, precisos: no me dejaron confundirme."[190] "La malla" or "mesh" that makes Cañadón Seco's hybrid web is a multi-species contained environment in which she is, undoubtedly, a foreign presence. "Les vi

[189] Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to follow)," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2, (2002): 416.
[190] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 52.

los ojos fijos, el cambio de actitud."[191] Cristoff, who had been left alone for most of her stay at Cañadón Seco, was suddenly *seen* by the dogs, was suddenly, *addressed* by them. She does not, as Jacques Derrida warns against[192], ascribe words to the dogs. She "reads" their stance, the new hardness in their eyes as they fixate on her, their movement towards her, the warning of teeth enveloping her ankle without the culmination of the bite. They did not need to "say" more. Her presence, once welcomed or at least ignored, was acknowledged and rejected by the town's canine inhabitants. The narration of Cristoff's non-belonging thus emerges as a literary device that defines spheres within the text in response to the author's embodied experience while collecting testimonies. These testimonies, in addition, provide further example of delimiting acts aimed at creating protective human spheres in the Patagonian Steppe.

3.2. Facing the Outside: Ontological Security

"In the life of a man," Bachelard writes, "the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being's first world."[193] The sphere of the home, ideally, delimits a space within which animals, including human-animals, feel safe. It provides physical and psychological protection against exposure to danger, whether it be in the form of a haeccity such as the climate or in the from of an embodied threat. Within it, we can relax in the knowledge that our existence is contained and safeguarded. This protection allows us to disavow the fact that we do not know

[191] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 53.
[192] Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to follow)," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2, (2002): 387.
[193] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 6-7.

what we are or how anything comes to be. Thus, the sphere of the home can serve as a space for integration of the self in the face of our ultimate utter physical and psychological exposure.

The Patagonian landscape emerges in *Falsa Calma* as a trigger of ontological insecurity, that is, as a psycho-geographic event that brings to the fore the insignificance of individual human lives when faced with the vastness of the world and universe we inhabit. Landscape, in this sense, is a relationship of inter-species and inter-matter affect that, as Bernardo Canal Feijóo argues, does not reside in "nature" or in its perception by an observer that organizes it, but in a relationship in which all parts are transformed.[194] "¿Cómo se ensambla esta falta de horizonte que evidencian los informes, me pregunto, con la idea del horizonte sin límites al que hacen continua referencia los folletos sobre la Patagonia?,"[195] Cristoff wonders, after citing sociological reports on the high suicide rates among teenagers in Las Heras. The rhetorical question creates the possibility of a relationship of causality in the readers' minds between the horizon-less openness of the Patagonian steppe and the lack of direction, emotional safety, and existential aloneness that could lead a teenager to commit suicide. Cristoff's philosophizing of psycho-geographic assemblages is not one in which landscape determines character, as in Sarmiento's *Facundo,* for example. Rather than an explicatory gesture meant to close otherwise open subjectivities, Cristoff's is an opening gesture that ponders, ultimately, what it means for human mental ecologies to be confronted with their smallness in the formless "cosmos."

Federico migrated to Santa Cruz to work as an inspector of oil rigs and spends most of his working days driving the long distances between rigs. For him, it is the interplay between the openness of the Patagonian steppe and the return to the "carpa", the house in the middle of a field where inspectors can stop to rest and eat in company of others, that gives him the spiritual

[194] Andermann, *Tierras en trance*, 214.
[195] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 204.

calmness of knowing his place in the universe. “Estar a la intemperie con la certeza de que en algún lado alguien espera, eso es para él un hogar.” It is the experience of the magnitude of the Patagonian steppe *combined* with the knowledge of the existence of the “carpa” as well as the actual space itself where warmth, food, and companionship await, that allow Federico to have a positive affective experience of the environments through which he traverses. It is the knowledge of an interior human sphere within which he is physically and psychologically safe from the physical and psychological threats of the environmental ecology, from the outside or “intemperie”, that open up the possibility of giving in to the feeling of internal and external remoteness that the Patagonian steppe engenders.

Alienation, in the Marxist sense, means to be separated from the fruits of one’s labor and also, consequently, separated from one’s own desire. The separation that stems from the experience of remoteness, which I am more interested in here, can be internal or external. It can refer to an alienation within the hybrid web or an alienation within the multiplicity of the self, which is experienced as a being taken over by the outside, thus revealing the vulnerability of the sphere of the individuated psyche, or, in other words, the openness of the mental ecology. Federico uses the term "aturdimiento" to refer to the feeling of shock and numbness that the topography of the Patagonian steppe imposes on the psyche. "Entrar en el campo," he relates, "es como entrar en otra dimensión. Al rato de andar se apodera de uno una especie de aturdimiento, un estupor ante nada en particular. Una especie de beatitud, aunque yo crea que el exagera." [196] This moment, which begins with Federico's voice (through Cristoff's writing) but ends with Cristoff's, further clarifies the psychological and material need for the hearth in Federico's mental ecology. Beatitude refers to a religious experience, a feeling of blessedness, that can follow from

[196] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 144-145.

a "numinous" experience, a term that Rudolf Otto popularized to refer to a mystical moment or event that creates a unique state of mind for which humans can find no explanation.[197] Crucially, the numinous causes not only extreme awe but also fear. The inescapability of one's smallness becomes awe-inspiring and/or intolerable in this topography that annihilates the human body and psyche. The expanse of the Patagonian steppe occasions in Federico this experience, which is why the hearth of "carpa", its smallness, its warmth and, most importantly, its human company become, by contrast, markers of an inside that Federico can retreat to. This remoteness "en estado puro"[198], experienced simultaneously as an exterior and interior distance, challenges the psychological limit of the individual mental ecology, revealing the precarity of mental, bodily and social human spheres. How individual humans relate to this experience is bound with their idiosyncratic constructions of self and world. While some, like Federico, might have a Romantic, quasi-spiritual relationship to an outside, materialized in the world of hills, fields, deserts, and skies that causes the momentary rush of overwhelming sensations translated into feelings of awe and frightful meaninglessness, others might find it existentially intolerable.

The variety of possible subjective responses to this confrontation with an ultimate outside is also thematized in *El viento que arrasa.* The boundary between Brauer's home sphere and the environmental ecology in which it is embedded is purposefully tenuous, occasioning in Tapioca a fear that will come to be addressed by Reverend Pearson's promise of a human social sphere not only in this life, but in heaven.

As we saw, the area of the south-western Chaco province has been the location of most of Brauer's life. The familiarity that stems from the routine of daily life in his isolated car shop is

[197] Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Trans. John W. Harvey, (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 7.
[198] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 145.

deepened by his practice of listening to nature inside the Chaco forest, the "monte", a practice that he shares with Tapioca:

> La religión, creía él, era una manera de desentenderse de las responsabilidades. (…) Le había inculcado a Tapioca el respeto por la naturaleza. Sí creía en las fuerzas naturales. Pero nunca le había hablado de dios. (…) Dos por tres se internaban en el monte y observaban su comportamiento. El monte como una gran entidad bullente de vida. Un hombre podía aprender todo lo necesario solamente observando la naturaleza. Ahí, en el monte, estaba todo escribiéndose continuamente como en un libro de inagotable sabiduría. El misterio y su revelación. Todo, si uno aprendía a escuchar y ver lo que la naturaleza tenía para decir y mostrar.
>
> Pasaban horas, quietos debajo de los árboles, desentrañando sonidos, ejercitando el oído de tísico que fuera capaz de distinguir el paso de una lagartija sobre una corteza del de un gusano sobre una hoja. El pulso del universo se explicaba por sí mismo. [199]

Brauer's home sphere, the space in which he feels safe, is not limited by the area of his fenced-in shop but extends to include the hybrid web of animals, plants and the unseen "pulse" of life that traverses through matter in the surrounding environmental ecology. It is an epistemological positionality that occasions this openness of the home sphere: he is comfortable with that which he knows, that which he can locate within the web of relations that make the environmental ecology of the territory in which he lives. Along with the familiarity that stems from the sensory attunement to interconnections within the hybrid web comes an acceptance of a certain degree of mystery, of that which cannot be known because it is not available to sensory experience within his umwelt. "El bosque," Andermann writes, "es donde la *bíos* se reconoce otra vez como *zoé*."[200] From this psycho-geographic disposition an ethics develops. The Good, according to Brauer, results from the full mental and physical involvement in the material present that stems from work and familiarity with nature.

It would be tempting to see Brauer as the embodiment of the "ecological subject," whose ethical action in the world stems from knowing himself to be a part of a shared life pulse.

[199] Almada, *El viento que arrasa*, 79.
[200] Andermann, *Tierras en trance*, 225.

However, while his mental ecology dialogues with the environmental ecology in which he lives it denies the need for human belonging, disregarding others' need for a human social sphere. This leads him, for example, to regard Tapioca going to school as unimportant and to approach the child's sense of ontological insecurity as a mere lack of knowledge about the functioning of the relationships of causality and interdependence in the environmental ecology they inhabit:

> De más chico, a Tapioca se le había metido miedo a la luz mala. (…) Una noche el Gringo se cansó de tantas pavadas, lo agarró del cuero del lomo y se lo llevó a campo abierto. Vagaron varias horas hasta que por fin, justo antes de que empezara a clarear, dieron con lo que el Gringo andaba buscando. Lejos, entre unos árboles, vieron una luminosidad temblorosa.
>
> -Ahí tenés tu luz mala -le dijo.
>
> El chaguito se puso a llorar como una magadalena y el Gringo tuvo que agarrarlo del brazo y llevarlo a la rastra hasta el lugar del hallazgo.
>
> Al pie de los árboles encontraron la osamenta de un animal mediano, un chivo o un ternerito. Apuntó con la linterna y le mostró cómo de los restos pútridos, de la materia inflamada, se elevaban pequeñas llamas que vagaban en el aire oscuro de la noche.[201]

By taking Tapioca into the forest and showing him the connection between the appearance of floating lights and the decomposing body of an animal, Brauer expects the child to feel safe in the knowledge that everything within his sphere of inhabitation has a cause, an explanation purely anchored in the interaction of matter and not on its construction as a "luz mala" within a system of beliefs created by the human mind. But the element of mystery that Brauer is comfortable with continues to plague Tapioca's sense of ontological security, which is why he ultimately feels drawn to the promise of eternal safety within Reverend Pearson's Christian theology. While Brauer's territoriality is a result of his intimate familiarity with the environmental ecology he inhabits, Reverend Pearson and Leni's mental ecology is built primarily in dialogue with their Protestant faith. The primacy of the human-God relationship and the ethical responsibilities that stem from it concern the wellbeing of the soul of humankind. The

[201] Almada, *El viento que arrasa,* 79-80.

act of human speech is the primary mechanism by which Pearson symbolically defines his sphere of belonging as it distinguishes humans, according to him, from all other animals. In the following section, I analyze how *Falsa calma* and *El viento que arrasa* figure the porosity of social spheres in the Chaco and Patagonia, particularly with regards to migration and the mission system.

3.3. Contested Social Spheres

Globalization has put in evidence the degree to which apparently discrete social and environmental spheres are, in fact, open to outside influences whose ability to pierce through the spheres' membranes is determined by the degree to which they bring with them hegemonic values and power dynamics. In this section, I analyze how *Falsa calma* and *El viento que arrasa* figure mechanisms of sphere-making that, due to the positionality of these regions in global systems of exchange and their assertion of heterogeneity in the face of constructed national identities, are revealed in their permeability. I will focus on two phenomena that emerge in the texts: Immigration and the mission system.

3.3.1 Migration and the Social Sphere

Both of the ecoregions discussed in this chapter received waves of immigration in the 19th on 20th century, often encouraged by an Argentinean State seeking to make "unused" land productive for the purposes of "development" as well as to form a homogenous national identity anchored in a claim to European heritage and Catholic religiosity. The State's colonization of the Patagonia in the 1870s, a campaign termed the "Conquest of the desert," was led by General Julio Argentino Roca and aimed at taking political, cultural, and economic control of the region's wealth of natural resources. The use of the term "desert" not only refers to the region's expanses

of flat, dry land but also conveys the notion of emptiness, of a lack of human inhabitation willing to alter this environmental ecology to make it work for the purposes of State formation and accumulation. This campaign resulted in what Andermann calls a "desindigenización sistémica,"[202] a systemic and genocidal removal not only of indigenous people, but of all markers of indigeneity, seeking to alter the entire environmental ecology of the region through the territorial reorganization occasioned by the influx of new industrial and agricultural activity.

Cristoff's autobiographical testimony at the outset of *Falsa calma* is a framing tool that embeds the social ecologies that she will visit throughout the text within this longer, contentious history of land appropriation and cultural encounter:

> Aunque mi padre nació en medio de la Patagonia, todos a su alrededor hablaban búlgaro: mi abuelo había logrado evitar el trabajo en el petróleo que esperaba a la mayoría de sus compatriotas emigrantes y se había comprado un reducto próximo al río Chubut, donde estaba asentada la colonia galesa, en la cual, con el pretexto de cultivar, se dedicó a refundar su propia Bulgaria. Con el tiempo logró que estuvieran ahí, como clones perfectamente logrados, los animales, los ritmos de la cosecha y de las lluvias, el yogur que hacía mi abuela, las revistas en caracteres cirílicos y los amigos búlgaros que lo visitaban de vez en cuando. Cuando mi padre salía del reducto para jugar al fútbol con los amigos de las chacras vecinas sabía que las reglas eran pegarle bien a la pelota y hablar ese otro idioma que hablaban sus amigos rubios: ya de chiquito se las ingeniaba bien con el galés de potrero. Después volvía a su casa, donde se hablaba poco o se hablaba búlgaro. Un día, cuando mis abuelos calcularon que tendría seis años, lo llevaron hasta un pueblito cercano, Gaimán, y lo depositaron en un banco de escuela. Desde allí mi padre se percató, observando bien a su alrededor, de que muchos, casi diría todos, hablaban un tercer idioma. No se parecía en nada a los que él sabía, y se llamaba castellano."[203]

Cristoff's bulgarian family arrived in the Patagonia and settled within the sphere of the Welsh colony that had arrived in the province of Chubut in 1865. The word "colony" comes from the Latin "colere", which means "to cultivate." This term, which continues to be used in the region today to designate government programs that aim to inhabit and alter land for the

[202] Andermann, *Tierras en trance*, 129.
[203] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 7.

purposes of agricultural labor and production, signals the delimitation of a sphere within an environmental ecology for the creation of agricultural human settlements. With the support of the Argentinean State, Welsh immigrants founded the first agricultural colony in the Patagonian region. The socio-political organization of these spheres, promoted by public figures such as Sarmiento, explicitly followed models of municipal organization coming from the United States. This model entailed each municipality having a complete government, with its own self-sufficient system of public institutions, thus mirroring in its efforts for social, economic, and territorial organization the functioning of the larger sphere of the State. In this context, the fostering of the formation of the Welsh colony was part of a State effort to create a civilian population engaged with public issues and the furtherance of the State's developmentalist project.[204] The organization of a State territoriality in the Patagonia was dependent on this re-organization of land into agriculturally productive colonies.

This re-organization of land, as we see in the quote above, also entailed the replication of foreign environmental ecologies in the Patagonia. Within the sphere of the Welsh colony, Cristoff's grandfather was able to create a Bulgarian sphere not only in its materiality but also its discursivity. In addition to populating his sphere with the flora and fauna of his native Bulgaria, he also used language to delimit the home, privileging the use of Bulgarian when inside his private sphere. Language emerges in the quote above as another mechanism of sphere-making, separating the Bulgarian sphere of the home, from the Welsh public sphere of the colony, and the Spanish sphere of the State, which Cristoff's father encountered upon entering the public-school system.

[204] Fernando Williams, "La Patagonia galesa entre el tablero estatal y la idealización naturalista: Aportes desde una perspectiva paisajística," *Población & Sociedad* 21, no. 2, (2014): 93-127.

Yet, not all forms of immigration enjoyed the same governmental support. As García Canclini explains, the process of globalization that can integrate different cultures can also segregate: "La multiculturalidad y sus diferencias se conforman ahora no solo por la convivencia y el conflicto de tradiciones históricas diversas dentro de cada nación, sino debido a la estratificación engendrada por el desigual acceso de los países, y de los sectores internos de cada sociedad, a los medios avanzados de comunicación."[205] In *Falsa calma*, all immigrants who came from any country previously ruled by the Ottoman empire are called "Turks". Naming creates a mediated relationship to the world that it encloses into a sphere. It makes things intelligible, even if not in their totality, to human epistemologies and systems of thought. The act of grouping together communities who might have belonged to different social spheres prior to arriving to Argentina and identifying them under one name serves as a way of affirming the social identity of the pre-existing social ecology that is manifesting itself in its openness. Simultaneously, it creates a sphere around those who've migrated to the region that results in the segregation, even if partial, of the individuals thus identified.

Unequal access to the nation's public sphere is suffered by most migrant subjects, who put in evidence in their physical and cultural existence the inescapable heterogeneity of any social sphere. This contentious reality emerges in *Falsa Calma* through the voices of a Lebanese family living in Maquinchao, Río Negro. Their testimonies narrate a history of segregation and violence unaddressed by local authorities and the State, as well as the construction of a rivalry between immigrants and indigenous groups that served to further the characterization of socio-cultural groups that did not fit the Nation-state's cultural and phenotypic self-definition as barbaric or conniving. "En toda la Patagonia, no sólo en la andina," Cristoff explains, "es común

[205] Néstor García Cancilini, "Culturas híbridas y estrategias comunicacionales," *Estudios sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas* 3, no. 5, (1997): 123.

encontrarse con la sospecha subyacente de que los árabes – "los turcos" – hicieron la plata estafando a los indios (…). '¿Sabés por qué en la provincia de Buenos Aires hay un pueblo que se llama Indio Rico? Porque por ahí nunca pasó un turco' es un chiste que circula entre los bares patagónicos"[206] (72). The possibility of indigenous social spheres in the Patagonia has been marked by relentless discrimination, resulting in an often-contentious liminal cultural existence, as we will see in the following section. Yet, it is politically useful to blame this disenfranchisement on another discriminated social group, thus characterizing them both as separate from the hegemonic social sphere.

In *Falsa Calma,* the Patagonian Steppe thus emerges as a space where cultural identities vie to assert themselves symbolically and materially. Through her testimony and the testimonies of those she interviews, as well as the texts that inform her mental ecology and complement the testimonial narratives, Cristoff figures the often contentious heterogeneity of the region's social spheres as they reveal themselves in their openness to cultural and material fracture.

3.3.2. Religiosity and the Migrant Subject

In *El viento que arrasa,* the openness of social spheres emerges primarily in relation to the social role of religious leaders and doctrine in the Chaco region. Like many Protestant pastors, Reverend Pearson, who is known for his oratory skills travels Argentina's rural areas to proselytize. He represents a common presence in provincial Argentina: the charismatic Protestant orator, often Pentecostal, who anchors Christian doctrine on local plights, beliefs and practices. His sermons speak to a territorialized public, one whose venture into the realm of Christian spirituality necessarily passes through their embodied experience of the social and environmental ecologies they inhabit. Almada, who treats Pearson and the regional presence that he represents

[206] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 72.

with a mixture of curiosity and suspicion, intersperses past sermons in the text, separated from the main narrative by the use of italicized font:

> *Dios nos ha dado la palabra. La palabra nos distingue del resto de los animales que se mueven bajo estos cielos. Pero cuídense de las palabras, son armas que pueden estar cargadas por el Diablo. (…) Viene el patrón y les habla con palabras fuertes, seguras, que prometen a largo plazo. Les habla como un padre a sus hijos. Después de oírlo comentarán entre ustedes: qué bien que nos ha hablado este hombre, sus palabras son sencillas y verdaderas, nos habla como si fuésemos sus hijos, nos dio a entender que si nos quedamos con él y hacemos lo que nos manda, nos tendrá siempre bajo su ala, (…) lo dijo bien clarito (…).*
>
> *Viene el político y les habla con palabras que suenan de lindo, parece que saliera música de su boca, nunca les han hablado con palabras así de bonitas, nunca les han hablado así de corrido, sin perder el aliento. Y ustedes se quedan mansitos después de oír un discurso tan florido, tan bien redactado, con tantas palabras sacadas del diccionario (…). Pero yo les digo: desconfíen de las palabras fuertes y de las palabras bonitas.*[207]

Pearson's sermons appeal to the historical conflict between "criollo" ranchers and the Argentinean State and local populations, often of indigenous descent. In the early 20th century, Protestant missionaries arrived in the Argentino-Paraguayan Chaco region at a time when the Argentinean State was working to appropriate land for a developing agro-industry and to integrate indigenous people into a system of seasonal salaried work. This was also part of a process of "assimilation" of indigenous populations into a hegemonic cultural identity defined, in part, by its Catholic faith.[208] The first Protestant mission in the Chaco region, *Misión el Toba*, was opened in the 1930s by British Anglican missionaries by the Pilcomayo river. This is the region that Leni and Pearson are driving towards, "otro mojón de Cristo levantado en las entrañas del monte, en la zona del río Bermejito, en una comunidad aborigen."[209] Rejected by the State because they were often foreign and not Catholic, Protestant missionaries became a protective force for the Toba community that live in the area against settlers and the military.

[207] Almada, *El viento que arrasa*, 53-54.
[208] Patricia Torres Fernández, "Políticas misionales anglicanas en el Chaco centro-occidental a principios de siglo XX: Entre comunidades e identidades diversa," *Población & Sociedad*, no. 14-15, (2007): 141.
[209] Almada, *El viento que arrasa*, 24.

However, this protection came with the demonizing of indigenous customs and beliefs and the imposition of Christian doctrines and moral precepts.[210] The ambivalent role of Protestant missionaries in the lives of local communities is embodied by Reverend Pearson who, as one can see in the quote above, believes himself to be a protector of the workers he preaches to. Unlike the ranch owners and politicians, he, as the purveyor of God's word, speaks a truth that promises them agency in their own lives –if they accept the Christian faith. "*Este es el momento de cambiar sus vidas para siempre,"* he tells the congregation "*Yo les digo: mañana es ahora. ¿Por qué dejar pasar el tiempo, el invierno con sus heladas, el verano con sus tempestades? ¿Por qué seguir mirando la vida desde el borde del camino? No somos reses para mirarlo todo desde atrás del alambrado, esperando que llegue el camión de carga y nos deposite a todos en el matadero.*[211] Reverend Pearson belongs to the Pentecostal branch of Protestantism, which started attracting a large following in the Chaco region during the 1940s due to the activity of the North American evangelist John Lagar at the Go Ye mission in Resistencia, Chaco[212], approximately three hours away by car from the location of the events in *El viento que arrasa.* Pentecostalism is characterized by emotionally charged sermons aimed at creating an energetic, embodied experience of the Holy Spirit. Through Leni, for example, we are made witness to one of Reverend Pearson's sermons during which he spoke the congregation into a state of generalized excitement and then proceeded to remove a woman's physical pain by "sucking" a black stone from her stomach, after which the astonished watchers broke into applause while he sweated in the middle of the stage.

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[210] Gastón R. Gordillo, *Landscapes of Devils: Tensions of Place and Memory in the Argentinean Chaco*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 93.
[211] Almada, *El viento que arrasa,* 111-112.
[212] César Ceriani Cernadas, "Scandinavian Pentecostal Mission in the Argentine Chaco. First stage: 1914-1945," *Memoria americana: Cuadernos de etnohistoria* 19, no. 1, (2011): 121.

The influence of Protestant and, particularly, Pentecostal faith in the region is an example of the porosity of social spheres. All groups and cultural identities are, to varying degrees of vulnerability, open to influence from the "outside," from a separate social sphere that is revealed in its adjacency. However, the fact of this porosity and the hybrid practices that it results in do not imply a comfortable cultural blend. I emphasize here the point made in the introduction: hybridity in this project is understood as a relationship of affect rather than as a finished product of mixing. Hybridity, thus, is an encounter that can be harmonious or, as is often the case in the settings discussed here, contentious. In Antonio Cornejo Polar's theory of conflict, he chooses to use the concept of the "migrant subject" to that of the "mestizo" when discussing cultural heterogeneity in Latin America. While the second is a result of a dialectical process resulting in an embodied synthesis, the first implies an open and unfinished dialogue. "Si el sujeto mestizo intenta rearmonizar su disturbado orden discursivo, sometiéndolo a la urgencia de una identidad tanto más fuerte cuanto que se sabe quebradiza, el migrante como que deja que se esparza su lenguaje, contaminándolo o no, sobre la superficie y en las profundidades de una deriva en cuyas estaciones se arman intertextos vulnerables y efímeros, desacompasados, porque su figuración primera es la de un sujeto siempre desplazado."[213] The unresolved character of hybrid subjectivities – subjectivities that respond to multiple, often conflicting, cultural vectors of determination – in heterogeneous contexts exposed to assimilation efforts like that of the Chaco and Patagonia ecoregions, as well as the conflictive social role of religious orders, also emerges in *Falsa calma.* In El Cuy, Río Negro, for example, Cristoff speaks to Milka, a Catholic community leader of Mapuche descent:

> Milka me cuenta que la idea del Taller Milikilin Huitral, que ella puso en marcha y que hoy sigue coordinando, surgió en realidad como una iniciativa de la Iglesia

[213] Antonio Cornejo Polar, "Condición migrante e intertextualidad multicultural: El caso de Arguedas," *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana* 42, (1995): 106.

> católica. Que a fines de los ochenta el curo la vino a ver y le dijo que, frente al cisma – valga la hipérbole – que se estaba produciendo en el pueblo entre los católicos y los evangélicos, sería importante reunir a las mujeres de la comunidad – mujeres de origen mapuche, excluidas del mundo del trabajo – en una actividad común – la recuperación de los tejidos que hacían sus antepasados – a la que se agregara también una dosis de formación religiosa – de cuño católico, por cierto –. Esta suerte de catequesis *sui generis* quedaría – le dijo el cura y así se cumplió – en manos de Milka (…). Fundamentalmente la atrajo eso del hilado: era algo que había aprendido de una tía y que durante la infancia practicaba a escondidas de sus padres. Hilar era cosa de indios.[214]

Milka embodies Cornejo Polar's "migrant subject." The heterogeneity of her cultural identity manifests in a conflictive relation to the indigenous practices she inherited, like weaving, and the continued attempt to negotiate within herself her Catholic faith, her indigenous heritage, and her independence as a woman in a context where it can still be not only rejected but also the catalyst for retaliation in the form of physical violence. She sees her weaving workshops as a way to teach indigenous women in her community Catholic doctrine while at the same time engaging in a cultural practice that she treasured but was denied as a child. Indigenous populations in the Patagonia suffered extermination and cultural discrimination since the colonization of the Americas, which intensified during the Argentinean State's "Conquest of the desert." This resulted not only in genocide, disenfranchisement and economic dependence for indigenous communities, but also in the rejection of markers of cultural belonging. In her practice of Catholicism and traditional weaving, Milka sees the possibility of agency and self-assertion for her and the women that attend her workshop. In this context, just as in the case of Protestantism in the Chaco described above, Catholicism becomes a contentious vector of determination that allows for the re-appropriation of cultural practices once denied while at the same time surreptitiously inculcating hegemonic religious thought.

[214] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 100.

Religiosity thus emerges as another vector of determination that puts in evidence the fact that social sphere's radiate. They dialogue with systems of thought that exist beyond them but cross through them, infusing an apparently isolated world and the mental ecologies that inhabit it with an ontology that emerges somewhere else, altering not only individual subjectivities, but also their interpersonal and psycho-geographic relationships.

3.4. Developmentalism, Abandonment, and Precarity: Isolated Modern Spheres

The formation of social and environmental spheres that has been discussed so far emerges in *Falsa calma* and *El viento que arrasa* in the context of a State effort to modernize the ecoregions of the Chaco and Patagonia by introducing a model of industrialization that attempted to include all of the Argentinean territory into a unified State territoriality for the purposes of social integration and economic accumulation. As Canal Feijóo condemned, in contrast to the "hypothesis of the Patagonia," which constructed that ecoregion as the next frontier of "cheap nature"[215] for capitalist exploitation, the north was constructed as an ecoregion in constant state of crisis.[216]

In the Chaco, "el monte" is a space that manifests in its materiality the conflictive history of land access and use in the region. As Gastón Gordillo analyzes, at the beginning of the 20th century, the Toba were the dominant human group in the region of north-eastern Chaco. They used the method of burning to create prairies. However, upon the arrival of "criollos" and their appropriation of the land for grazing, the monte vegetation returned: cows consumed all of the grass, proceeding to eat fruits from bushes and trees that resulted in the proliferation of this vegetation. "En la actualidad, una masa compacta de árboles, cactáceas y arbustos de entre seis y

[215] Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 17.
[216] Bernardo Canal-Feijóo, *De la estructura mediterránea argentina,* (Buenos Aires, 1948), 104.

doce metros de alto, que la gente de la zona llama "el monte", domina el paisaje como si fuera el producto imperturbable de la naturaleza."[217] Furthermore and more specific to the southwestern semi-arid Chaco, the felling of *Schinopsis quebracho colorado* or "quebracho Colorado" in the 1970s for the purposes of making poles and the expansion of the national road system lead to the considerable reduction of forested areas, the subsequent exodus of fauna, and the intensification of draught and floods.[218] As Brauer laments, "Siempre era así por acá. Primero el castigo de la sequía, después el castigo de la lluvia. Como si esta tierra no dejara de mandarse macanas y debiera ser castigada todo el tiempo. Nunca le aflojaban la cincha."[219]

From Leni's perspective, the sphere of Brauer's shop in *El viento que arrasa* is materially defined by a small house, a pile of car carcasses, and the fence that creates a visual representation of the boundary between Brauer's shop and the adjacent sphere: a cotton plantation.

> Se alejó para el lado opuesto de la casita y el montón de chatarra. El paisaje era desolador. Cada tanto un árbol negro y torcido, de follaje irregular, sobre el que se posaba algún pájaro que parecía embalsamado de tan quieto. Siguió caminando hasta llegar al límite del terreno, marcado por un alambrado medio caído. Pasando los hilos de alambre comenzaba una plantación de algodón. (…) Leni acarició su camisa transpirada. Recordó que su padre, alguna vez, le contó que su abuela era bordadora. (…) Pensó con cierta nostalgia que las telas que bordaba su abuela y la camisa que llevaba puesta, en su génesis más antigua, habrían comenzado en la soledad de un campo como este.[220]

Leni's territoriality, her subjective sense of space within Brauer's sphere, responds primarily to the sense of sight. Faced with the unfamiliar, sight identifies, categorizes and delimits the otherwise undefined hybrid web of matter. In the modern rural world, the fence is the primary form of boundary-making, defining spheres of ownership over the ecology contained

[217] Gastón Gordillo, "Historias de los bosques que alguna vez fueron pastizales: La producción de la naturaleza en la frontera Argentino-Paraguaya," *Población y Sociedad,* no. 17, (2010): 60.
[218] Ibid., 67.
[219] Almada, *El viento que arrasa*, 146.
[220] Ibid., 76.

in the fenced-in area. Within this sphere, the scene from Leni's perspective is bleak. Life seems to hold still in response to the dry heat, vegetation turning on itself to prevent any release of moisture. In the surrounding cotton fields there are no signs of human habitation, which amplifies the protective force of Brauer's shop. This protection is not only physical but also spiritual. Leni has no home, no personal nor social sphere to return to. She has no sense of social belonging. While this does not necessarily translate into feelings of physical insecurity, it does create a loneliness that is mirrored by the lack of human presence in the cotton field. Thus, the small but inhabited sphere of Brauer's shop becomes a space where her internal self finds solace in small actions such as making coffee, washing dishes, and discussing memories held in the mechanic's old photographs.

From Leni's perspective, the materiality of the shop's sphere is defined by its precarity, which is figured by the collection of objects, scents, and scenes available to the character's sensory experience. "Cerca de la casa, hasta casi llegando a la banquina, se amontonaba un montón de chatarra: carrocerías de autos, pedazos de maquinarias agrícolas, llantas, neumáticos apolados: un verdadero cementerio de chasis, ejes y hierros retorcidos, detenidos para siempre bajo el sol abrasador."[221] The sphere of Brauer's shop becomes a locus of the process of negative accumulation that is inherent to capitalist accumulation. That which becomes unusable, waste, comes to rest in the isolation of the mechanic's sphere, out of sight of the Argentinean urban centers like the trash that, carried up the Paraná river, ends up littering the banks of small communities on its path. The relationship of this sphere to the larger social world of the State is figured in its negativity. It is part of its network, as is evidenced in the materiality of negative accumulation produced elsewhere, but does not enjoy the public services, such a stable access to

[221] Almada, *El viento que arrasa*, 13.

electricity, associated to this belonging. "El relato tiene materialidad," Sarlo writes about *El viento que arrasa*, "las botellas de bebida helada, la chatarra, los resortes de un asiento roto, la grasa de un motor, el ruido de unos platos sobre la mesa, el olor de la pobreza en el campo, mugre, combustible quemado, calor, una tormenta en la noche, insectos, perros, polvo y barro. Seguimos esas referencias materiales con atención, como si ellas tuvieran una clave de lo que fue y de lo que podrá suceder. No la tienen, pero la escritura de Selva Almada presenta esas sensaciones con detenimiento significativo: son lo que el cuerpo puede conocer. Más allá, hay otro mundo." [222] The materiality that Sarlo identifies in the text is the manifestation of the process of negative accumulation. The other world is that which exists beyond the text, the world of relations of affect and interdependency within the hybrid web.

In contrast and in accordance with Canal Feijóo's characterization of the two ecoregions' relationship to the State, in the Patagonian world that *Falsa calma* dialogues with, new spheres of human habitation emerged around the discovery, extraction, refinery and transportation of oil and natural gas, which were found in 1907 in the port town of Comodoro Rivadavia, in the province of Chubut. Yacimientos Petróliferos Fiscales (YPF), founded in 1922 by president Hipólito Yrigoyen, was the first oil and gas company outside of the USSR established as a State enterprise. This can be understood in the context of what García Canclini describes as the "expansive project" of the four-pronged process of modernity[223], which refers to the push to know and categorize nature in order to possess it within a capitalist logic motivated by the search for ever-increasing profit margins. [224] It combined scientific discovery with industrial

[222] Beatriz Sarlo, "Fin del mundo," *Perfil,* April 1, 2012, n/a.
[223] The other three are the emancipatory, the renovating, and the democratizing projects. Nestor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad,* (México: Grijalbo, 1977), 31.
[224] Nestor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad,* (México: Grijalbo, 1989), 31.

development for the purposes of revenue for private gain and, as was the case in Argentina, for public projects meant to "modernize" the national territory. YPF took a central role in the economy of Comodoro Rivadavia and founded other towns, which Marcelo García characterizes as "commodity cities"[225], around the extraction, production, and transportation of oil such as Caleta Oliva, in Santa Cruz, and Plaza Huincul, in Neuquén.

The structuring function of national (YPF or YPF-Resol, after its privatization) and international oil companies is the material manifestation of a developmentalist logic that underlies much of the construction of spheres in the Patagonian isolated towns. Rather than limiting their role to the exploitation of natural resources, oil, gas, and mining companies created social spheres around the loci of extraction by subsidizing their cultural, residential, and recreational development. This historically resulted in social ecologies built around a single extractive economic activity. [226] Modernization in the form of asphalt roads, access to consumer goods, and participation in the Buenos Aires-centered public sphere through television and radio was tied to the arrival, success, and generosity of oil companies such as YPF, ESSO, Royal Dutch Shell, and Standard Oil of New Jersey. This is the modern, developmentalist and industrialized iteration of what Roberto Schwarz theorized as the institutionalization of favor in the post-colonial context of Brazil. In the introduction to his text on Machado de Assis, Schwarz argues that "colonization, based on the monopoly of the land, produced three classes of population: the proprietor of the latinfundium, the slave, and the 'free man,' who was in fact dependent. Between the first two, the relation is clear. Our argument will hinge on the situation of the third. Neither proprietor, nor proletarian, the free man's access to social life and its benefits

[225] Marcelo García, "El emirato patagónico", in *Crisis*, no. 4, (2011).
[226] Orietta Favaro and Graciela Iuorno, "Sujetos, política y conflictos en la Patagonia argentina," in *Luchas contrahegemónicas y cambios políticos recientes de América Latina,* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2008), 315.

depended, in one way or another, on the favor of a 'big man'."[227] Oil companies not only gave access to social life but in fact created social spheres in the Patagonia that were not there before and were abandoned after the companies' business declined or ended.

Therefore, I would add to García Canclini's definition of the modern developmentalist logic that there is, embedded in the developmentalist project, a unique mechanism of sphere-making. This sphere is characterized by the promise of "civilized" sociability, of private property epitomized by the family home and the comforts that have increasingly become attached to it. These comforts, such as heating and AC, but also accessibility, not only determine the physical concentric limits of the human sphere but also increasingly define a "natural" outside, a world of elements, a world of haeccities, against which insulation is increasingly needed.

Las Heras, for example, was the result of a failed development project. The Ferrocarril Transpatagónico had promised to connect the coastal Puerto Deseado with the Andes and, later, the Pacific Ocean. However, due to a shortage of iron after the beginning of World War I, the project was abandoned in 1914. "A la parálisis que suelen provocar estos finales abruptos," Cristoff explains, "(…) hay que sumar, en el caso de ellos, la especie de hipnosis que provoca esta meseta. Creo que proviene de una mezcla compuesta por la aparente monotonía del paisaje, el viento constante y la brutal presencia del cielo." [228] In that paralisis, the result of a combination of economic, topographical and climactic factors, the town was formed. Much of what we learn about Las Heras is from the perspective of Sandra, who claims to have powers which protect her from the influence of "los siete", a family that owns the local lottery business and, according to

[227] Roberto Schwarz, "Misplaced Ideas: Literature and Society in Late Nineteenth-Century Brazil." *Comparative Civilizations Review* 0, no. 5 (October 1, 1980). http://search.proquest.com/docview/1311892426/?pq-origsite=primo.37.
[228] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 198.

her, enter peoples' dreams to fill them with stories until they go mad and commit suicide, as was already discussed above.

Sandra's job is to care for the gardens of the directors of YPF: "De ahí, de esa sequedad, proviene lo difícil del trabajo de Sandra, (…). Lo que en otro lugar sería mero transcurrir indiferente de la naturaleza acá se convierte en una lucha de titanes, en una medición de fuerzas permanente. Cada una de esas casas que están al borde del pueblo, enfrentadas a la meseta, son, con sus jardincitos verdes adelante, una especie de puesto de combate. La Fortaleza desde la que se demostrará que el bien siempre vence al mal." [229] The Good, in this case, is the ordered, tamed, and immunizing garden that delimits the inside world of humans against "the bad", the wilderness, danger, and emptiness of the devouring Patagonian Steppe. Those meters of manicured green grass delimit the human sphere against the encroaching vastness, creating a contained space within which humans can circulate without getting lost in the Patagonian desert. The lawns of grass, markers of a modern sphere imported from other ecoregions, are symbolic markers of "development" in the face of a "barbaric" and autochthonous wilderness. "¿Qué será que se teme si simplemente se deja que la meseta avance? ¿Qué es lo que estos metros de verde salvaguardan?"[230], Cristoff wonderns, turning again to the rhetorical question to pose the problem of ontological insecurity in the psycho-geographic reality of the Patagonian steppe. By materializing the liminal space between interiority and exteriority, human and non-human, gardens order our relationship to the ultimate Other that is the outside. The grass lawns of Las Heras, which remind one of Ford's failed recreation of 1950s U.S. suburbia in the Amazon jungle,[231] are a materialization of the developmentalist logic and the modern, "cosmopolitan"

[229] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 199.
[230] Ibid., 199.
[231] Greg Grandin, *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City*, (New York: Picador, 2009).

aesthetic that comes with it. "El jardín modernista," Andermann writes, "es (…) ante todo una herramienta de deslocalización, un paisaje verbal compuesto puramente por tópicos y figuras ya poetizadas (…)."[232] By imposing on the topography an order and aesthetic, the modernist garden functions as a tool for the denial of the imposition on the psyche of the formless landscape.

The active structuring function of oil companies, evidenced in the material and social realities of the towns constructed around the rigs, was evidenced not only by their role in the formation of these social spheres but also in the gap that was left upon the companies' decline, as was the case with YPF after the military dictatorship (1976-1983) and its privatization under the government of president Carlos Menem.[233] For example, the YPF offices in Comodoro Rivadavia reduced their personnel from 4.983 people in 1990 to 518 in 1993, resulting in a decrease in employment from 22.8% in 1991 to 1.9% in 1992, putting in evidence the centrality of this economic activity in the region.[234]

For Francisco, who migrated from Córdoba to Cañadón Seco, Santa Cruz, to work for YPF, the oil company provided the infrastructure not only for his material life, but also for his social world. "La paga era buena, le daban casa, seguro social, y la empresa se encargaba de todo: de mandarle a un técnico si se le rompía algo en la casa, de mandar un colectivo si su mujer quería ir a la peluquería en Caleta Oliva. Le organizaba la vida, lo cuidaba."[235] YPF was the "spinal cord"[236] of Cañadón Seco and organized the social and individual experience of its inhabitants. Yet, the precarity of the "developed" status is evidenced in the fact that when the oil rigs stop working, or international oil prices drop, all of these markers become harder or even

[232] Andermann, *Tierras en trance*, 117.
[233] 51% was later re-nationalized by the government of Cristina Fernández.
[234] Orietta Favaro and Graciela Iuorno, "Sujetos, política y conflictos en la Patagonia argentina," in *Luchas contrahegemónicas y cambios políticos recientes de América Latina*, (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2008), 321.
[235] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 27.
[236] Ibid., 26.

impossible to maintain including the primary markers of them all – density of population, access to education and being worthy of being not only mapped but accessed.

In its heyday, Leon's convenience store, one of two in Cañadón Seco, founded by his father in 1953, saw two or three hundred people a day, mostly YPF workers. In addition to colognes, packets of gum and cookies –consumer products meant to signal inclusion in a modern world–, León sells tickets for the bus that crosses the north of Santa Cruz. However, in the narrative present, most of the YPF workers that once inhabited the town have left due to the company's diminished social and economic power. Now, he explains, buses often ignore the stop at Cañadón Seco, choosing instead to zoom past to the next town, leaving the one or two people who bought tickets from him stranded and forcing him to return the cost, which is sometimes half of his income for the day[237]. Thus, whenever the bus is scheduled to arrive, León sits in alert, ready to jump off his chair and into the street to force the driver to recognize the existence of Cañadón Seco and its inhabitants.

The spectral in the "ghost towns" that Cristoff dialogues with thus emerges as the affective residue of global market forces and national political and economic projects that aimed to construct the ecoregion of the Patagonian steppe as a new sphere of industrial production, accumulation, and social integration but have since partially abandoned the social spheres they helped create. The imposition of distance and the refusal to be fully "mapped" made the Patagonia region one of equivocation, of illegibility that hindered human enterprise. These ecological factors, compounded with the process of negative accumulation that results not only in the progressive exhaustion of oil reserves but also in the continued disenfranchisement of

[237] Cristoff, *Falsa Calma*, 15.

human populations in isolated Patagonian towns, have created ghostly social spheres, where resiliency is rewarded but the material and psychological perils of aloneness lie in wait.

3.5. The Open Environment: Material Porosity

I have thus far analyzed the mechanisms of sphere-making figured in *Falsa calma* and *El viento que arrasa*, focusing primarily on the often-contested delimitation of mental and social ecologies in these ecoregions. I will conclude this chapter by briefly addressing the porosity of environmental spheres, which I will analyze further in chapter three.

It is Brauer's dog, el Bayo, who announces the pending arrival of one of the Chaco's infamous summer storms, as it starts to brew in the northeastern forest. For a moment, the reader leaves the mind of the four human characters as Almada imagines the dog's perceptual experience, whose heightened sense of smell warns him of the approaching haeccity that is the storm:

> El olor era muchos olores a la vez. Olores que venían desde lejos, que había que separar, clasificar y volver a juntar para develar qué era ese olor hecho de mezclas.
>
> Estaba el olor de la profundidad del monte. No del corazón del monte, si no de mucho más adentro, de las entrañas, podría decirse. El olor de la humedad del suelo debajo de los excrementos de los animales, del microcosmos que palpita debajo de las bostas: semillitas, insectos diminutos y los escorpiones azules, duelos y señores de ese pedacito de suelo umbrío.
>
> El olor de las plumas que quedan en los nidos y se van pudriendo por las lluvias y el abandono, junto con las ramitas y hojas y pelos de animales usados para su construcción.
>
> El olor de la madera de un árbol tocado por un rayo, incinerado hasta la médula, usurpado por gusanos y por termitas que cavan túneles y por los pájaros carpinteros que agujerean la corteza muerta para comerse todo lo vivo que encuentran.
>
> El olor de los mamíferos más grandes: los osos mieleros, los zorritos, los gatos de los pajonales; de sus celos, sus pariciones y, por fin, su osamenta.
>
> Saliendo del monte y ya en la planicie, el olor de los tacurúes.
>
> El olor de los ranchos mal ventilados, llenos de vincuchas. El olor a humo de los fogones que crepitan bajo los aleros y el olor de la comida que se cuece sobre ellos. El olor a jabón en pan que usan las mujeres para lavar la ropa. El olor a la ropa mojada secándose en el tendedero.

> El olor de los changarines doblados sobre los campos de algodón. El olor de los algodonales. El olor a combustible de las trilladoras.
>
> Y más acá el olor del pueblo más cercano, del basural a un kilómetro del pueblo, del cementerio incrustado en la periferia, de las aguas servidas de los barrios sin red cloacal, de los pozos ciegos. Y el olor del mburucuyá que se empecina en trepar postes y alambrados, que llena el aire con un olor dulce de sus frutos babosos que atraen, con sus mieles, a las moscas. (…)
>
> El olor que era todos los olores, era el olor de la tormenta que se aproximaba.[238]

Almada uses the information available within her mental ecology, particularly the elements that would compose the material environment surrounding Brauer's shop, to construct the web of smells that el Bayo might untangle. She makes el Bayo a subject by imagining his umwelt, the perceptual world that would manifest itself through his sense of smell. This allows her to include within the world of *El viento que arrasa* an environmental ecology that is not available to human senses. The storm begins in the eco-region of the humid Chaco of the Paraguay-Argentina border, carrying the scents of the living and decomposing forest as it begins to move south-west, picking up parts of the human and non-human hybrid web of matter on its trajectory past the town of Tostado in northwestern Santa Fé, as we find out later from Brauer. The wind and water form a haeccity that affects Brauer's sphere. Its climate was initially described from the perspective of Leni and Pearson's embodied experience of physical discomfort: the sun was bright, the wind hot, the heat abrasive, the soil dry and loose. As the storm approaches, however, the temperature and humidity change as the air carries molecular particles of animals, vegetation, trash, human waste, soap, that mix with and push away the hot air that defined the characters' –human and canine– embodied experience of climate within the sphere. The material boundary of car-parts, cement and wire that delimits the sphere of the shop, even the wider environmental ecology that defines Brauer's sphere of belonging, are revealed in

[238] Almada, *El viento que arrasa,* 117-118.

their openness as the climatic haeccity makes all four human characters revel, if only momentarily, in its power to make them and their conflicts seem insignificant.

Environmental ecologies, as was discussed in the introduction of this chapter, are bounded spheres where animal and plant life adapt to the material world that composes it. However, as the increasing toxicity of waters and soils in the modern world has come to show, what occurs in one mental ecology is carried by waters, winds, and living beings to others, revealing that no material sphere is, in fact, completely isolated. The molecular turn in the life sciences has allowed us think how these material conversations take place, as I will examine further in chapter three.

Chapter 3:
The body in the Anthropocene:
Molecular Ecopoetics in *Fruta podrida* and *Distancia de rescate*

Chapter one analyzed the activist ecopoetics that emerged alongside a new awareness of the role of human economic systems and patterns of consumption in environmental degradation at the end of the 20th century. I identified three main characteristics of this ecopoetics: 1) a historicist approach that spatialized and temporalized the current crisis within a linear process of environmental degradation that began with the colonization of the Americas and the birth of the capitalist system, 2) a focus on the violence against human groups and bodies as a sign of larger system of ecosystemic exploitation, and 3) a utopian vision anchored in a socialist critique of the intrinsic injustice of the capitalist world system and the possibilities of human and non-human cohabitation opened by revolution. The construction of the present was, thus, anchored in grand narratives about the past and the future that united the Latin American region in its fate and, ideally, its revolutionary action. In contrast, the second chapter identified an ecopoetics of home in two 21st century writers who, instead, focused on the intimately local, figuring spheres of existence anchored in the particularities of the ecoregions from which they emerge. In so doing, these authors helped us think how apparently isolated social, mental, and environmental spheres dialogue with other spheres embedded in a network of material and symbolic exchange. This configuration of spheres and networks is one manifestation of what I have referred to as the "hybrid web". Within the hybrid web, spheres can express, in their own local particularity, hegemonic symbolic and material configurations traversing the web's networks. It is with this understanding, for example, that activists associated to the "Buen Vivir" ecological movement argue for the importance of grassroots action based on the respect of subjugated knowledges that address the global environmental crisis in its localized manifestations.

This final chapter deepens the conversation by exploring how the hybrid web and the dynamics of power that traverse and compose it constitute environmental ecologies and, within them, bodies. This entails approaching the hybrid web at multiple scales of existence to follow some of the vectors of determination that interrelate not only global social ecologies with local spheres, but also, living and non-living matter at a molecular scale. At this scale, the hybrid web, which is always in flux, is made in the constant becoming and unbecoming of molar forms, revealing them in their instability, their continuous change. Vulnerability is an intrinsic part of material existence since life is not an object nor an idea, but an event of continuous transformation. However, in the context of spheres constructed as "environmental sacrifice zones" within the global system of exchange, this vulnerability is exacerbated; it is no longer part and parcel of the continuation of life but, instead, becomes an accelerator of death.

This is the scenario engaged by the two novels that this chapter will examine: *Fruta podrida*, published in 2007 by Lina Meruane, and *Distancia de rescate*, published in 2018 by Samanta Schweblin. *Fruta Podrida* takes place in the Chilean Central Valley, an environmental sphere dedicated, in large part, to the fruit-export industry. María and Zoila del Campo are half-sisters who live in Ojo Seco, a small populated enclave surrounded by the fruit plantations of an international corporation. María, the oldest sister, is an entomologist whose job is to prepare chemical combinations to spray from airplanes over the fruit fields in order to ward off any unwanted "pests". Her obsession with cleaning all forms of life from the markers of dis-ease[239] in the quest for "perfect" homogeneity is extended to her sister, Zoila, who has diabetes. Zoila, in turn, rejects the biopolitics of control that her sister imposes on the fields and that the local

[239] I hyphenate this word to move away from the singular use of the term as an identity marker and emphasize its relationality, its ability to define and describe a particular affective and material communal situation. Dis-ease, in this sense, can designate the presence in an organic body of an element that threatens its material existence but can also describe the unsettling of environmental or social ecologies.

hospital attempts to impose on her. The biopolitical logic of the fruit corporation and the hospital constitute in Ojo Seco an experimental necropolitics, justified under the guise of the "common good". Ultimately, both sisters find agency in the subversive use of their bodies, destabilizing the international markets of fruit and organ transplants by recognizing the extent to which their material existence is constituted by and participates in this wider network of exchange.

Distancia de rescate is a story of intoxication set in a soy plantation in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Amanda, a well-to-do mother, leaves the capital city with her daughter, Nina, to enjoy a vacation in the countryside. However, the image of idyllic rurality is progressively dismantled, as the town's environmental and social ecologies are revealed to be permeated by the deadly pesticides of the surrounding monoculture. The narrative is structured as a non-linear dialogue between Amanda, who is dying from pesticide poisoning, and David, a boy who has already suffered this fate but partially survived, becoming, in the process, a liminal figure between life and death that seeks to understand the material assemblages that the dying bodies had to enter into to come to the point of intoxication. Through David's questioning, Amanda attempts to reconstruct the events through the lens of her embodied experience, simultanously figuring the molecular hybrid webs composing the town's toxic ecology.

Both novels participate in what Jens Andermann has termed "Anthropocene literature," in which bodies and environments converge in the continuity of molecular assemblages. [240] These works challenge an understanding of subjectivity purely tied to individuated molar forms. In doing so, they bring to the fore a form of subjectivity that responds not only to molar experience but also to the understanding of molecular existence. In the characters and settings that these novels portray, as well as the narrative mechanisms they choose, they construct worlds

[240] Andermann, *Tierras en trance*, 343.

in their "devenir inespecífico" or "becoming undefined". In the plane of aesthetics, this becoming undefined is characterized by what Gabriel Giorgi calls a "rhetoric of the living"[241] and Andermann describes as a "liquid aesthetic", both referring to a poetics that makes the solid vibrate, blurring the boundaries between species and matter more generally.[242]

This liquid aesthetic puts forth an ontological proposal akin to that of surrealist writers like Enrique Molina, who used poetry to question and challenge the human condition and entrenched forms of relating to a world defined by its "demonic beauty"[243] by purposefully seeking that which is ignored and disavowed, the edge at which "world" turns into "cosmos", forms into the formless, the conscious into the unconscious. In his work, Molina constantly explored what I have, in the context of this project, called the "hybrid web". "Entre uno y las otras cosas, entre uno y los seres hay una distancia que jamás se cubre del todo. Entre la conciencia del yo y la proposición de los sentidos queda algo así como esos agujeros negros de que habla el conocimiento actual del cielo, de una vertiginosa fuerza centrípeta. Sólo la poesía puede franquearlos más allá de las categorías de la razón," he stated in conversation with Roberto Alifano.[244] According to the writer, the poetic engagement with the world opens the possibility of accessing it in its unified dimension by discursively inhabiting the space in-between forms, existence at the scale of becoming, that is unavailable to most sensory experience. This has also been a key argument throughout this project.

However, I argue that the examples of "Anthropocene literature" that I engage in this chapter, by virtue of the ecologies and discursive field they dialogue with are, unlike surrealist

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[241][241] Gabriel Giorgi, *Formas comunes: Animalidad, cultura, biopolítica,* (Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia Editora, 2014), 35.
[242] Andermann, *Tierras en trance*, 29.
[243] Guillermo Sucre, "La Belleza Demoníaca Del Mundo," in *La Máscara, La Transparencia: Ensayos Sobre Poesía Hispanoamericana*, (Caracas: Monte Ávila, 1975), 415.
[244] Roberto Alifano, "Enrique Molina: Ars poética", in *Crisis* 2, no.43, (1986): 41.

poetry, explicitly concerned with a world marked by environmental deterioration and ecological injustice. In novels like *Fruta podrida* and *Distancia de rescate* the liquid aesthetic is infused by a critique of unequal distributions of precarity that articulates the concepts of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene, taking up some of the systemic concerns analyzed in the ecopoetics of the turn of the century through the work of Eduardo Galeano, while still emphasizing the local sphere as the locus of experience, affect, and action. In this context, what Andermann refers to as the "postnatural hero" emerges as a deterritorialized being that not only exists as part of a molar social ecology but also as a molecular body-event, vulnerable to the material manifestations of negative accumulation. The "post natural" hero is, in other words, an ecological subject to the extent that it holds, simultaneously within itself, the knowledge of its molar and molecular existence. This results in the disarticulation of traditional alliances, such as those between mother and child in *Distancia de rescate*, as ethical conflicts rooted in the contrast between an impersonal molecular existence and an individuated molar existence emerge.

The localized manifestation of negative accumulation that serves as referent to both of the novels engaged is that which results from a new form of agroindustry, focused on largescale, industrialized monocultures. This model of agrobusiness emerged in the context of what Svampa has called the "commodities consensus," in which Latin American governments in the 21st century re-emphasized the centrality of large-scale exports of raw materials, including agricultural products, in a process of "reprimarization" of the region's economies. "According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development," she writes, "in 2011 agricultural, mineral, and commodity raw materials represented 76 percent of the exports of the countries of the Union of South American Nations, compared to only 34 percent for the world as a whole."[245]

[245] Maristella Svampa, "Commodities Consensus: Neoextractivism and Enclosure of the Commons in Latin America," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 114, no.1, (2015): 65.

Fruta Podrida and *Distancia de rescate* think how the model agroindustry actualized under this framework is internalized and embodied by those whose lives are structured by its market logic.

The environmental crisis has made evident the extent to which the spheres within which we exist have always been porous and permeable. The visual metaphor that Sloterdijk uses for the current era of globalization, explored in chapter two, is that of the foam. This metaphor, however, not only applies to social ecologies and the forms of cultural expression that manifest within them, as Sloterdijk and García Canclini have explored. Foam also mirrors the cells in the body that enclose their nuclei within the permeable boundaries of their membranes. In the Southern cone spheres that these novels use as referents, cells not only participate in webs of becoming in their participation of the flow of life, but also integrate into themselves, the chemical materials that have permeated the region's environmental ecology.

The first section of this chapter analyzes the narrative mechanisms by which the two novels discussed think the molar and molecular embeddedness of bodies in local environmental ecologies and global networks of exchange. The primary mechanism by which this is achieved, I argue, is the privileging of a somatic gaze as the lens through which to relate the novels' events. The second section examines how *Distancia de rescate* figures a chemical infrastructure that permeates the environmental and social spheres in which the narrative takes place. Thus, it thinks how bodies are revealed in their molecular continuity with the ecology of which they are a part and the implications of this continuity in environments exposed to agrochemicals. The third section turns to *Fruta podrida* to discuss the manner in which bodies are constituted, particularly in ecological sacrifice zones, by global systems of biopolitical control geared towards the maximization of standardization and profit at the expense of heterogeneity in the expression of life. The fourth and final section faces the uncomfortable truth of our molecular vulnerability by

exploring some of the ontological implications of understanding life through the lens of the molar and the molecular in the context of the Anthropocene.

1. Narratives of the Anthropocene: The Somatic Gaze

What are the mechanisms by which Anthropocene literature thinks and figures a world in its continuous becoming? And how does it account for the uneven molecular distribution of a necropolitics of negative accumulation? I argue that a somatic gaze focused on the character's embodied experience of their environmental and social ecologies functions, in *Distancia de rescate* and *Fruta podrida*, as a mechanism for narrative emplotment that, simultaneously, decomposes the human bodies around which the narratives are structured. Through the characters' somatic gaze, an ecological subjectivity emerges that responds to an increased awareness of the configurations of material affect of which they are a part. In this way, these narratives participate in what Gabriel Giorgi has identified as new "escrituras del yo" or writings of the self. Following Alberto Giordano, Giorgi argues that, in this genre, "lo íntimo es menos el espacio de reapropiación de la vida por parte del sujeto que un pliegue desde el cual esa interioridad se abre a intensidades y afectos impersonales, comunes, o en todo caso no asignables a un yo. Lo que cuenta en ellas es la interrogación sobre esa 'materia de vida' cuyo estatuto ha sido puesto en cuestión, y cuya naturaleza – entre el cuerpo, la cultura y la experiencia – ha dejado de ser el fundamento presupuesto de la subjetividad."[246] Narratives of material intimacy can thus become tools for the recognition of embeddedness, creating the discursive basis upon which the ecological subject can emerge.

[246] Giorgi, *Formas comunes*, 37.

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming", already at play in Jens Andermann's characterization of representation within literatures of the Anthropocene as a "becoming undefined," is useful to understand the construction of world in *Distancia de rescate* and *Fruta podrida*. In their theory of "molecularity" and "molarity", Deleuze and Guattari propose that we think affect at different scales of existence. The molar is the scale at which humans commonly experience the world. It is the scale at which materiality is organized into distinct and bounded forms. In contrast, the molecular is the scale at which everything is fluid, always in exchange with everything else. Forms are not clearly defined but are instead in a constant process of "becoming". Becoming describes material existence in terms of affect, of being swept away in an involuntary process of material intermingling and transformation that continues endlessly. Therefore, becoming does not result in a new subjectivity. "What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes."[247] Nothing, no object and no subject, is ever static; everything is in a constant process of change. "Between substantial forms and determined subjects, *between the two*, there is not only a whole operation of demonic local transports but a natural play of haecceities, degrees, intensities, events, and accidents that compose individuations totally different from those of the well-formed subjects that receive them."[248] Thus, "becoming," refers to the relationships of affect that compose the ever-fluid hybrid web. Hybridity, as it has been understood and operationalized in this project, it is worth remembering, does not imply a static subjectivity that has resulted from the combination of two or more others. Rather, as García Canclini emphasizes, it refers to a *process of hybridization* that is never finalized. While García Canclini has primarily focused,

[247] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 238.
[248] Ibid., 253.

from a sociological perspective, on the hybridization of cultural practices, I am now using this term to describe processes of hybridization of the human body in the two novels discussed.

Fruta podrida turns to the use of metonymy to figure a world in which the subjects are not only individuated humans, but also their body parts. Throughout the novel, the narrative's actants alternate between the human characters and the organs and molecules that compose and travel through them. The novel begins with the sound of a dripping faucet and the cursing of the feeling of frustration inside María, the older of the two del Campo sisters. As she angrily walks through the house looking for the culprit, her sister, Zoila, she arrives at an undefined lump on the living room floor: "Cuando llegó a la puerta levantó la vista: hasta dónde llegaría el agua que debía ser su huella. Hasta allá. Pero había algo, allá. Allá tirado en la penumbra de la sala. Un vaso derribado junto a un bulto. Un zapato caído en el piso. Un calcetín negro. Una pantorrilla flaca. Debajo de la mesa una niña despatarrada y chueca: el brazo torcido hacia atrás, la boca abierta."[249] María is the first actant, who takes in the scene. Through her gaze, the undefined mass is slowly revealed in its humanity as different elements, a sock, a calf, come into focus. By narrowing in on the parts before the human whole, the novel establishes the atomized perspective that will dominate the rest of the text, in which human bodies will emerge as multiplicities composed of organs, limbs, senses, and chemical processes. To provide another example, after taking her convalescent sister to the hospital, María is prompted to enter the doctor's office for an update: "Entre, entre, no se quede ahí parada, dijo la voz envuelta en su delantal blanco."[250] The doctor, who will become the embodiment of a medical-corporate complex that I will develop further below, is a clothed voice. The body is thus deconstructed through the use of metonymy, putting the focus on the parts actually engaging in action.

[249] Lina Meruane, *Fruta podrida,* (Santiago de Chile: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007), 15.
[250] Ibid., 22.

Furthermore, this atomized gaze is doubled, as it is not only Meruane who uses it as a narrative tool, but also Zoila. Due to her diabetes and the experimental treatments she is being subjected to, Zoila is forced to maintain a log of everything she eats and experiences throughout the day. This mechanism of biopolitical control does not only serve to discipline the body in order to make it suitable for a transplant that never arrives but also delimits Zoila existence, bounding her to the subjectivity imposed on her by the medical system. In response, Zoila takes the sentences of her composition notebook and de-composes them:

> *esta espera saturada*
> *de consonantes y síntomas y*
> *notas conjeturales y pistas*
> *falsas o verdaderas;*
> *esta espera con su S intercalada*
> *entre sustantivos*
> *esa ese*
> *descomponiendo mi cuaderno*
> *entre mis dedos*
> *manchando la superficie cuadriculada*
> *de mi cuerpo*
>
> (cuaderno de deScomposición)[251]

These poems, interspersed throughout the text, challenge the medical ordering of Zoila's body and assert her mortality against a medico-industrial global system intent, as we will see, on denying it. Through this writing of the self, Zoila performs a discursive rejection of the productivist biopolitics that dominate Ojo Seco and opens herself to the experience of her decomposing materiality, of her becoming-other, through the discursive engagement with her body. The somatic gaze, common in Meruane's work, allows the reader to enter the sphere of the characters' bodies. Discursivity thus opens the characters' corporality while simultaneously revealing it, in its continuous becoming, as always already open.

[251] Meruane, *Fruta podrida,* 55.

Distancia de rescate achieves this opening of the sphere of the body through the dominance in its discursivity of a theory of detail, as Lucía De Leone argues, that seeks the significant in the insignificant.[252] This search is aimed at finding in Amanda's self-narrative the "knowledge-making moments"[253], those embodied quotidian acts that can reveal the chemical infrastructure of the town's sphere. I use the term "infrastructure" following Michelle Murphy's definition as "the spatially and temporally extensive ways that practices are sedimented into and structure the world."[254] Given that the novel's somatic gaze is constrained to Amanda's limited embodied experience of the town's sphere and within it, her intoxication, it does not reveal the sedimented practices of the town's social ecology. Rather, what emerges is its "chemical infrastructure", "the spatial and temporal distributions of industrially produced chemicals as they are produced and consumed, and as they become mobile in the atmosphere, settle into landscapes, travel in water ways, (…) absorbed by bodies, metabolized physiologically, (…) as they bioaccumulate in food changes, break down over time, or persist."[255]

"Son como gusanos,"[256] Amanda describes, opening the narrative and plunging the reader into her embodied experience of the already occurring events of *Distancia de rescate*. Structured as a dialogue between Amanda and David, whose voice appears in italics, the story unfolds as the boy, a liminal being between life and death seeking to understand how intoxication is spread, pushes Amanda to describe the events of the previous days to find the exact moment at which she and her daughter, Nina, came into contact with the pesticide that is slowly killing her. "¿Estás seguro que es necesario hacer estas observaciones? ¿Tenemos tiempo para esto? *Las*

[252] Lucía De Leone, "Campos que matan. Espacios, tiempos y narración en *Distancia de rescate* de Samanta Schweblin," *452ºF* 16, (2017): 71.
[253] Michelle Murphy, "Distributed Reproduction, Chemical Violence, and Latency," *Scholar & Feminist Online* 11, no.3 (2013): n/a.
[254] Ibid., n/a.
[255] Ibid., n/a.
[256] Samanta Schweblin, *Distancia de rescate,* (Buenos Aires: Literatura Random House, 2018): 11

observaciones son muy importantes."[257] David's exhortations push Amanda to focus on minute details as they manifest in her physical experience of the events. "*El punto exacto está en un detalle, hay que ser observador,"*[258] he explains. David pushes Amanda away from the creation of a story in which events succeed each other, to instead focus on moments as fragments of a non-causal flow. It is the non-linear processes of hybridization, of becomings and unbecomings that are the focus of David's questions. In other words, her subjective narrativization of life is unimportant; what matters is the assemblage of matter present at the precise moment of contact. What he is looking for is the instant, within the flow of events and becomings, of Amanda's becoming-pesticide.

"*¿Cómo es la caminata en tu cuerpo?,*"[259] David asks. It is through language, through the retelling of the events through the fragmented lens of the body that Amanda comes to realize how she has interacted with the world, how she has entered relationships of material affect that had escaped her conscious awareness. The text focuses primarily on figuring the territorial regime of signification, the horizon of possibility of movement within the material world within which the events unfold. However, due to the town's toxic chemical infrastructure, the apparent territorial regime of signification is revealed in its deception. While Amanda initially reproduces the trope of the countryside as a safe space to escape the city, its anxieties and pollution, the possibilities of movement within the town's social and environmental ecologies become constrained as a sense of unease progressively permeates Amanda's embodied experience.

Amanda feels the increasing sense of danger through the tension of the "rescue distance". The "rescue distance" is how she describes the thread she feels connects her to her daughter and

[257] Schweblin, *Distancia de rescate*, 12
[258] Ibid., 14.
[259] Ibid., 45.

informs her of the degree of danger she is in. As Amanda explains it, it is "esa distancia variable que me separa de mi hija y me paso la mitad del día calculándola, aunque siempre arriesgo más de lo que debería."[260] David seizes on this concept because it simultaneously forces Amanda to focus on the embodied experience of her memories and determines the disposition of bodies in space. In other words, it creates instances of territorialization in the flow of becomings, opening the theoretical possibility of a molar experience of molecular interconnectivity. The bond of love, exemplified in the narrative as that between a mother and her child, is such it has a quasi-materiality that manifests as a physical experience in the body. This links individuals together and from it stems an ethics of care that, David hopes, could work against the threat of material intoxication. The novel's horror, however, stems from the realization that this bond cannot curb the body's molecular vulnerability within the toxic sphere. *Distancia de rescate* thus confronts toxic chemical infrastructures with an ethics of care and finds, to the readers' dismay, that care at a molar level is not enough to face the molecular, invisible threat of intoxication.

In both novels, the imbalance of the body's molecular homeostasis is manifested as experiences of the molar body: itchiness, blurry vision, increased sweat as body temperatures rise, dizziness, and the anxiety of desperation:

> Se me nubla la vista, me palpita la cabeza. Chispazos eléctricos se encumbran por mi nuca, hacia el cráneo: estoy al borde de un cortocircuito. Alcanzo un cuchillo pero mi mano no tiene fuerza, mi puño se abre y la afilada herramienta cae, se clava en el suelo como una advertencia mientras mi cuerpo va dando vueltas, alucinando, y mis neuronas piden desesperadamente azúcar, azúcar, una y muchas veces azúcar repitiendo el sabor acaramelado de esa palabra hasta que lentamente todo se deshace en un sudor insulso y una voz tenue que silba susurra suspira gime simplemente como un eco absurdo a azúcar azúcar azúcar (…) azúcar azúcar azúcar.[261]

[260] Schweblin, *Distancia de rescate,* 22.
[261] Meruane, *Fruta podrida,* 37.

Dis-ease, in this moment, is the result of unrestrained insulin cursing through Zoila's blood stream. In Amanda's case, pesticides penetrating the permeable membrane of her skin cells result not only in physical symptoms and the eventual death of her body, but also in the non-linear structure of the text itself, which responds to the confusion created by the chemical in her mind. In both novels, dis-ease is a point of entrance into the body's molecular existence as it interacts with the environmental ecology around it. By alternating the scale of vision of the reader, from the molar social and environmental spheres in which the stories take place, to the molar experiences of the body, to the molecular chemical infrastructures within which they exist, *Distancia de rescate* and *Fruta podrida* help us think the fact of our constant becoming in a world permeated by the existential threats that exist within spheres subject to negative accumulation.

2. Toxic Environmental Ecologies in *Distancia de rescate*

In the previous chapter, I examined the mechanisms by which spheres are locally defined and the extent to which these immunological devices are revealed as porous and open to outside "penetration". In other words, I explored how spheres figured in *Falsa calma* and *El viento que arrasa* are part of a wider network, focusing primarily on the social manifestations of this web of foaming spheres. *Distancia de rescate* helps us think how this dialectical, fluid structure manifests itself at a molecular level. The horror genre and the theme of the inescapable threat of pesticide poisoning allows us to think ecological embeddedness without falling prey to the tendency to romanticize this material reality. In this novel, the sphere, while still fulfilling a protective function for the mental ecologies that inhabit it, is defined by its murderous toxicity.

The country town where Amanda decides to spend her family vacations is unnamed. We know that it is four hours from the capital city of Buenos Aires and that it combines ranches and

country homes, enormous soy plantations, humble homes of local residents, and a stretch of poor, improvised housing between the train tracks and a river that separates the plantations, ranches, and local homes from the small town center. The walk from David's house, to the town, through the poor housing complex, is twelve blocks. [262] Through this information the reader learns that the town's environmental ecology is defined by its small size, the material closeness of its inhabitants and its delimitation, at a molar scale, by a river and the soy plantations. However, the dialogue between Amanda and David slowly reveals the boundary between the plantations and the town in its porosity as the fields share a chemical infrastructure with the populated center. Because of this, even when socio-economic stratification is visible from one block to another in the size, materials and distance between houses, the area's chemical infrastructure erases, at a molecular level, the material separation of socio-economic difference that often partially immunize some while exposing others. In other words, everyone in the small town, human and non-human, is exposed to its material toxicity.

The sphere's economy is dominated by the monoculture of soy. Most of those who do not work in the fields of Sotomayor, the soy corporation that owns the town's surrounding land, works at their offices, like Carla, David's mother. "Los campos de Sotomayor," Amanda describes, "empiezan con una gran casona al frente y se abren hacia atrás, indefinibles. No hay vereda todavía. Pero hay pasto entre la calle y la casa. Hay dos galpones medianos detrás, y siete silos mucho más allá de los primeros sembrados."[263] The material and social ecology of the town is dominated by soy to such an extent that it is not only surrounds it but is also present in the locals' backyards, many of whom choose to plant the corporation's seeds, becoming actors in the town's agrarian model.

[262] Schweblin, *Distancia de rescate*, 16.
[263] Ibid., 60.

The town is engulfed by a model of agrobusiness that, as Maristella Svampa and Enrique Viale explain, is central to the neoextractivist logic touted by both right and left-wing political parties, not only in Argentina but across Latin America, as the path to the region's economic development and modernization. This model of agrobusiness is characterized by an orientation towards large-scale production of monocultures, primarily for exports, and the subsequent reliance on the intensive use of glyphosate, causing large-scale sociosanitary impacts in the surrounding environmental and social ecologies. Its main objective is profit maximization, which leads to the amassing of land by few corporations and associates at various scales, the expansion of the agrarian frontier, and subsequent deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and the disenfranchisement of vulnerable populations.[264] Currently, approximately 90% of hectares sown in Argentina are planted with soy. [265] This leads Svampa and Viale to argue that the country has been subsumed in a process of "devenir-soja" or "becoming-soy," in which approximately 12 million people live in areas were 300 million liters of pesticides and other agrotoxics are sprayed each year. [266]

The ongoing process of the region's becoming-soy in the context of a neoextractivist system goes hand in hand with the waters' becoming-pesticide. The danger posed by an ecology traversed by a network of waters carrying pesticides, disavowed not only by corporations and governments, but also by the majority of consumers, gives *Distancia de rescate* its unsettling tone. As Schweblin has stated, she is drawn to the horror of that which goes unsaid[267] and, in this context, it is the danger of exposure to invisible, deadly chemicals that creates a growing sense of

[264] Svampa and Viale, *Maldesarrollo,* 131.
[265] Ibid., 130.
[266] Ibid., 150.
[267] Joel Vargas and Pablo Díaz Marenghi, "Samantha Schweblin: 'Me gusta mucho el terror de lo no dicho'," *ArteZeta,* (Julio, 2016): https://www.artezeta.com.ar/samanta-schweblin-entrevista/

terror not only in the characters but also in the reader. The reader's unease upon reading *Distancia de rescate* is a response to the characters' generalized anxiety in the face of this invisible threat – their "liquid fear," as Bauman refers to it. The state of liquid fear present in modern societies is caused, he argues, by the feeling of uncertainty and insecurity experienced in the face of a diffuse threat whose invisibility prevents humans from positioning themselves safely against it.[268]

"Más allá de la soja se ve verde y brillante bajo las nubes oscuras. Pero la tierra que pisan, desde el camino de entrada hasta el riachuelo, está seca y dura,"[269] Amanda describes. The dry, hard soil is the first clue that the ecology she is inhabiting is what Gabriel Giorgi has called a "paisaje de sobrevida" or "landscape of survival," marked by the visible presence of death. Giorgi characterizes these landscapes as:

> reparticiones formales que escenifican, una y otra vez, ese umbral entre orgánico e inorgánico pero sobre todo las líneas de transfusión, de tráfico y de reconfiguración de lo vivo en torno a esas latencias y estos restos. "Paisaje", veremos, (…) como huella de un itinerario, como instalación y, (…) producción de espacio entre cuerpos, instalación de un "entre" --"paisaje" en el sentido de una cierta proxémica, una medida de distancia y movimiento, anudada al cuerpo en tránsito por un territorio despojado.[270]

From this perspective, "landscape" is not outside of the living and non-living beings that inhabit it, but is constantly composed by their interaction, by the assemblages of affect that they enter into and separate from. This definition adds a molecular dimension to Canal Feijóo's definition of "landscape" as a psycho-geographic event, which I engaged in chapter two. Landscapes of survival are populated by lives that are "other," that in their temporal and spatial existence challenge definitions of living and non-living, organic and inorganic. In *Distancia de*

[268] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear*, (Cambridge, Polity, 2006).
[269] Schweblin, *Distancia de rescate*, 122.
[270] Gabriel Giorgi, "Paisajes de sobrevida," *Catedral Tomada: Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana/Journal of Latin American Literary Criticism* 4, no.7 (2016): 131.

rescate human temporality is traversed by the non-linear temporality of pesticide molecules. This manifests in the novels' narrative structure as David continuously searches for the moment at which the temporality and territoriality of Amanda and Nina's organic bodies intersect with those of the glyphosate molecules. This moment marks the point at which their bodies, like those of most of the town's population, enter a fluid state between life and death, from which Amanda speaks. The imagery of liquidity not only serves a metaphorical function that figures the towns' landscape of survival, it also responds to its molecular infrastructure, characterized by a toxic water system that subterraneously crosses the boundaries of the soy plantations.

Water has very high adhesive and cohesive properties, meaning that its molecules not only bind to each other (cohesion) but can also bind to others (adhesion). In addition, many substances are water soluble, as their molecules can easily disperse into it. These three properties account for the effectiveness of water in the conformation of the town's chemical infrastructure. A river, against which the poorest houses stand, delimits the sphere at a molar level, separating its population from the soy plantations. At a molecular level, however, it is a corridor, a petri dish for the chemical infrastructure's becoming-pesticide. The water's infrastructural role within the novel mirrors that of the two most contaminated rivers in Argentina: the Matanza-Riachuelo and the Reconquista, both in the Buenos Aires province. Millions of people live against the banks of these rivers, exposed on a daily basis to quantities of industrial chemicals that cause a variety of health problems, from skin and respiratory issues to cancer and malformations. Amongst other substances detrimental to the health of living beings, the Reconquista contains agrochemicals and pesticides at levels far exceeding those tolerable to aquatic life. [271] The pollution of the Reconquista affects the ecology of the Paraná delta, which contains a network of

[271] Svampa and Viale, *Maldesarrollo*, 92.

wetlands unique to Latin America not only in their extension but also in the fact that they do not flow into the ocean. In addition, both the Reconquista and the Riachuelo feed into the basin of the Río de la Plata estuary, conforming, in this way, a chemical infrastructure with varying degrees of exposure to toxicity. [272] The banks of these two rivers are examples of "sacrifice zones," which Svampa and Viale define as areas that are subjected to the extreme effects of negative accumulation and environmental injustice,[273] where those who inhabit them are left not only to deal with the industrial and waste pollution that flows down the river with impunity but also its sociosanitary effects.

The river in *Distancia de rescate*, much like the Reconquista and the Riachuelo, defines a sacrifice zone, where the accumulation of pesticide toxicity and its fatal effects on the health of those who live around it is ignored in favor of Sotomayor's increased profit margins. It is in this river that David first encountered the pesticide. When the stallion that Carla's husband had borrowed to breed with his mares disappeared, Carla found him drinking water at the river. While she roped him, her son approached the waterway: "David se había acuclillado en el riachuelo, tenía las zapatillas empapadas, había metido las manos en el agua y se chupaba los dedos. Entonces vi el pájaro muerto. Estaba muy cerca, a un paso de David."[274] While never making it explicit, it is clear that Carla made an immediate connection between the bird being dead and the river's water. Later, when the stallion's health begins to deteriorate Carla can no longer ignore what her mind already knows: her son has been poisoned: "Lo que sea que hubiera tomado el caballo lo había tomado también mi David, y si el caballo se estaba muriendo no había chances para él. Lo supe con toda claridad, porque yo ya había escuchado y visto demasiadas

[272] Svampa and Viale, *Maldesarrollo*, 94.
[273] Ibid., 84.
[274] Schweblin, *Distancia de rescate*, 20.

cosas en este pueblo."[275] The reader learns, in this moment, that the liquid fear of pesticide poisoning is present in the mental ecology of the town's inhabitants. After Carla recognized David's pending death, she took him to a local spiritual practitioner who conducted a "migration", in which part of David's self left his body and another entered, thus splitting the pesticide intoxication between two bodies that would then be able to heal. Through this process, however, David ceases to be a four-year old child, and becomes an "angel of death", so to speak. "Tenía cuatro años y medio y estaba enterrando un pato,"[276] Carla shares with Amanda when she confesses the story of David's transformation. As a liminal figure between life and death, David's new role is to accompany the living beings, that are dying from pesticide poisoning, human and non-human, in order to understand how the chemical infrastructure continues to expand. David is, thus, a "postnatural hero", whose affective alliances are no longer tied to being Carla's son or even belonging to the human species. This creates tension for Carla, who assumed the responsibility of caring for David's body after his migration, even if the personality that inhabited it was unfamiliar to her. He is also an unsettling figure for the reader, who accustomed to traditional arrangements of ethics and familiar reciprocity, has to slowly overcome the jarring effect of David's impersonal relationship to the other human characters. However, in their impersonality, David's ethical alliances respond to the knowledge of a chemical infrastructure that affects humans and non-humans alike. In this context, his role is to reveal this molecular flow of toxic becomings to the dying characters and, in so doing, to the reader.

David, and the human and animal bodies that he comes into contact with, slowly emerge in the narrative as markers of a landscape of survival. When Amanda hears the story of David's poisoning, she is unable to understand how it occurred, she has had no knowledge-making

[275] Schweblin, *Distancia de rescate*, 21.
[276] Ibid., 71.

moments that could reveal the town's chemical infrastructure in its toxicity. "Eso pasa, Amanda, estamos en un campo de sembrados," Clara explains. "Cada dos por tres alguno cae, y si se salva igual queda raro. Los ves por la calle, cuando aprendés a reconocerlos te sorprende la cantidad que hay."[277] Many express the presence of pesticides in their bodies in their physical appearance, such as Abigaíl, the daughter of the clerk at the local supermarket. One of her legs is shorter than the other, causing her to limp, her forehead occupies half of her head, which is bald, and she screams "como si un pájaro imitara un chico"[278]. David, Nina, and Amanda are poisoned when, due to the adhesive quality of water, the pesticide clings to their skin and clothes, penetrating the permeable membranes of their cells. Abigaíl, however, was already born with mutations resulting from her mother's exposure to the chemical. The temporality of the pesticide extends beyond that of the material present in which water-pesticides slithered in the town's water networks. In other words, the temporality of the chemical infrastructure exceeds the present moment in its manifestations. Michelle Murphey suggests the term "distributed reproduction" to describe the biopolitical power of infrastructures, their ability to promote some forms of life while averting or altering others. In chemical infrastructures, chemical injury is not only spatially displaced to "sacrifice zones" but is also temporally displaced, "such that accountabilities exceed the scope of individual lives, bioaccumulating or persisting over time, beyond regulatory regimes, into the long future."[279] Because it has been constructed as a "sacrifice zone" within a system of production and exchange, any present or future damage to the ecology of the town around the Sotomayor plantations carries on with impunity. Sometimes it is best not to expose one's body to the town's water, as Carla explains to Amanda, bringing her a bucket of mineral

[277] Schweblin, *Distancia de rescate*, 70.
[278] Ibid., 41.
[279] Michelle Murphy, "Distributed Reproduction, Chemical Violence, and Latency," *Scholar & Feminist Online* 11, no.3 (2013): n/a.

water; sometimes children are born with malformations because of the air that their mothers breathed or the water they drank; sometimes, the chemical past manifests itself as an absence, in life unborn due to the spontaneous abortions that have become commonplace. The town's population has come to cope with what Svampa and Viale call "environmental suffering," the pain and hardship suffered by those who see their rights systematically violated as they are burdened with the consequences of environmental degradation.[280] This environmental suffering is exacerbated when the agents that threaten life are invisible, like pesticide molecules, creating an atmosphere of liquid fear.

"Me sorprenden las ganas que tengo de subirme al coche y manejar cuatro horas y media hasta capital. Volver al ruido, a la mugre, a congestionamiento de casi todas las cosas," Amanda states, remembering her emotional state before her fateful trip to the Sotomayor offices to say goodbye to Carla. "*¿De verdad este sitio te parece un lugar mejor?,*"[281] David responds, in a rare moment of curiosity. In its engagement with the repercussions of the dominant agroindustry model and its effects on environmental and social ecologies, *Distancia de rescate* challenges the trope of the peaceful countryside, purveyor of health to those the city smokes out. The fear and anxiety that grows as each knowledge-moments figures the toxic sphere of the town, mirrors that of home-intrusion narratives, where a sphere constructed as safe is not only revealed as dangerous but is in fact more life threatening than the outside.

Spheres constituted as ecological sacrifice zones, like that in *Distancia de rescate*, visibly manifest in the texture of their soils, the color and amount of life in their waters, the quality of life of human and non-human animals, the effects of the accumulation of toxicity for the purpose of increased profit through the standardization of biological life, in this case, soy. The model of

[280] Svampa and Viale, *Maldesarrollo*, 86.
[281] Schweblin, *Distancia de rescate*, 68.

agroindustry that has become dominant in the Latin American southern cone, premised on the maximization of production for the purposes of export, transforms environmental ecologies by erasing biodiversity, controlling the vegetation that grows, the animals that are allowed to roam, the chemicals that the waterways carry, all for the production of crops that will satisfy the global market's need for homogeneity in mass quantities. Agroindustry thus fulfills the infrastructural role of distributing reproduction, determining what forms of life can and cannot exist in a defined environmental ecology. What *Distancia de rescate* confronts us with is the reality that no corporation or government can control the chains of becomings unleashed by the dilution of agrochemicals into environmental spheres connected through a material infrastructure of water, soils, and winds. In a toxic chemical infrastructure, no one is safe.

Fruta podrida, as we will see in the following section, explicitly thinks the entanglement of environmental, social, mental, and corporal spheres with a globalized system of production, exchange, and consumption marked by imbalances of power. Set in the context of the neoliberal turn of the end of the 20th century, *Fruta Podrida* opens the space to think how the sphere of the body inhabiting sacrifice zones of the international agroindustry is constituted and disciplined to fulfill the productive demands of the ever-changing capitalist world system.

3. The Open Body: Globalization in *Fruta podrida*

This project has proposed that the concept of the "hybrid web", when thought at a global scale, helps us think the dialectical structure of spheres and networks that, in a world that is not only materially but also increasingly symbolically interconnected, characterize how localized environmental and social spheres and global networks are mutually informed. Lina Meruane's *Fruta Podrida* explicitly thematizes how globalized networks of production, exchange and

consumption are embodied through mechanisms of discipline. Thus, the novel opens the space to think how the primary sphere of ontological security, the body, is constituted in a globalized world, as it explores the political anatomy of a medico-industrial complex that attempts to delimit the conditions of possibility of biological life. In this context, bodies emerge as spheres where control is actualized but also as the primary space of agency.

As García Canclini argues, a unifying theory of globalization cannot account for the diversity of manifestations that our increasingly interconnected human societies present. The variety of phenomena that emerge as a result of new technologies of movement and communication can make manifest a processes of homogenization while, at the same time, articulating fragmentation, difference, and inequality in old and novel ways.[282] This is why he favors the collection of narratives, rather than searching for a totalizing theory that will account for all manifestations of the multifaceted dynamic of globalization. That being said, the narrative of globalization in *Fruta podrida* reinforces the explanatory power of theories of coloniality that, articulated with novel forms of ecocritical thought, allow us to analyze some of the mechanisms by which destructive extractivist politics continue to be perpetuated, particularly in the Latin American context.

The novel takes place in "Ojo Seco", a small town in Chile's agricultural center, the Central Valley, during the 1980s. Ojo Seco is home not only to the fruit plantations of an unnamed corporation whose headquarters are in "the north," seemingly the United States, but also a hospital whose ambitious director aims to make the pinnacle of transplant research. María, the older sister, works as a chemist at El Galpón, creating pesticides to attack anything that could threaten the production of fruit for export. Her younger half-sister, Zoila, who is the abandoned

[282] García Canclini, *Imagined Globalization*, 24.

daughter of one of the fruit corporation's managers, has diabetes and is subjected to the hospital's studies and experiments against her will. Zoila and María's bodies thus stand at the intersection of global networks and their local sphere. The vectors of global networks of medical knowledge, equipment and organs, as well as commercialization of fruit, pass through and constitute their bodies, penetrating in this way the most intimate of spheres. The direction of influence and constitutive power is fundamentally one-sided; until both sisters rebel, that is.

The mechanisms of a "globalized rurality"[283] that traverse the novel's hybrid web can be understood through the lens of sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems approach, which attempts to understand how the global economy is structured, particularly as it relates to the division of labor. Wallerstein proposes that the world-economy is split into centers and peripheries depending on the type of economic activity taking place and the value it adds to the end-product. In this system, geographical areas devoted to the commercialization of primary goods are constituted as peripheries in relation to the centers of marketing and consumption.[284] Wallerstein traces the beginnings of this world system to the "long 16th century" and argued with Anibal Quijano for a continuity between the colonial re-structuring of the world's economy and the current distribution of centers and peripheries. Quijano has termed this continuity "coloniality of power," a concept that has also been taken up by decolonial thinkers such as Enrique Dussel. "Coloniality," Quijano and Wallerstein write, "was essentially the creation of a set of states linked together within an interstate system in hierarchical layers. Those at the very bottom were the formal colonies. But even when formal colonial status would end, coloniality would not."[285] In the peripheries this resulted in what Dussel described as a double movement

[283] Svampa and Viale, *Maldesarrollo,* 130.
[284] Imannuel Wallerstein, *El moderno sistema mundial I, II, III,* (México: Siglo XXI, 2007), 426.
[285] Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Americanity as a concept, or the Americas in the modern world-system," *Revista Internacional de Ciencias Sociales* 64, no.4, (1992): 550.

between globalization and exclusion expressed as a simultaneous process of modernization and material and discursive exclusion.[286] In this context, Dussel argues, "el proyecto utópico del sistema-mundo vigente que se globaliza (económico, político, erótico, etc.) se descubre a la luz de sus propias pretensiones de libertad, igualdad, riqueza y propiedad para todos, y de otros mitos y símbolos en contradicción consigo mismo, ya que la mayoría de sus posibles participantes afectados se encuentran privados de cumplir con las necesidades que el mismo sistema ha proclamado como derechos."[287] Fragmentation, it is worth adding, manifests not only in the dynamic of coloniality but also in the internal configurations of centers and peripheries, as vulnerable populations within centers of power also suffer the disconnect between a global discourse of rights tied to narratives of modernization and its striking lacks as it is actualized.

In the Chilean context, this fragmentation was exacerbated by the rapid implementation of neoliberal reforms during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990), as Naomi Klein analyzed in *The Shock Doctrine.* Klein writes that the shock suffered by the Chilean population with the onset of the dictatorship and its violent repression created the possibility to test out the economic theories of economist Milton Friedman, a staunch advocate for privatization and free-market policies and advisor to Pinochet. Friedman argued that times of crisis provide the opportunity to pass economic measures that would otherwise see opposition from civil society, such as extensive privatization and deregulation of the market.[288] Pinochet's dictatorship was Friedman's first opportunity to successfully test out his ideas, privatizing social services such as education, aggressively pursuing foreign investment, and cutting social spending, among others, successfully transforming Chilean economy and politics through the

[286] Dussel, *Ética de la liberación,* 17.
[287] Ibid., 310-311.
[288] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism,* (London: Picador, 2008), 8.

enshrinement of neoliberal values in a Constitution that the country's population continues to fight to this day.

It was during this time that Chile's fruit-export industry was formed, hailed by the *Wall Street Journal* as proof of Chile's "economic miracle" and an example for other "developing" nations.[289] As Heidi Tinsman explains, it was in fact the governments of Eduardo Frei Montalva (1964-1970) and Salvador Allende (1970-1973) who, through an extensive land reform that dismantled the country's long-established latifundia system, had set the ground –literally, it was during that time that the trees that would mature during the military regime were planted– for a new fruit industry. With the neoliberalization of the Chilean economy instituted by Pinochet's government, the export of grapes, preaches, apples, and plums, particularly to the United States and Japan, boomed to the benefit of Chilean companies and multinationals such as Dole and Standard Fruit.[290] This new agrobusiness not only relied on forms of mechanical and chemical technology for the cultivation of "perfect" fruit for export, but also drew on a novel source of labor in the agrarian sector: women. While they had made up 10% of wage-earning agricultural labor in the 1960s and 70s, they made up 40% of Chile's fruit workers by the mid-1980s. 80% of the labor at fruit-packing plants was carried out by "temporeras" who worked seasonally up to sixteen hours a days for piece-rates.[291]

The construction of *Fruta podrida'*s mental, environmental and social ecologies is informed by to this period of Chilean history. Because of the centrality of the fruit-export company to the town's economy María and the seasonal workers whose daily living depended on

[289] Heidi Tinsman, "Reviving Feminist Materialism: Gender and Neoliberalism in Pinochet's Chile," *The University of Chicago Press Journals* 26, no.1 (2000): 148.
[290] Heidi Tinsman, "Struggles in the Countryside: Gender Politics and Agrarian Reform in Democracy and Dictatorship," *Radical History Review,* no.124 (2016): 67.
[291] Heidi Tinsman, "Reviving Feminist Materialism: Gender and Neoliberalism in Pinochet's Chile," *The University of Chicago Press Journals* 26, no.1 (2000): 146.

its functioning were exposed, in their seemingly isolated existence, to the fluctuations of the global market. Faced with a new plague at the plantation, the *Drosophila melanogaster* or *"*fruit fly", María anxiously contemplates what is at stake in her finding a chemical combination to annihilate the "pest", the "malditas moscas cosmopolitas"[292], as she refers to them: "Esta es una emergencia que podría acabar con la fruta. Y con los tractores y sus operarios. Y con las temporeras al menos una temporada. Su puesto de trabajo y la Empresa entera estarán en riesgo si las acciones en la Bolsa se derrumban."[293] In this moment, the sphere of Ojo Seco is spatialized within a global network that determines its social and environmental ecologies. If María were unable to halt the reproduction of the fruit fly, the corporation's immediate profit would diminish because consumers in "the north" would have no fruit to buy. Ojo Seco, and Chile more broadly, are thus constituted as purveyors of primary goods, as peripheries in the global south to a center of consumption in "the north". That center, however, is subject to the fluctuations of the financial market and could see its projected value, the price of its shares, drop as a result of the likely loss of profit at the consumer level. In response, the social ecology in Ojo Seco would suffer as the network of workers associated to the plantation would experience in the present the consequences of an immediate loss in fruit and a future loss in corporate value. This dialectic between the center and periphery is further complicated by the fact that the eggs of the fruit fly arrived attached to the seeds sent by the corporation, as control of biological diversity through the standardization and patenting of seed is part and parcel of this model of agroindustry. Ojo Seco and its environmental, social, and mental spheres are thus constituted in direct response to the economic network that makes its habitus, that conditions its possibilities of existence.

[292] Meruane, *Fruta podrida*, 68.
[293] Ibid., 67.

The concentration of agrochemicals and transgenic fruit genetically manipulated to withstand them make the environmental ecology of Ojo Seco an "open air lab," a term used by Gras and Hernández to characterize the Argentinean agroindustry examined in the previous section.[294] This phrase implies that monoculture plantations in the Southern Cone define spheres of experimentation, where the cost of environmental negative accumulation and suffering, weighed against capital gains, is deemed warranted and necessary. They constitute, in other words, ecological sacrifice zones. Meruane's novel pushes the metaphor of the "open air lab" further by combining two manifestations of the coloniality of power within one medico-industrial complex: Ojo Seco not only produces standardized fruit for export but also human bodies and organs.

The medico-industrial complex[295] in *Fruta Podrida* is the articulation of two spheres of control of biological life: the fruit corporation and the local hospital. In the context of 1980s Chile, the medico-industrial complex creates an atmosphere of repression and secrecy, creating an underlying sense of stress that mirrors that of the years of military dictatorship. The regime's control of the body manifested in the enshrinement and imposition of traditional gender norms, the kidnapping and adoption of children, the limitation of movement and expression, and, at its most extreme, in the use of physical torture and death as a form of punishment. *Fruta podrida* thinks the mechanisms by which a system of biopolitical control constitutes bodies while, at the same time, indagating the forms of agency that emerge through its cracks.

[294] Cited in Maristella Svampa and Enrique Viale, *Maldesarrollo: La Argentina del extractivismo y el despojo,* (Buenos Aires: Katz Editores, 2014), 170.
[295] The concept of the "medico-industrial complex" dialogues with Juan Recchia Paez's discussion of an "espacio médico-mercantil" in Juan Recchia Paez, "Cuerpos infectos, cuerpos extraños: literatura y vida en *Fruta podrida* de Lina Meruane," *Estudios de Teoría Literaria. Revista digital: artes, letras y humanidades* 7, no.14 (2018): 158, footnote.

The fruit plantation and the hospital share both a material network and a biopolitical logic. The trucks that leave the Galpón filled with fruit return with equipment for the hospital. Thus, the movement of knowledge and medical equipment uses the same vectors that, as we saw above, reproduce the coloniality of power. It is through the local institutions of the Galpón and the hospital that this power dynamic is imposed on the environmental and social ecologies of the town. The biopolitical logic that they share seeks to delimit and control the unfolding of biological life, subjecting it in its heterogeneity to mechanisms of standardization. Monica Barrientos argues for the existence of a metaphorical relationship between the narrative's biopolitical control of fruit and human bodies. In this analysis, the controlled production of fruit can be understood as a metaphor for disciplined bodies, defined, processed, preserved and easily replaceable.[296] From an ecocritical perspective, however, I argue that the fruit is not a metaphor for the human body. Rather, both are expressions of an impulse to control all forms of life. The relationship is one of continuity between the biopolitical definition and control of Zoila's body and the corporation's fruit: "No había bacterias involucradas ni virus, no había amebas ni menos hongos que pudieran ser rociados una noche desde el cielo, con avionetas," María regrets when Zoila is diagnosed with diabetes. "No se podía cavar alrededor de la Menor y regarla con antídotos."[297] Unlike the fruits that she sprays with pesticides in the field, the source of biological instability cannot be removed from Zoila's body. This preoccupies María, whose obsession with sterile environments and bodies leads her to not only reject her sister as a personification of disease – "María se levantó con náuseas: iba a tener una enfermedad metida

[296] Mónica Barrientos, "La fisura del espacio y la toxicidad de los cuerpos: *El Contagio* de Guadalupe Santa Cruz y *Fruta Podrida* de Lina Meruane," *Chasqui* 44, no.1 (2015): 95.
[297] Meruane, *Fruta podrida,* 24.

dentro de su propia casa, la enfermedad se le había colado y no había manera de erradicarla."[298]– but also any function of the human body that betrays its organic materiality.

Menstruation, in particular, represents for María, who has internalized the patriarchal values of the export company and the gendered distribution of work in the fruit plantation, the expression of economic dependency, physical weakness, uncleanliness, and worst yet, those functions of the human body which seem to exceed her control.

> Había entrado a la empresa como secretaria bilingüe de día mientras estudiaba agroquímica de noche. (…) había ido acumulando frustraciones hasta que se recibió de pesticida y el Ingeniero le comunicó que la pondría a prueba una temporada. Así había ascendido peldaño a peldaño desde el primer piso hasta el segundo, dejando atrás el rumor y la pestilencia a sudor y a sangre menstrual de las temporeras y de las supervisoras y de la nueva secretaria en práctica, para empezar a tomar decisiones ejecutivas sobre el futuro de la empresa.[299]

To take control of her future, she had to reject her female body and the liquids that escape it, molding it to access the limited amount of power available to her. In the process, she lost her own subjectivity, embodying in her inhabitation of the social and environmental ecologies of which she is a part, a quasi-pesticide. In doing so, she took on the paradoxical function of the pesticide: to produce life, be it fruit or, as we will see, humans, by killing all possibilities for variation.

The whole ecology of Ojo Seco is disciplined, subjected, and put to work for the purpose of productivity and accumulation. Because the novel's events unfold shrouded by the invisibility of the ecological sacrifice zone, agrochemicals, medicines and experimental transplants become *pharmakons*, cures for the ills they themselves cause. Medicine, Foucault argues, can serve a biopolitical strategy.[300] This does not mean, it is worth clarifying, that the pursuit of health is

[298] Meruane, *Fruta podrida*, 28.
[299] Ibid., 28.
[300] Michel Foucault, *Estrategias de poder*, Trans. Elisés Guinzazú, (Barcelona: Paidós, 1999), 366.

intrinsically a submission to systems of control, nor that all forms of fostering a body in which one feels vital entail participation in a biopolitics of productivity and standardization. Rather, what *Fruta podrida* helps us think is how a neoliberal logic of ever-increasing productivity and profit can make use of imbalances of power in a global network characterized by the persistence of coloniality to convert ecological sacrifice zones into spaces of experimentation on the limits and possibilities of biological life.

The director of Ojo Seco's hospital has one goal: to make the institution a center for transplant research that rivals those in "the North". Paradoxically, given the town's positionality in the global network of exchange described above, this entails subjecting the town's population to experimental treatments that teeter on the line of illegality, when they don't ignore it completely. "Tómese esto," the doctor tells María while he explains how expensive transplants are, "Muestras médicas, agregó, impaciente, un regalo que le hace la industria farmacéutica del Norte…"[301] The doctor embodies the paternalistic and predatory bioethical stance of the pharmaceutical corporations he has allied himself with, becoming a tool for the exercise of their power. Because of Ojo Seco's invisibility within the global network, the human bodies that inhabit it become what theorists like Bauman have called "disposable lives," lives whose wellbeing can be sacrificed for the continuation and growth of modern capitalist society.

Paradoxically, it is through the creation of life and its perpetuation at all costs, that this necropolitical power is actualized in *Fruta Podrida*. The reason why the doctor provides María with "free" medical samples while discussing the cost of a transplant that her sister, Zoila, supposedly needs, is to recruit her as a supplier for the hospital, a supplier of human bodies. Throughout the approximately ten years in which the events of the novel take place, María is

[301] Meruane, *Fruta podrida,* 23.

regularly pregnant, giving birth to children that then disappear. As the doctor's ambitions rise, so does the price she charges for her "contribution", hoping to be able to use the money to find a cure for her sister, rid herself of the burden of caring for her, and finally create the economically stable life she wants for herself.

Key to the justification of the hospital's organ trafficking and the imposition of unwanted experimental treatments on the town's population is the precept that death is antithetical to healthy, productive bodies. In other words, medicine is not understood as a purveyor of vitality for bodies that will, due to their organic existence, eventually find their death. Instead, it is constructed as a technology meant to avoid this universal fate altogether. "Mi hermana, doctor, mi media hermana, ¿va a morirse?" María asks after Zoila fell into a diabetic comma, "Su hermana a medias, ¿morirse?, repitió el Médico palideciendo aún más y balbuceó: morirse nadie. Sobre mi cadáver se morirá alguien es este hospital. Para qué cree que estamos trayendo tanta máquina, tanta tecnología importada contra la muerte."[302] This denial of death comes, paradoxically, at the cost of life: the life of the children María and others gave birth to and the life of those who, like Zoila, are stripped of the right to self-assertion within their own bodies. "No sabía si lo imaginaba o si estaba recordando los comentarios de las temporeras en el Galpón: (…) que tuviera cuidado, que muchas habían perdido hijos en el hospital y nunca lograron recuperarlos."[303] Within this necropolitical system, the lives of some are thus deemed disposable, sacrificed in the battle against decay.

Within the medico-industrial complex that dominates Ojo Seco, this logic extends to the bodies of the seasonal workers at the Galpón, the soils of the fields, and the fruit on the trees. All are subjected to necropolitical practices, be them chemical pesticides, genetic manipulations, or

[302] Meruane, *Fruta podrida*, 24.
[303] Ibid., 23.

exploitative work conditions, for the creation of "proper" life in the form of untarnished fruit and productive bodies. "Váyase tranquilamente para su casa, María…," the doctor tells her after María inquires about the state of her sister,

> María del Campo," she responds, "(…), del Campo como mi pobre madre y como mi hermana enferma; del Campo como la tierra que piso cada mañana camino al trabajo y cada tarde, de vuelta, continuó, enderezándose; y levantando la voz dijo todavía, no cualquier María, no una María anónima como todas esas que usted atiende en la sala de parto, no como las marías temporeras a las que les extraen guaguas lo mismo que juanetes; no cualquiera, no. Soy la María del Galpón; María, la que vive en el callejón sin salida del Ojo Seco con su hermana, esa que llegó anoche y que usted no ha dado todavía de alta ni me ha explicado qué tiene. Pero me va a decir, ahora, va a decirme si se morirá y cuándo y de qué, y si será contagiosa su muerte.[304]

In her quest for self-worth and economic stability within a system that continuously deny them to her, María has fallen prey to the illusion of power provided by her subjective becoming-pesticide. In other words, she has bought into the rhetoric of globalization denounced by Dussel, which promises self-actualization while instituting a politics that denies heterogeneity. This homogenization functions as a tool for substitutability, as soils, fruits, seasonal workers, and women's wombs are stripped of the particularities that confirm their belonging to a complex hybrid web that exceeds human control.

The export model that the novel engages saw little opposition in 1980s Chile due, in part, to the brutal suppression of unions and the extreme economic vulnerability of seasonal workers. With the collapse of earning power during the regime, their low wages became crucial to families' survival.[305] These conditions of precarity opened the space for the rapid neoliberalization of society, exacerbating the inequalities suffered by spheres constructed as sacrifice zones. For example, while the Chilean economy boomed as its fruit reached new

[304] Meruane, *Fruta podrida,* 24.
[305] Heidi Tinsman, "Struggles in the Countryside: Gender Politics and Agrarian Reform in Democracy and Dictatorship," *Radical History Review,* no.124 (2016): 68.

markets, pesticide poisoning resulting in miscarriages and babies born with malformations also became standard.[306]

With this context as referent, Meruane investigates the possibilities of embodied agency left open in the "tiempo-aquí," the spatio-temporal present of the periphery, characterized by its partial inclusion in the modern world system. In the face of a biopolitics of sterility informed by a patriarchal rejection of women's bodies as "unclean", for example, the *temporeras* at the Galpón choose menstruation as a protest tool for better working conditions. María, who relishes the fact that she does not menstruate due to her constant pregnancies, is called in to dismantle the collective assertion of women's biological cycles: "y las temporeras alegando por el calor, por la sed y el sudor, por la sangre que no paraba de correr entre sus piernas, todos esos fluidos saturados de bacterias que podían infectar el recinto, suspiró asqueada mi hermana escuchando el relato del Ingeniero…"[307] Sweat, spit, and blood, fluids of the human body, become tools for the destabilization of a system intent on interrupting biological cycles of which decay is a part. In a system that rejects the ubiquity of bacterial life in the hybrid web we all inhabit, exposing the fertile aliveness of their bodies becomes an act of defiance. The protest, however, was violently dismantled by the military, as the power of the State asserted itself in favor of commercial interest.

Within a system intent on biopolitical control, Zoila's affirmation of selfhood also passes through the body as she asserts her right to "sweet blood" and death. Against María's dual participation in the medico-industrial complex, through the production of fruit and human bodies, Zoila finds agency in aligning herself with the part of her body that is rebelling against its

[306] Heidi Tinsman, "Reviving Feminist Materialism: Gender and Neoliberalism in Pinochet's Chile," *The University of Chicago Press Journals* 26, no.1 (2000): 151.
[307] Meruane, *Fruta podrida,* 90.

own continuation: her pancreas. “Mientras ella produce fruta perfecta en el campo yo produzco azúcar en mi cuerpo (…). Mi empresa es la del descuido,”[308] she states. As Recchia Paez argues, Zoila’s acceptance of decay is an affirmation of improductivity, of death as a possibility.[309] Zoila defends, in other words, the right to heterogeneity in the manifestation and embodiment of life. “Mi hermana y yo vivimos en trincheras opuestas de este campo de infinita producción y reproducción. Ella concentra sus esfuerzos en el plan aéreo contra la peste; yo intento boicotearla. Industriosamente ella siembra, fertiliza, pare y negocia; yo empiezo a planear el modo de desarticular toda su empresa.”[310] María’s enterprise, that which her sister is intent on sabotaging, is, initially, that of the medico-industrial complex. She not only accepts participation in this system in order to achieve her hopes of economic stability, but also accepts its underlying definition of life. She does not care about the children that she births, much like she does not care about the effects of chemicals on biological life, be it the spraying of pesticides on the fields, the chemical irritation in her nose after a day of work, or the effects of continuous pregnancies and obsessive cleaning and scrubbing on her body. The reproduction of productive life in the future entails the sacrifice of life deemed less worthy in the present. Her willing participation thus entails a politics of splitting and a disavowal of the fact that, in her affirmation of the value of an existence of quiet sterility she is sacrificing the vulnerable, materially interdependent, bacteria-laden and fluid-filled fact of life itself.

The corporation’s biopolitics are not only actualized in María’s body, but also through it. “Esa es mi responsabilidad, yo decido cuánto de ese pesticida y cuánto del otro en los aviones y en el aire, yo soy quien mueve con las dos manos, con hasta el último músculo de la espalda, la

[308] Meruane, *Fruta podrida,* 42.
[309] Juan Recchia Paez, “Cuerpos infectos, cuerpos extraños: literatura y vida en *Fruta podrida* de Lina Meruane,” *Estudios de Teoría Literaria. Revista digital: artes, letras y humanidades* 7, no.14 (2018): 160.
[310] Meruane, *Fruta podrida,* 73.

pesada maquinaria del campo; la que da trabajo soy, y la que provee los supermercados al otro lado del océano, en todos los continentes. En estas manos recae toda la responsabilidad económica y moral; en estas manos, en cada dedo y cada falange…"[311] The dual lens that characterizes the narrative language of the novel, which brings into focus multiple scales of molarity at once, is in full display in this passage, as body parts are spatialized within the global market system. María chooses a chemical, which is then sprayed from airplanes over plantations, the muscles of her back move the machinery in the fields and make fruit appear in supermarket shelves across the world, and, because of this, it is on each of her fingers, that the system relies to exist. It is this awareness of the inextricability of her body from this export system that ultimately opens her space of agency.

Faced with the realization of the inescapability of her subalterity within a capitalist world-system premised on the maintenance of inequality, María decides to add cyanide to one apple in each fruit crate, sending global fruit markets into chaos: "Así es: un hallazgo que siembra el terror entre los ciudadanos, y pánico, y angustia entre consumidores, y desesperación entre los exportadores: en esa cadena de montaje todos están siendo afectados."[312] Thus, María's body, once a sphere through which the global network of exchange was actualized in the local sphere of Ojo Seco, sends ripples down its threads, as it dares to invert, if only momentarily, the directionality of the vectors of determination. There is, in fact, a real referent for this event. On the 13th of march, 1989, scandal broke when the United States, Canada, and Japan suspended the imports of Chilean grapes when two were found to contain cyanide. Pinochet's government blamed the Communist Party, arguing that the "Plan Fruta" had meant to destabilize the economy and the transitional process. The grapes, in fact, were later discovered to have not been

[311] Meruane, *Fruta podrida*, 76.
[312] Ibid., 105.

contaminated in Chile after all.[313] The rejected fruit, both within the world of the novel and that which served as its referent, was "generously" shared amongst the region's population and touted as an opportunity for vulnerable populations to come to the Nation's rescue by feeding their bodies with potentially deadly fruit.

Fruta Podrida thus helps us think how the sphere of the body participates in and is constituted by globalized networks of exchange. In a global system dependent on the perpetuation of the coloniality of power, the differential effects of negative accumulation manifest in the soils, waters, and social spheres of sacrifice zones permeating their environmental ecologies at a molecular level. Bodies, in this context, manifest this biopolitics in their molar existence, evidencing it in the limitations imposed on the exercise of life.

4. Ontology in the Anthropocene

In the previous chapter, I analyzed works of literature of the 21st century that figured social and ecological spheres in their localized complexity, revealing them in their porosity, in their openness to "outside" influence. I argued that, in doing so, they engaged the dialectical structure of the global hybrid web, composed of fluid spheres and networks. The current chapter has taken this analysis to the sphere of the body, exploring how it is constituted in dialogue with material local spheres and global networks of exchange that put in evidence their embeddedness in molecular webs of existence.

Central to these works, and "Anthropocene literature" more generally, is the notion of "becoming", which attempts to understand molar forms, like the human body, at the scale of the molecular. At this scale, the fluidity of the hybrid web, the interrelation of spheres within

[313] Manuel Délano, "La 'batalla de la uva' amenaza con paralizar la transición a la democracia chilena," El País, March 16, 1989.

networks, is all there is. In other words, all molar forms are revealed in their multiplicity. Following Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari argue for the need to think at the level of "elements that no longer have either form or function, that are abstract in this sense even though they are perfectly real. (…) depending on their degree of speed or the relation of movement and rest into which they enter, they belong to a given Individual, which may itself be part of another Individual governed by another, more complex, relation, and so on to infinity."[314] Each form is a multiplicity because of the relations into which each of his/her parts enters. In fact, "the whole of Nature is a multiplicity of perfectly individuated multiplicities."[315] What is more, human bodies are multiplicities to the extent that they are super-organisms, containing more bacterial than human cells. Humans are, thus, at a molecular level, trans-species beings.

In this project, I have argued that the fluid configurations that human multiplicities enter can be understood, at varying scales, through the concept of the "hybrid web". In addition, this chapter has examined how *Fruta podrida* and *Distancia de rescate* think the hybrid web through the somatic gaze. Using an ecocritical lens, I have articulated the concept of molecular becoming with a biopolitical analysis that highlights structural inequalities within the hybrid web. Becoming is not an apolitical concept. The relationships of affect that it entails are permeated by molar injustice. In this final section, I explore some of the ontological implications of this assertion.

Through the somatic narrative gaze, both novels engage the body in its ultimate vulnerability. Bodies, as we've seen, are vulnerable at a molar level depending, among others, on their positionality within the global social ecology. Yet, all are vulnerable at a molecular level due to the continuous process of becoming or, in relation to the individuated self, unbecoming.

[314] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 253.
[315] Ibid., 254.

Vulnerability, in this case, emerges in its relation to the experience of ontological insecurity hinted at by some of Cristoff's informants in *Falsa calma.* We are vulnerable because our selves, in their material and subjective existence, are open to the world with which they interact, constantly being made and unmade by it.

What we find in *Fruta podrida* is a biopolitical system intent on the denial, firstly, of multiplicity, and secondly, of the process of becoming that is intrinsic to life. Becoming is co-opted by structures of power resulting in an ecopolitics of becoming-commodity, as Zoila states when she looks down through her airplane window on her way to the North: "El mundo allá abajo es una enorme instalación fabricando ciudadanos de exportación."[316] What she sees is a world where all, humans and non-humans, are managed under the same medico-industrial complex. In this context, it is not only a set of practices of labor and consumption that commodify the individual but also the manipulations of the body's physical existence as a multiplicity. This becoming-commodity is premised on a removal of complexity. The mechanism is, thus, a becoming by removal rather than addition, a becoming lesser. Zoila's embrace of her body's "fermentation" and the slow process of decomposition this entails is a conscious surrender to her body's becoming-other, becoming-matter. As she writes in her notebook:

> *vendrán los tiempos en que*
> *también*
> *me descuelgue del mundo*
> *cubierta de hongos*
> *repleta de gusanos para rodar*
> *quién sabe por qué caminos*
> *tiñendo la tierra*
> *magullando mi piel hasta pelarla*
> *escurriéndome*
> *un punto suspensivo*
> *en el vacío,*

[316] Meruane, *Fruta podrida,* 120.

entonces los pájaros
también
vendrán a picotearme

(cuaderno deScomposición)[317]

The point here is not to excessively emphasize the affirmation of agency in Zoila's embrace of diabetes and mortality but, rather, to analyze a medico-industrial complex that denies the body's constant becoming-undefined. In the quest for a standardized understanding and imposition of "health," the unstable and finite materiality of the body –and the subject– are disavowed.

At the end of *Fruta podrida,* Zoila travels to the North, to the transplant hospital where, supposedly, María's babies have gone, to boycott the life-extending machinery that keeps humans alive while they wait for transplant technology to be developed. After successfully carrying out her plan, she gives in to the deterioration of her body as she slowly dies sitting outside of the hospital. A nurse, the last narrative voice of the novel, finds her and futilely insists on bringing her in to get treatment: "Perdóneme que la contradiga," she answers to one of Zoila's last remarks, "pero el cuerpo no tiene por qué acabarse en estos tiempos de la reproducción biológica. Todo puede repararse o repetirse. El cuerpo puede reciclarse como nuestra conversación, reanudarse como el clima con sus soles y sus tormentas."[318] The body doesn't have to die within the medico-industrial complex because it can be repaired and recreated, like a machine. María previously repeated this notion while at the hospital in Ojo Seco during one of her pregnancies: "Y la Mayor observaba ese diagrama del cuerpo imaginando una sofisticada planta procesadora provista de esfínteres de entrada y esfínteres de salida, de intestinos distribuidores, de fajas transportadoras y de arterias. En cada punto, pensó la Mayor examinando

[317] Meruane, *Fruta podrida,* 33.
[318] Meruane, *Fruta podrida,* 162.

la anatomía, había químicos, ácidos y un elaborado sistema que destruía los gérmenes, había almacenes y oficinas donde se elaboran las estrategias de producción. Una máquina perfecta…"[319] This understanding of the body as a machine can, as it does for María, respond to the organization of its functioning at a molar level, to the coordination of the labor of its organs for the maintenance of homeostasis. However, this metaphor also functions, in the context of the medico-industrial complex, as a biopolitical tool as it de-humanizes the body in order to commodify it, optimizing its functioning not only within itself, but also in relation to the productive social ecology of which it is a part.

Central to this dehumanization is thus the denial of biotemporality, of the linear trajectory that each living individual multiplicity traverses from birth to death.[320] By turning to the metaphor of the machine, the body is removed from the traps of time. In this context, when biotemporality asserts itself through a visible process of decay, the body stops having value. It is a loss to a system intent on continuous growth and re-absorption of energy into itself.

Falsa Calma ends with the nurse examining Zoila's decomposing body: "Ay, dónde termina ese cuerpo, dónde está el punto final de esta mujer. Que ella o cualquier por favor le diga, y quizá entonces sí pueda por fin callarme…"[321] The need to know the body is thus condensed to the ability to name it, categorize it. This is the sense in which Derrida explored the concept of the *pharmakon* tied to writing in Plato's *Phaedrus*.[322] Writing as a tool for memory emerges in that text as the cure and the poison for the problem of forgetfulness. In the present context, naming the body serves to delimit it in its multiplicity and its ability to exist beyond the

[319] Ibid., 25.
[320] J.T. Fraser, *Time, the Familiar Stranger,* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 190-96.
[321] Meruane, *Fruta podrida,* 185
[322] Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharamacy" in *Dissemination,* trans. Barbara Johnson, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981): 97.

confines of the visible. The word here functions as a tool for sphere making, as it encapsulates that which is not entirely bounded. By naming and, therefore, defining the molar body, the fact that life in motion, at a molecular level, exceeds the limits of that which can be named as part of a "body", is forgotten. However, *Fruta Podrida* also presents us with a different writing practice, one that does not seek to define but, rather, decompose. Zoila's de-composition notebooks function as a way of re-appropriating discursivity as a tool that, in a context where knowledge-making is tied to a medico-industrial complex of control, allow her to be present to the process of disintegration of her body, of its becoming-liquid, becoming-soil, becoming-other.

One might be tempted, when thinking at a molecular scale, to ignore molarity and momentarily forget about individuated existence. Yet, ecological thinking does not entail a rejection of individuated life. It entails being able to see it in its biotemporality and its prototemporality simultaneously. In contrast to biotemporality, prototemporality is, in J.T. Fraser's hierarchical theory of time, the temporality of molecules. At this scale, temporal positions cannot be assigned in a linear manner and relationships of causality are probabilistic.[323] This is the temporality of the scale of becoming. What we have seen is that, in the Anthropocene, the probability of toxic molecular becomings increase, particularly in ecological sacrifice zones. This is because the Anthropocene inaugurates the possibility of inorganic becoming, of vulnerable bodies, in their multiplicities, entering configurations of affect with toxic, human-made materials such as pesticides.

Both *Fruta podrida* and *Distancia de rescate* explore human vulnerability through the lens of reproduction. Just as María cannot control whether the children she births will inherit the gene for diabetes that Zoila's body has expressed, a condition that she understands as a form of

[323] Paul Harris, "Time and Emergence in the Evolutionary Epic, Naturalistic Theology, and J.T. Fraser's Hierarchical Theory of Time," *KronoScope* 12, no. 2 (2012): 147-158, doi: 10.1163/15685241-12341237, 154.

toxicity, the inhabitants of the rural town in Schweblin's novel cannot prevent the epigenetic effects of pesticide poisoning from affecting the development of their offspring. The probabilistic nature of causality at a molecular level thus emerges as an unavoidable source of vulnerability that is exacerbated in bodies that express in their molar form latent organic and inorganic becomings that could accelerate their biotemporality, their death.

What *Fruta Podrida* and *Distancia de rescate* bring to the fore is the spatial displacement not only of the effects of negative accumulation, in the form of pesticide poisoning, for example, but also of the ecological toll of the biopolitical fight against vulnerability within the human social ecology. The medico-industrial complex in *Fruta podrida* has already manipulated the genetic code of fruit to produce standardized, "perfect" specimens, and it is the human and non-human web of ecological sacrifice zones that is then subjected to the pesticides that this fruit needs to be able to grow in a world that is alive with bacteria, flies, weeds, floods, and droughts. It is this same sphere of sacrifice that is exposed to the experimental transplants meant to manipulate the reproduction of illness within human populations. Vulnerability at molar and molecular scales is thus further exacerbated in sacrifice zones in order to, paradoxically, eliminate it as a fact of human material existence.

The reason why David is focused on the "rescue distance" is that if we are connected to others, if there truly is a thread of affect that connects us, then we should collectively be able to maintain a semblance of safety, a hive-existence of sorts. I could feel when the thread of becomings is being poisoned if I am linked to someone else who is. And yet, this does not save the characters. Because our love bonds, as central to survival as they are, do not undo our material vulnerability. As David states, the poison is always there. The maintenance of life is always threatened. And in a world where avoidable molecular threats continue to increase, this

vulnerability only grows. Yet, to exist is to become. To live is to continue to inhabit the individuated self as it interacts with the world, it is to exist within the hybrid web. To be alive is not to stay the same, it is to interact with the world around, both at a molar and a molecular level. A biopolitics that denies becoming, that disavows our embeddedness in the hybrid web, that assumes and reinforces the sense of a bounded body is an biopolitics against life.

Anthropocene literature participates in the collective recognition of our material existence within a fluid hybrid web of living and non-living matter. The Anthropocene, an era defined by the impact of human societies on the earth's geology, weather patterns, and the extinction of species, has created the possibility for inorganic becomings and increased vulnerability for human and non-humans alike. This vulnerability, as we have seen, is not evenly or even fairly distributed, as social and environmental ecologies constituted as "ecological sacrifice zones" bear the brunt of the capitalist world system's negative accumulation. The spatially and temporally displaced manifestations of negative accumulation have made the hybrid web of the world painfully visible. The human need for crisis in order to change habitual patterns of behavior is an unfortunate reality of our species-being. Yet, the awareness of molecular entanglement made possible by the visible effects of negative accumulation has created an opportunity, an opportunity to recognize ourselves as part of webs of existence that exceed our control. This recognition opens the possibility for an ecological ethics anchored in a subjectivity that understands itself to be not only the combination of personality, physical appearance, and life experience but also an everchanging hybrid body, entangled in the web of becomings that make the world.

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