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Humans at the End of the World:
Reimagining the Limits of the Human in Contemporary Spain

By

Justin M. Berner

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Hispanic Languages and Literatures

and a

Designated Emphasis

in

New Media

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Alex Saum-Pascual, Chair

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the concept of the posthuman within the context of contemporary Spain, looking at how a variety of cultural objects (literature, film, earth art, and digital literature) question or otherwise explore the limits of the fundamental modern concept of the human. The nature of this investigation works in two directions, asking both how the study of contemporary Spain can help better understand the posthuman and how the posthuman as a critical concept can reveal novel insights or connections within the existing scholarship on Spain and its cultural production. Ultimately, by employing a variety of analytical frameworks and disciplines to interpret this diverse collection of objects, I propose that the posthuman can serve as a transversal concept in Peninsular literary and cultural studies, linking disciplines, discourses, and historical periods through associations that might otherwise be overlooked.

The general understanding of the posthuman that guides this dissertation is one that takes as its point of departure Michel Foucault's initial provocation, found in the final pages of *The Order of Things*, to historicize and critique the concept of the human. It is likewise informed by a general deconstructionist exercise in critiquing the instability of the human-nonhuman binary in all its myriad manifestations. More specifically, I approach the posthuman from two perspectives: the digital and the environmental. For the first of these two, informed by the work of N. Katherine Hayles, I comprehend the digital posthuman not as a way to transcend the corporeal or material limits of being human, but rather a way to consider how the affordances of digital technology can be used to critically reevaluate the formation of the liberal human subject. For the environmental posthuman, I explore the binary between human culture and the nonhuman environment, employing the framework of ecocriticism and engaging with the work of various scholars such as Donna Haraway, Cheryl Glotfelty, and Jason W. Moore in order

to contest the formation of this binary and consider alternative ways of comprehending the interrelations between humans and nature.

In chapter 1, “The Lichen at the End of the Novel: Emilia Pardo Bazán and the Question of Naturalism in Late-Nineteenth-Century Spain,” I study Bazán’s canonical novel *Los Pazos de Ulloa* within the context of the nineteenth-century debate on mechanism and vitalism, in this way contextualizing my inquiries regarding the posthuman within a larger history of critiquing Western scientific thought. Prior to my analysis of this novel, I review the debate between mechanism and vitalism as found in the writings of Claude Bernard, Émile Zola, and Emilia Pardo Bazán. Ultimately, I argue that Bazán offers a complex view of the relations between humans and nature that critiques the mechanist insistence on this binary. Jumping forward a century but staying in the rural, in chapter 2, “Transhumant/Transhuman: A Posthuman Reading of Julio Llamazares’s *La lluvia amarilla*,” I analyze the different ways of approaching the posthuman that are apparent in Julio Llamazares’s novel about an abandoned village in the mountainous, northern extremes of Spain: in particular, I focus on the binaries of human-tree, human-animal, and human-environment. Situating this investigation within the context of the infrastructural and demographic changes of late-twentieth-century Spain – most of which occurred in the final two decades of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship –, this chapter considers how Llamazares reflects on the changing perspectives to the concept of nature in contemporary Spain and imagines new possibilities for understanding the ways in which humans affect and are in turn affected by the environment. Chapter 3, “Unhelpful Tools with Destructive Inertia: Posthuman Destruction in Eugenio Tisselli’s *degenerative* and *regenerative*,” argues that these two works of electronic literature serve as allegories for the dangers of digital posthuman assemblages, which I define as a collection of humans and nonhumans, facilitated by and comprised of digital technology, that can effect significant actions in the world. In this chapter, I use scholarship on the posthuman – bringing into conversation the work of Latour, Braidotti, and Hayles – and new media – in particular, the scholarship of Wendy Chun – to consider how Tisselli offers a general critique of digital technology in contemporary capitalism. Complementing this, I also employ Guillem Martínez’s concept of the *Cultura de la Transición*, a framework that criticizes the political deactivation of culture in democratic Spain, to help comprehend these works within the context of contemporary Spain. Finally, in chapter 4, “Life and Death in the Anthropocene: Various Approximations to the *Prestige* Oil Spill,” I analyze three objects: the earth art sculptures of Manfred Gnädinger, the experimental film *Costa da Morte* by Lois Patiño, and a set of chapters from Agustín Fernández Mallo’s *Nocilla Experience*. Linking these objects through their common connection to the 2002 *Prestige* oil spill off the coast of Spain, I consider how the concept of the posthuman can be represented in works of art, rather than just literature, and ask to what extent the posthuman can serve as a critical methodology for studying a contemporary world of increasing digital abstraction and impending environmental catastrophe. Although the analyses found throughout the four chapters of this dissertation revolve around this question, the discussion of the final chapter, by directly addressing an environmental disaster, more directly recognizes the urgency of this type of critical practice. Wrapping up the dissertation, the conclusion offers a brief commentary on the importance of criticism – both in Peninsular studies and more broadly – to more explicitly engage with how artists use formal experimentation to explore the posthuman and the various fields traversed by this concept

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Introduction

The Human at the End of the World

As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility – without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased like a face drawn in sand at the end of the sea.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

I.

This dissertation begins and ends not too far from the end of the world. In the opening and closing chapters, the focus is on Galicia, the northwestern region of Spain and one of the westernmost extremes of the European continent. The Cabo Fisterra, which features in various scenes of the film *Costa da Morte* (2013), discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation, literally means “end of the earth” and once was thought to mark the westernmost point of the Iberian Peninsula and, thus, continental Europe. It is, however, a geographical misnomer, as it is exceeded in its extent towards the Occident both by Cabo da Roca in Portugal – Iberia’s western extreme – and Cabo Touriñán, some miles to the north – mainland Spain’s true westernmost point.

Spain itself was once thought to be the end of the world and, if we ignore alternative etymological theories, the name *Hispania* comes from the Greek toponym *Hesperia ultima*, denoting the fact that what we today call the Iberian Peninsula was once thought as the land closest to the setting sun, at the farthest western reaches of the known world. It has existed in the greater cultural imaginary of the Mediterranean and then of Europe as a place of the unknown, of danger and possibility, of the limits of a certain world’s physical and intellectual reach. It is not coincidence that St. James, whose shrine and cathedral give name to the most culturally important city of Galicia, was said to have spread the Gospel not only to the Iberian Peninsula, but to this region whose shores were said to be the end of the earth. Likewise, in modern times, the figurative symbolism of being on the edge of the world can be understood as encouraging the conquest of those heretofore-unknown lands even farther west. Even today, the geographical position of Spain and Portugal – closer to, or even deemed a part of Africa – is used to feed dismissive narratives of Iberia’s lack of civilization or incomplete modernization,

contrasting those countries on the peninsula with the rest of Europe that is found on the other side of the Pyrenees.¹

I begin with this geographical description of Spain for two reasons, both of which help further elucidate the main title for this dissertation, “Humans at the End of the World.” The first is, quite simply, to serve as a reminder of geographical place and its importance for understanding the concept of the human today. In this way, this brief review of geography and etymology serves as a theoretical exercise in “grounding,” or the “return to the earth” that Bruno Latour advocates as essential for contemporary political formation in his 2018 book *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climactic Regime*. By invoking the geographical specificity of Spain, my goal is to emphasize the concrete importance of the places that are discussed over the course of this dissertation and the analysis of the objects found therein. It is a constant reminder of the material world – its geological, environmental, and biological idiosyncrasies – which these myriad works of art represent: whether it is the lichens discussed in the first and second chapters, the digital infrastructure brought up in the third, or the polluted barnacles considered in the final chapter, my goal is to emphasize the ways in which humans are embedded within a nonhuman world that is, while affected by global and cosmic forces, significantly determined by local specificities.

The second way is much more poetic and conceptual, reflecting on the very idea of a limit and its relationship to that which it bounds. In particular, thinking about the Cabo Fisterra and Spain as places that were once the end of the world, and by bringing up this fallacious toponym, I am interested in reflecting on what it means for a limit to exist, only for it to be later revealed that this limit was incorrect factually or was dependent entirely on an errant act of circumscription that ignored a larger, perhaps unknown context. That is, by thinking from the supposed “End of the World,” we can perhaps reconceptualize the boundaries of other categories, particularly those that seem as unchangeable and imposing as the world itself. Of course, my interest both here in this introduction and throughout this dissertation is not in highlighting the faults of ancient geography, but instead considering the limits of the other noun in the title. This dissertation is, as the subtitle conveys, an essay in reimagining the limits of the human in contemporary Spain: it is about the ways in which the limits of the human are being redrawn or eliminated, about the ways in which those limits were originally constructed, and about what is left when a limit no longer signifies that which it formerly delimited. It is, considering the discussion above and the emphasis on the various ways of perceiving geographical place, also an analysis of how this change to the idea of the human is being understood from the perspective of contemporary Spain. The dissertation thus asks the following two questions: “What can Spain offer the field of posthuman studies?” and “What can the posthuman offer to the study of contemporary Spain?”

II.

The posthuman is a polysemic term whose usage today spans a variety of disciplines. In the most general sense, its “post-“ prefix signals a critique of the “human,” recognizing the

¹ The phrase, “Africa begins at the Pyrenees” or its equivalent, “Europe begins at the Pyrenees” captures this sentiment. Of unknown origin, it has been errantly attributed to Dumas and even Napoleon.

historical constructedness of this concept within Western modernity. This critique has its origins in Foucault's archaeology of forms of knowledge, published in the 1960s in *The Order of Things*. Precisely, today's scholars of the posthuman point to the final page of this work, cited above in the epigraph, in which Foucault meditates on the future of the concept we call "man" and how it, like the pillars of classical thought before it, may come to soon disappear (387). Similarly, within this Continental lineage of the posthuman, the work of post-structuralists and deconstructionists such as Derrida, Lyotard, and Deleuze and Guattari are seen as taking up Foucault's initial provocation and applying it to their respective investigations.

However, this orthodox genealogy is, as Cary Wolfe writes in his comprehensive review of the field, only one possible avenue for understanding how the posthuman came to be an important field today. In particular, this very French, very philosophical examination of the human is one that principally critiques the original construction of this concept but does not consider the myriad ways in which the "human" is actively being contested today. Although there are various perspectives from which one can approach this critique of the human, throughout this dissertation, I focus on two that I see as most consequential and relevant for the objects that I am studying: the technological and the environmental.

The technological posthuman has its roots in the field of cybernetics, as theorized in the famous Macy conferences of the late-1940s and 1950s, where preeminent thinkers from a variety of fields, "converged on a new theoretical model for biological, mechanical, and communication processes that removed the human and *Homo Sapiens* from any particularly privileged position in relation to matters of meaning, information, and cognition" (Wolfe xii). N. Katherine Hayles begins her *How We Became Posthuman* by tracing the history of this cybernetic genealogy, describing how the cybernetic model – as it transitioned from a focus on homeostasis to reflexivity and ultimately to virtuality – articulated "a new way of looking at human beings [in which, henceforth, they] were to be seen primarily as information-processing entities who are *essentially* similar to intelligent machines" (7). As Hayles then mentions, and as is fundamental for her larger argument, this cybernetic vision of the human ultimately did not question the idea of the modern human subject, but rather sought to, "[fashion] human and machine alike in the image of an autonomous, self-directed individual" (7).

It is with regards to this point that technological posthumanism diverges. On one hand, there is the ever-popular figure of the cyborg and the movement of transhumanism, which see the posthuman as an extension of the human, one in which technological prostheses allow an individual human's consciousness the capacity to live forever, technology permitting. For as much as transhumanism promises to supersede the conventional limits of the human, it is not posthuman in the sense detailed above, for it, like cybernetics before it, unabashedly seeks to continue a tradition of rational humanism based on mind/body dualism and a positivist, teleological view of scientific endeavor (Bostrom 3-4). Countering this perspective, Hayles does not understand the "human" as a figure defined as an autonomous subject with the, "mastery necessary to dominate and control" their external environment (290); instead, she sees the human as an organism constantly engaging in emergent, complex interrelations with humans and nonhuman others (288). Her exemplar of technological posthumanism, articulated at the end of *How We Became Posthuman* and developed further in *Unthought*, are "distributed cognitive systems," in which "'thinking' is done by human and nonhuman actors" (290) who collectively expand on the individual capacities of any one human or nonhuman. I further

develop and apply this concept to my reading of Eugenio Tisselli's electronic literature in chapter 3 of this dissertation, but, for this introduction, it is most significant to reiterate how Hayles's technological posthuman critiques the values of autonomy and mastery over one's external environment that are inherent in the concept of the human.

Serving as a helpful bridge between the technological and the environmental posthuman, Donna Haraway's famous essay on cyborgs appropriates this techno-scientific icon, using its supposed transgression of human-machine boundaries as a point of departure from which she can offer a way out of the dualistic thinking that reinforces essentialist binaries such as man-woman, robot-human, or human-nature. (67-8). Focusing on the last of these binaries, what I am here referring to as the "environmental posthuman" is a way of rethinking and questioning the "originary dualism" that is human culture-nonhuman nature (Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life* 55). There are, of course, multitudinous perspectives from which this binary has been questioned, but for the purposes of my investigation, I will focus on two such perspectives: the critiques of techno-scientific modernity, and the contemporary discourse on anthropogenic climate change. With regards to the former, for example, in chapter 1, I look at how Emilia Pardo Bazán's nineteenth-century novel *Los Pazos de Ulloa* examines and critiques the positivist scientific discourse expressed in Zola's Naturalist literary manifesto, while in chapter 2, I consider how Julio Llamazares's 1988 novel *La lluvia amarilla* opposes the dualistic split between humans and nonhumans as a way of commenting on the modernization of rural Spain during the latter decades of Francisco Franco's dictatorship. Of course, it is impossible to talk of this binary today without considering the current climate crisis, a topic that is alluded to throughout the dissertation but is brought up explicitly in the final chapter's analysis of different cultural approximations of the *Prestige* oil spill off the coast of Galicia. Within this introduction, I offer a more extensive discussion of this topic in the following section.

Ultimately, I propose using Haraway's concept of "naturecultures" (originally found in Latour's critique of the modern divide of human-nonhuman), as well as Moore's analogous metaphor of a "web of life," as ways of thinking beyond this fundamental binary and comprehending humans as developing within and through nature. Together with Hayles's critique of certain visions of the technological posthuman and the more deconstructionist framework for questioning the formation of the "human," these ways of thinking beyond the nature-culture binary offer a hopeful vision of the posthuman as a critical concept. In this respect, the objects analyzed over this dissertation – from Pardo Bazán's canonical novel to Tisselli's paired works of net art, to Patiño's experimental work of *Novo Cinema Galego* – all demonstrate unique ways of questioning the human-nonhuman binary, while also providing new ways of thinking the human for the contemporary moment.

Finally, while this quick review gives a brief introduction to the first question brought up in the preceding section, it has yet to answer the latter inquiry of, "What can the posthuman offer to the study of contemporary Spain?" The most comprehensive approach to this topic to this date has been Vistenz and Beilin's edited volume, *Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates*, which offers many perspectives for considering this question, but is, at least in my reading, lacking a clear articulation of what the posthuman can offer to academic scholarship on contemporary Spain. While I fear that I similarly lack a pithy declaration of what the posthuman can offer this field, I propose that the broad scope and interdisciplinarity of this

project demonstrates the transversal nature of this concept: it offers a way of working across disciplines, connecting ideas or problems that would otherwise not intersect.

III.

The phrase “end of the world” of course has an additional, far more apocalyptic meaning today, calling to mind the pertinent discourse regarding the viability of the Earth for sustaining human life as the result of anthropogenic climate change. The title of the dissertation thus invokes this much less conceptual and far more urgent notion of the end of the world to emphasize what is one of the principal reasons for which “the human” must be questioned today. This is not to lay the blame for such a global, existential crisis on a discursive notion such as the human, but rather to better understand the ways in which the idea of the human has been used to construct and to excuse a dangerous othering of an external, nonhuman world. The chapters that follow do not proffer the posthuman as a methodology of redemption or salvation for these times of grave environmental catastrophe, but rather I contend that deconstructing the idea of the human is necessary for any environmental critique.

Of course, this act of reimagining the human has been approached in a variety of ways within global warming discourse, the most popular being the Anthropocene, as brought to the attention of a wider public through the publication of Crutzen and Stoermer’s 2000 article, which carried the name for this new geologic epoch in which humans have significantly affected the physical earth. The Anthropocene signals, as Chakrabarty states in his “Four Theses” essay, that moment in which “the wall between human and natural history has been breached” (221), thus making the human into a collective, geological agent. While Chakrabarty and others have used this concept to reflect on what it means for humans to now comprehend themselves as a species precisely at the moment of our *anthropos* precarity, other theorists have more recently questioned the use of this prefix to assign blame indiscriminately to all humans. Of these, the aforementioned Jason W. Moore, whose concepts of world-ecology and the web of life are brought up in chapters 1 and 3 of this dissertation, offers one of the most convincing critiques with his idea of the “Capitalocene,” which emphasizes how capitalism has, since the mid-fifteenth century, been the organizing logic through which humans have simultaneously transformed the environment and constructed an exclusionary concept of the human (Moore, “The Rise of” 79-82). The Anthropocene, both as a standalone concept and when considered together with all its discontents, thus represents one of the most important fields from which the human is both further theorized and questioned today.

Given the importance of the environmental question for understanding both the human and the current moment of anthropogenic climate crisis, the analyses found throughout this dissertation are informed to various degrees by the field known as environmental or ecocriticism. A diverse field that has transformed considerably since its inception in the 1970s, it is succinctly defined as, “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty xviii). While some chapters and some analyses in this dissertation are more clearly indebted than others to an ecocritical methodology, this basic premise underlies the dissertation as a whole given the fundamental role of the human culture-nonhuman nature binary. Ecocriticism is thus one of the most helpful tools I employ throughout my dissertation’s larger evaluation of the concept of the human in contemporary Spain, but I nonetheless

emphasize that it is, like the posthuman, limited as it is a critical methodology. That is, for as much this dissertation only further supports Glotfelty's assertion that ecocriticism as a field is motivated by our recognition of the planetary consequences of anthropogenic climate change (xx), I would also emphasize that ecocriticism itself is, as Buell emphatically argues, not a "practical program," but rather a "call to fellow humans to recognize the intractable, like-it-or-not interdependence that subsists between the human and the nonhuman" (102).

Despite its unsurprising limitations, ecocriticism does help uncover the ways in which the human-nonhuman binary is apparent in different geographical places and at different historical moments. It also is particularly helpful for highlighting the cultural idiosyncrasies of environmental thought. In that respect, one of the unforeseen revelations of this dissertation was how the first chapter's analysis of Pardo Bazán's *Los Pazos de Ulloa* called attention to the national and regional particularities of environmental thought in Spain in the nineteenth century. This first chapter thus offers a specific defense for Heise's "comparatist reminder" at the beginning of *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, "that neither environmentalism nor ecocriticism should be thought of as nouns in the singular, and that the assumptions that frame environmentalist and ecocritical thought in the United States cannot simply be presumed to shape ecological orientations elsewhere" (9). The distinction of Spanish ecocritical practice and environmental thought is a topic that has been discussed by other scholars, in particular through the many different publications of Luis I. Prádanos. Nonetheless, I find that this historical examination of environmental thought in Spain provides an enriching avenue for further investigation, one that offers insight not only for Iberianist ecocritics, but also for the larger question of environmental politics in contemporary Spain.

IV.

As mentioned prior, this dissertation begins with an analysis of Emilia Pardo Bazán's nineteenth-century Naturalist novel *Los Pazos de Ulloa* (1886) in order to contextualize my inquiries of posthumanism within a larger history of examining and critiquing Western scientific thought. In this first chapter, I review the scientific debate regarding mechanism and vitalism found in the writings of Claude Bernard, Émile Zola, and Emilia Pardo Bazán, close reading their essays together with contemporary critiques of science, such as Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature*, to demonstrate how Pardo Bazán rejects the instrumentalism and material determinism advanced in Zola's Naturalist manifesto. This revisionist history of scientific discourse in late modern Spain is informed by the work of Nicolás Fernández-Medina's *Life Embodied: The Promise of Vital Force in Spanish Modernity*, but I differ from his project insofar as my emphasis is not on writing an intellectual history, but rather on analyzing how Pardo Bazán represents in her fiction writing the changing perspectives to nature in a moment of scientific revolution and rapid, uneven modernization in Spain. The diachronic approach offered by this first chapter posits a continuity between the nineteenth-century discourse regarding science and technology and the contemporary discussions of the posthuman that respond to digital technological advances and anthropogenic climate emergency.

In the following chapter, I analyze Julio Llamazares's *La lluvia amarilla*, a 1988 novel about the final resident of an abandoned *pueblo* in the Pyrenean extremes of Aragón. I read this novel's central meditation on the threshold between human culture and nonhuman nature

as a way of responding to the changing concept of the human in Spain during the second half of the twentieth century, as caused by the rural exodus and the infrastructural modernization that occurred during the last two decades of Franco's dictatorship. Prior to the analysis, I review this historical context, placing the work of Hispanic scholars Nathan E. Richardson and Luis Moreno-Caballud in conversation with the more general critique of nature and the country found in the critical oeuvre of Raymond Williams and Kate Soper. Offering an ecocritical interpretation of the novel that close reads specific passages, I focus on three categories through which Llamazares questions the human-nonhuman binary: tree, animal, and environment. In addition to generally asking why the author questions this fundamental dualism of human-nonhuman, I likewise consider why Llamazares makes this critique of modern binaries at this specific moment in Spanish history, thus connecting the more general discussion of the posthuman to the historical specificities of late-Francoist and early-*Transición* Spain.

Looking at a very different type of object, in the third chapter I analyze *degenerative* and *regenerative* (2005), two twenty-first-century works of digital literature by Eugenio Tisselli that oblige their readers/users to confront the material effects of their ostensibly immaterial digital actions. Analyzing both the texts of these paired works and the way in which they were designed to respond to user interaction, I use Hayles's theories on cognition, Rosi Braidotti's Deleuzian concept of a posthuman assemblage, and Latour's Actor-Network Theory to explore and critique the instrumentalist perspective of technology that allows digital assemblages to unthinkingly effect significant change in the world. Ultimately, I see these two works as presenting various layers of allegory about the neoliberal capitalist ideology that prevails today on the digital spaces on which Tisselli's works exist as well as in the post-Franco, *Transición* economy of Spain. To connect my reading of these two objects with these allegorical interpretations, I use the new media critique of Wendy Chun in *Control and Freedom* and *Programmed Visions* together with Spanish theories on the hegemonic *Cultura de la Transición*. In the conclusion to this chapter, I directly address the question of the technological posthuman in Spain through a brief reading of the Spanish-language versions, *degenerativa* and *regenerativa*.

Finally, in chapter four I examine different cultural approximations of the 2002 *Prestige* oil spill off the coast of Galicia. Primarily analyzing Lois Patiño's 2013 experimental film *Costa da Morte* and a set of chapters from Agustín Fernández Mallo's 2008 novel *Nocilla Experience*, I consider how the concept of the posthuman can be represented in works of art and ask to what extent the posthuman can serve as a critical methodology for studying a contemporary world of increasing digital abstraction and impending environmental catastrophe. In this chapter, I examine large-scale approaches to these planetary issues – including Timothy Morton's new materialist concept of *hyperobjects*, Jason W. Moore's Marxist critique of the Anthropocene, and Anthony Giddens's sociological approach to the "juggernaut" of modernity. Rejecting the pessimism – regarding human survival and the capacity of artistic representation – that especially accompanies the theories of Morton, I argue that these works express the situatedness of individual humans as they experiment with novel forms of representation. In this chapter I address similar themes to those discussed in Luis I. Prádanos's *Postgrowth Imaginaries: New Ecologies and Counterhegemonic Culture in Post-2008 Spain*, but I reject the equivalence he forges between digital technology and neoliberal ideologies of unlimited growth.

As all four chapters emphasize, and as I posit in my final conclusion, what is really at stake in the investigation of the posthuman is the way in which this concept is represented or reflected upon through cultural production. The analyses that follow combine a more formalist approach to criticism with a strategy of close reading that calls attention to the miniscule details found in certain literary passages or visual details of the following works. Methodologically, then, my goal is to highlight not only what is being said or shown, but also *how* it is represented. To better grasp the posthuman today requires, to recall the discussion of limits that opened this introduction, one to assess the use of language and semantics as well as evaluate a more extensive field of perception. Overall, I hope that the following pages offer a variety of ways in which one can approximate the concept of the posthuman today, both in Spain and in a more global context.

Chapter 1

The Lichen at the End of the Novel

Emilia Pardo Bazán and the Question of Naturalism in Late-Nineteenth-Century Spain

Por más que el jinete trataba de sofrenarlo agarrándose con todas sus fuerzas a la única rienda de cordel y susurrando palabritas calmantes y mansas, el peludo rocín seguía empeñándose en bajar la cuesta a un trote cochintero que desencuadernaba los intestinos, cuando no a trancos desigualísimos de loco galope. Y era pendiente de veras aquel repecho del camino real de Santiago a Orense, en términos que los viandantes, al pasarlo, sacudían la cabeza murmurando que tenía bastante más declive del no sé cuántos por ciento marcado por la ley, y que sin duda, al llevar la carretera en semejante dirección, ya sabrían los ingenieros lo que se pescaban, y alguna quinta de personaje político, alguna influencia electoral de grueso calibre, debía de andar cerca.

Emilia Pardo Bazán, *Los Pazos de Ulloa*

When Julián, the effete, fish-out-of-water protagonist of Emilia Pardo Bazán's celebrated Naturalist novel *Los Pazos de Ulloa* (1886) first makes his way to the provincial manor house where he was sent to serve as chaplain and establish order upon the decadent house of Ulloa, he encounters an exasperating succession of complications that express the young, urban priest's discomfort and naivete in these unfamiliar, rural environs. Inexperienced riding a horse, the first page of the work recounts his stomach-churning descent of a country road with a suspiciously-steep incline, purportedly the result of local-governmental grift. Raised in the sheltered, sophisticated confines of the regional urban center of Santiago de Compostela and educated in the seminary, the innocent priest continues his trek down the road terrified of antagonistic locals and *bandoleros*, a fear that appears justified by the stone and wooden crosses he spies on the side of the road, each one marking a violent death that occurred on that spot. Well-read and rational, he is left bemused and confused by the speech of the rustic locals and their imprecise, colloquial manner of giving directions. Finally, as this opening chapter comes to its tense conclusion, scrambling to once more restrain his startled horse, terrified by the sound of gunshots at an uncomfortably-close distance, Julián encounters a pair of hunters he soon discovers are his employers: the discredited Marquis of Ulloa, Don Pedro Moscoso, and the calculating steward of the house, Primitivo.

The frustrating arrival of Julián to the *Pazos de Ulloa*, described in great detail by Bazán over the course of the novel's first chapter, appears to establish what is, ostensibly, the novel's central theme: the elemental opposition between civilized culture and wild nature. This, as Jo Labanyi remarks in her study of nature in Bazán's two country novels – *Los Pazos de Ulloa* and

its sequel, *La madre naturaleza* (1887) –, is the classic reading of this first chapter: in this interpretation, Julián’s literal descent of this mountain hill in the first paragraph of *Los Pazos de Ulloa* symbolically represents the descent from civilization into barbarism (353). Yet, as Labanyi then notes, the issue is not so simple, the binary between nature and culture not so neatly distinguished here. That is, if the first line of Bazán’s *obra maestra*, in showing Julián’s struggle against a forbidding hill, seems to prove the incompatibility of civilization and nature, then the next line, which hints at the local corruption responsible for this hill’s steep incline, reminds us as readers that what we experience as “nature” is always mediated to some degree by this dualistic other, civilization. Put differently, the road down this hill is not nearly-impassable for any inherent or inevitable reason, but rather because it was purposefully and illegally constructed as such. In the words of Labanyi, this first paragraph could thus be, “more accurately read as a descent into the barbarism resulting from the attempt to implant a modern central State apparatus in a backward rural country” (353). Thus, from the outset of *Los Pazos de Ulloa*, nature and culture are never presented as the dualistic opposites one might presume they would be given the genre, but are instead presented as mutually-interdependent and overlapping categories in a continual process of definition and redefinition.

Even though this binary opposition is questioned and complicated throughout the work, it nonetheless serves a significant role as the basis for the literary “experiments” performed by Bazán over the course of this Naturalist novel. In this way, there are various personages found throughout the work that either embody culture/civilization or nature/barbarism: by placing these characters in unfamiliar environs or in contradistinction with other characters that represent the opposing side of this binary, Bazán is able to directly explore and critique these two categories of nature and culture. Ultimately, while most of these characters appear to be defined, in true determinist fashion, by their backgrounds either as urbane, modern city-dwellers or as unsophisticated, rustic countryfolk, the main character Julián turns out to be the novel’s most dynamic personage. In contrast to these other characters, whose unchanging and categorically-defined comportment likewise seems to prove the incompatibility of nature and civilization, Julián upsets this facile binary by virtue of his development over the course of the novel. Although he sets off from the house of Ulloa under erroneous allegations of scandal – accused by the marquis of an illicit affair with Nucha, his moribund and unhappy wife – our Roman-collar-wearing protagonist now exhibits a newfound composure in these once-unnerving surroundings: departing under an ominous dark sky on a gusty day that echoes his initial arrival, Julián is now undaunted by the stone cross on the side of the road, instinctually restraining his agitated mare as they pause by the bloody body of the recently-assassinated Primitivo. In other words, as made apparent by the contrast between his departure and his arrival, Julián is no longer the meek priest he once was.

In both of these crucial moments in the novel, its exposition and the beginning of its denouement, two narrative elements appear rather prominently: a stone cross and a horse. As Quirk asserts in his study of the novel’s structure, the stone cross – or *crucero* – stands out as a geographical landmark that, in a narrative sense, delimits the two principal sections of the novel and, in a physical sense, serves as a threshold between the sphere of the Pazos and the world outside (82). In a similar way, we could see the difference in Julián’s composure at this moment, both his immediate reaction to the *crucero* and his response to his startled horse, as indications of his development over the course of the novel, of his growth from a naïve, young

priest who arrived to the Pazos with ample book knowledge but little familiarity with the maneuvers and machinations of the real world, in this way serving as a symbolic confirmation of the assertion of scholars such as Villanueva and Rojas Yedra that Bazán's magnum opus is an example of a Bildungsroman. Significantly, these two points in the novel express Julián's education in terms of his relationship to the nonhuman world, that is, to nature. With this idea in mind, in this chapter I would like to bring attention to Bazán's description of the horse and the stone cross at the beginning and the end of the work, concentrating on what they tell us about the relation of Julián to nature and, more broadly, about how Bazán approaches the nonhuman, environmental world in her quintessential work of Spanish Naturalism.

Before proceeding to an analysis of these two, crucial points in the novel, I first review the debate between Zola and Bazán with regards to Naturalism, determinism, and experimental science in the late-nineteenth century. Then, pairing this theoretical discussion with an analysis of Julián's interactions with the nonhuman world in two particular scenes of *Los Pazos de Ulloa* – specifically, his arrival to and his final departure from the rustic environs in which the majority of the novel takes place – I demonstrate how Bazán's Naturalism departs from the instrumentalism and material determinism of Zola and, in doing so, presents a complex view of nature that troubles the nature-culture binary. Ultimately, I argue that Bazán's depiction of Julián's interactions with a nonhuman, natural world at these two moments of the work demonstrates a complex view of nature that, despite some limitations, critiques the mechanist worldview inherent in Western modernity's construction of an inert nature that exists to be exploited for capitalist ends.

Naturalism and Emilia Pardo Bazán – A Complicated Relationship

In spite of the fact that *Los Pazos de Ulloa* has been, since its publication in the late-nineteenth century, regarded as Spain's preeminent Naturalist novel, to this day there is much discussion in academic circles as to whether the novel actually belongs to the Naturalist genre at all. Pointing towards the exhausting and seemingly-interminable debate on the matter, titles of articles – for example, Tasende-Grabowski's "Otra vez de vueltas con el naturalismo" or Feal Deibe's "Naturalismo y antinaturalismo en *Los Pazos de Ulloa*" – nod to the fact that positioning one's self with regards to the Naturalism/Anti-Naturalism argument has become an obligatory ritual for those publishing a scholarly analysis of the novel. Of crucial importance for this discussion, first off, is the question of what literary Naturalism actually is and, second, of course, is whether or not Emilia Pardo Bazán adheres sufficiently to the precepts of the genre. Thus, beginning in this section I answer these two questions, reviewing the ample scholarship on Bazán and Naturalism, including Bazán's own writings on "*la cuestión palpitante*" of Zola's Naturalism, as captured in her collection of essays of that name. While significant for understanding the arguments presented later on during the analysis of Bazán's novel, this discussion of the Spanish author's Naturalism will likewise provide a base for this chapter's broader examination and critique of the scientific epistemologies and worldviews that are underpinning Zola's formulation of Naturalism.

Zola begins his manifesto of literary Naturalism, *Le Roman experimental*, stating that, "The return to nature, the naturalistic evolution which marks the century, drives little by little all the manifestations of human intelligence into the same scientific path" (1). Published in

1880, three years after the publication of his widely-successful novel *L'Assommoir*, this essay not only sets out to define what a Naturalist work of literature is, but also, in doing so, intends to demonstrate the parallels between this form of literary practice and the then-burgeoning field of experimental science. That is, his essay argues that it is long overdue for literature, one of these “manifestations of human intelligence,” to follow the other disciplines that were transformed over the course of the nineteenth century and to go down that “same scientific path,” ending with what Zola calls “the experimental novel.” Placing his literary genre in direct opposition to Romanticism, Zola writes that “[the experimental novel] substitutes for the study of the abstract and the metaphysical man the study of the natural man, governed by physical and chemical laws, and modified by the influence of his surroundings” (23). In order to rid the literary of this wrongful idealism, Zola thus forms his “experimental novel” on the basis of the scandalous experimental method by which Claude Bernard proposed that medicine could more perfectly understand the functioning of the human body. If medicine, long considered more of an art than physics or chemistry, could become more scientific through the practice of experimentation on the physiological body, then, as Zola proposes, literature could similarly reform itself, becoming less abstract and metaphysical by performing a different kind of experiment on the sociological body.

Like the philosophical school from which it draws its name, Zola’s Naturalism puts forward a system that “considera la naturaleza como causa única de todo lo existente” (Barroso 13). The determining “nature” here for nineteenth-century naturalists such as Zola was one that obeyed certain scientific laws: that is, it was a nature that we could not only observe functioning, but whose mechanisms we could predict given the proper information.² Yet, as I emphasize later on in this chapter, many of these “laws” were far from axiomatic, thus leading the Naturalists down some rather questionable paths towards errant conclusions. In addition, not only was naturalism at large a determinist and positivist school of thought, but it was likewise atheist in that it, through “[seeking] the ultimate principle...in nature,” as Brown writes, it “was opposed to the theological idea of God” (3). Further summarizing the general philosophy of naturalism, Brown writes:

No matter if we cannot be rationally sure of the existence of God, no matter if we cannot be metaphysically sure of anything, the fact remains that we live and move in a world of apparent reality. Science can help us dominate that world and make it materially better. Here is something concrete, let us stick to it. We shall not know the ultimate why of things but at least we shall know the how of things. (Brown 3)

² The concept of “nature” used throughout the chapter is one that is defined discursively, positing “nature” in a negative, relational way as that which is not human culture or civilization. Defined concomitantly with the “human,” the idea of “nature” as abstraction in this way implies an unstable concept, one that can be defined and then used according to many different, and often opposing, ideologies depending on the context. Thus, for the nineteenth-century positivism that informs Zola’s Naturalist literature, “nature” becomes a category for that which can be quantified and studied via a scientific method of experimentation. Williams (1980) offers a good review of the discursive or abstract concept of nature in the West, while Soper (1995) argues for understanding both discursive and extra-discursive concepts of nature.

This repudiation of religion was an essential component of the philosophy for someone such as Zola, a man with a particular zeal for the present, whose “purpose and rallying cry” could be characterized as, according to Brown: “Away with the taboos and restrictions of the past! Let us be of our age, let us seek truth where it may be found” (27). Standing in the way of a more comprehensive understanding of humans and the world in which they live, then, religion in particular found no place in the material determinism of Zola’s philosophy-cum-literary-school.

While the iconoclastic atheism of naturalist thought was championed wholeheartedly by Zola, in whose oeuvre the church appears as a “pitiful relic of the past” (Brown 42), its determinism provided complications for the Catholic Bazán in her literary practice. Countering the materialist determinism apparent in the worldview professed by Zola, which she sees as supplanting a fatalist view in which humans are dependent on divine providence with one in which they are dependent on material causes (12), Bazán took issue with this worldview from a spiritual as well as an intellectual point of view. In terms of the former, as no small number of critics have noted over the years, her Catholic belief is at odds with the determinism and cynicism found in Zola. As she argues in *La cuestión palpitante*, humans are not solely determined by exterior forces – whether they be divine or material – but rather they maintain the free will to act in the world and partially determine their fate (13-15). Specifically, citing St. Augustine as the one who “acertó a realizar la conciliación del albedrío y la gracia” (14), Bazán argues that the Catholic doctrine supports neither a complete freedom of decision – as did Pelagius, the contemporary and ideological combatant of Augustine – nor a total submission to providential determination – as does, most famously, Luther (14). Instead, Bazán argues via Augustine that Catholicism offers, through Original Sin and the belief in the fallen state of all humans, a way of mediating these two extremes – an analysis of Augustine’s famous doctrine that, according to Hemingway (343), represents a slight simplification of the saint’s ideas, albeit one that allows the Spanish author to forge a literary practice that conciliated Zola’s Naturalism with her own Catholicism. Going further, Bazán asserts that it is precisely this enduring human struggle between our fallen nature and our divinely-endowed capacity for good that provides artists with material for their works: “Sólo la caída de una naturaleza originariamente pura y libre puede dar la clave de esta mezcla de nobles aspiraciones y bajos instintos, de necesidades intelectuales y apetitos sensuales, de este combate que todos los moralistas, todos los psicólogos, todos los artistas se han complacido en sorprender, analizar y retratar” (14).

Bazán’s disagreement with Zola, however, goes beyond her belief in Catholicism and is also rather significantly based in what she sees as the simplistic, uncritical manner in which the author from north of the Pyrenees accepts and adopts a variety of recently-developed scientific theories as the basis for his artistic method. According to his manifesto, Naturalism, through strict adherence to the experimental method and a commitment to faithfully portray the world according to physical and chemical laws, seeks to supplant the idealism and the metaphysical worldview of the Romantics, whose “idealistic writers admit mysterious elements which escape analysis, and therefore remain in the unknown, outside of the influence of the laws governing nature” (36). As he writes in the conclusion of this essay, with one final blow to the idealism of the Romantics, “we have become experimentalists instead of philosophers...the experimental method in letters, as in the sciences, is in the way to explain the natural phenomena, both

individual and social, of which metaphysics, until now, has given only irrational and supernatural explanations” (54). Through the rigid observation and painstaking experimentation found in the Naturalist novel, Zola believed literature could properly examine the ills of society in order to diagnose the maladies of the body politic and stimulate reflection on the necessary actions to be undertaken to effect improvement.

Along with the experimental method promoted by Bernard, Zola likewise adopted the mechanist worldview that was fundamental for this method. In fact, going further than Bernard himself, who, as Normandin states, was much more restrained in his “enthusiasm for the value of experiment” (498) than he is often given credit for, Zola promotes a radically mechanist worldview that conceives of the world as capable of being divided into discrete units that can be formally studied and summarily proven by virtue of the experimental method, evident in passages such as this one:

This then, is the end, this is the purpose in physiology and in experimental medicine: to make one’s self master of life in order to be able to direct it...We shall enter upon a century in which man, grown more powerful, will make use of nature and will utilize its laws to produce upon the earth the greatest possible amount of justice and freedom. There is no nobler, higher, nor grander end. Here is our role as intelligent beings: to penetrate to the wherefore of things, to become superior to these things, and to reduce them to a condition of subservient machinery. (25)

Beyond a simple rejection of romantic idealism, then, Zola’s Naturalism sustains the ideology of anthropocentric instrumentalism – with its mechanist view of the nonhuman world – that is central to the modern project, couching it in the language of human liberation and extending it to literary practice. Although one could read the French author’s zeal for the scientific breakthroughs of the later-nineteenth century as simply part of his larger rejection of the taboos and superstitions of the past, the language used in the quote above goes well beyond merely promoting science as a means of breaking with that past. Significantly, there is little space in this framework to question or recognize the limits of the epistemology promoted here: when Zola writes that “the aim of our human efforts is each day to reduce the ideal, to conquer truth from the unknown” (36), he advances a teleological view of scientific advancement, one in which unsolved problems are not due to the limits of this epistemological framework, but rather to the current limits of human minds to discover the necessary truths.

Countering this resolute support for science, Bazán is particularly critical of the way in which Zola accepts and advances many unproven theories in his effort to rationalize literary creation. As the following quote reveals, far from her opposition simply being based in her religious values, Bazán’s critique of Zola is, in fact, twofold:

Someter el pensamiento y la pasión a las mismas leyes que determinan la caída de la piedra; considerar exclusivamente las influencias físico-químicas, prescindiendo hasta de las espontaneidad individual, es lo que se propone el naturalismo y lo que Zola llama en otro pasaje de sus obras ‘mostrar y poner de realce la bestia humana.’ Por lógica consecuencia, el naturalismo se obliga a no respirar sino del lado de la materia, a

explicar el drama de la vida humana por medio del instinto ciego y la desenfrenada concupiscencia. (Pardo Bazán, *La cuestión* 17)

Thus complementing her Catholic critique of the French author's determinism, Bazán likewise looks with a suspicious eye on how he defends a mechanist view of humans; in particular, as seen in the above quote, her disagreement with Zola is significantly based in what she sees as the simplistic, uncritical manner in which he accepts and adopts certain recently-developed scientific theories and unwaveringly defends this scientific worldview. Far from mincing her words, she indicts Zola as committing the same logical crimes as many of those scientists whose dubious theories he lauds, writing, "le ha sucedido a Zola una cosa que suele ocurrir a los científicos de afición: tomó las hipótesis por leyes, y sobre el frágil cimiento de dos o tres hechos aislados erigió un enorme edificio" (18). Clearly, then, Bazán's criticism of Zola is not based solely in her Catholic belief, but is also concerned with the reception and application of contemporary scientific thought to the world at large, specifically, the application of these unproven hypotheses to the aesthetic study of society produced in a field such as literature.

As a critic, then, the author from A Coruña is quite clear with regards to the specific points in which she disagrees with the man who wrote *Le Roman experimental*. Nevertheless, as an author of narrative fiction, she was drawn to the method of Zola – to the strict practice of observation that his method demanded and to his proposition that the novel could resemble an experiment that explores chosen situations in the contemporary social milieu of a nation – and she was an unabashed admirer of the unique beauty that this scandalous author produced through the rich depictions of French life found throughout his oeuvre. Although she designated her own practice as belonging to Realism, of which she wrote that "el *realismo* en el arte nos ofrece una teoría más ancha, completa y perfecta que el *naturalismo*" (21), she nonetheless upheld much of the Naturalist method in what have become her most recognized novels, especially *La Tribuna* (1883) and *Los Pazos de Ulloa* (1886).

This latter novel takes place in the mid-nineteenth-century – around the time of the "Gloriosa" Revolution of 1868 that dethroned the then-regent Isabel II – at the fictional *Pazos de Ulloa*, a country manor house in the Galician region of Ourense belonging to the noble House of Ulloa. Julián, the priest from the city who serves as the protagonist of the novel, has been sent to help bring order to this unruly vestige of the *ancien régime* and to hopefully reform the remaining member of this old aristocratic house, Pedro de Moscoso. Abhorred by the spiritual and material disarray he confronts upon his arrival, Julián attempts to rehabilitate both man and manor by bringing Pedro back to Santiago and marrying him off to one of his aristocratic cousins and the plan all but works. However, when Nucha, the frail wife chosen by Pedro, births a daughter instead of the desired male heir, barely surviving the difficult parturition, don Pedro rapidly reverts to his old ways, living in concubinage with Sabel, the daughter of the malevolent house steward Primitivo, who serves in the kitchen staff and is the mother to Pedro's illegitimate son, Perucho. Ultimately, things do not end up well for any of the characters residing in the *Pazos de Ulloa*, with the climactic action coming to a head in the novel's antepenultimate chapter. After losing an election that would have sent him to Madrid, Pedro hires a local assassin to murder Primitivo, whose corrupt schemes thwarted the marquis's nascent political ambitions. However, this is not before Primitivo first foils Julián and

Nucha's plans to escape the oppressive confines of the old country house, accusing them of an affair that expels the mild-mannered priest back to Santiago and seals the mortal fate of Nucha.

Even through this rather abbreviated summary, we can see how the questions of nature, civilization, heredity, and determinism all coalesce within *Los Pazos de Ulloa* in a way that compels us as readers to trace the parallels between Bazán's work and the Naturalism of Zola. Tasende-Grabowski, for one, has little doubt that the novel is Naturalist. For her, the experiment in the novel "consiste en mostrar cómo el ser humano acaba por animalizarse al serle negados la educación y el amor, cómo las ideas civilizadas no pueden ser introducidas por una persona débil como Julián y cómo la barbarie acaba por causar la decadencia de una familia noble" (32). Arguing that *Los Pazos de Ulloa* ultimately refutes Bazán's own proposition that the human capacity for free will can resist the forces of the outside world, Tasende-Grabowski concludes that, "La naturaleza niega al hombre el libre albedrío, el desarrollo espiritual y la posibilidad de cambio porque sus personajes no son lo bastante fuertes como para enfrentarse a ella" (33). While it cannot be denied that all the major characters do in fact suffer before the novel reaches its finale – and what self-respecting nineteenth-century novel would not submit its personages to such undesirable ends? –, what Tasende-Grabowski posits is slightly mistaken as it both confuses suffering for submission to these outside forces and it draws an errant equivalence amongst these different characters' respective outcomes.

In contrast, other critics demonstrate a more tempered evaluation of the Galician author's relationship with Naturalism in this, her *obra maestra*. According to Barroso, for example, nature exacts a toll on all of the characters in the "asfixiante medio ambiente" of the countryside (101), but does not do so in a totalizing way: Julián and the novel's other outsider, Pedro's wife Nucha, may be weakened by nature, according to Barroso, but they are not fully assimilated or defeated by this oppressive nature (104). This proposal – that the novel alternately embraces and rejects a determinist interpretation of nature's role in human behavior – is likewise shared by Gerli, who states the novel would be purely Naturalistic if it were not for its pious protagonist: "Julián and, most importantly, his point of view offer an alternative to materialistic determinism. It is significant that Primitivo, instinct incarnate, is killed and Julián suffers only a spiritual crisis" (57). Agreeing with both Barroso and Gerli, Feal Deibe further paints the picture of Julián as an anti-Naturalist character found within a largely-Naturalist novel. In this way, Julián embodies what Brown sees as Bazán's characteristic ability to "find truth in the middle of the road" (46), that is, to consider two extreme or even opposing views, taking what she sees as valid from both, and presenting this synthesis within her work (46, 154). Thus, although there is some disagreement within the critical field regarding whether or not *Los Pazos de Ulloa* is a proper Naturalist novel, Julián's role as protagonist is definitely significant not only for moving along the narrative, but also for serving as the pivotal determinant for how we comprehend the degree to which Bazán adheres to Zola's literary system.

Aligning most with the analyses of Barroso and Gerli, in my own interpretation of the novel I agree that, if it were not for Julián, *Los Pazos de Ulloa* would be a Naturalist novel in the orthodox tradition of Émile Zola. Although Bazán ostensibly sets up an ideal Naturalist experiment, in which Julián (the representative of culture and civilization) and Primitivo (the representative of instinct and nature) fight over the soul of Pedro, the results of this experiment are far from conclusive, as neither is successful in the end at exerting their absolute

influence over the Marquis of Ulloa. However, the loss is much less consequential for the priest from Santiago: although he is tempted, frustrated, and burdened by his surroundings at the *Pazos* since day one, Julián is not defeated by the forces of nature and it is, of course, Primitivo who ends the novel as a dead body on the side of the road. While the *Pazos* provides an almost-perfect arena in which the forces of the material world should defeat Julián – a novelistic ending that would validate the deterministic worldview of Zola –, the young priest ends up departing the rural manor house having preserved his life and his Christian morality, while having also matured substantially as a person. It is for this reason, that I propose we should in fact read Bazán's magnum opus as an experimental novel, but one in which the very subject of the experiment is the Naturalist thesis of Zola and its material determinist ideologies. Julián's ability to transform in response to his surroundings and, ultimately, his capacity to overcome the determining forces of the world thus refutes the more extreme ideologies underpinning Naturalism.

What I show in the following sections, then, is how, as Bazán strays from the orthodox literary Naturalism delineated by Zola, she not only critiques the material determinism espoused by the French author, but likewise troubles the view of the natural world that underlies his ideas. If, as Villanueva and Rojas Yedra propose, *Los Pazos de Ulloa* should be read as a Bildungsroman, then the parallel scenes that I analyze in the following section, which bookend Julián's time as chaplain in Ulloa, emphasize that a significant component of his education pertains to his relation to nature and the nonhuman world. Specifically, as his interactions with the horses and the *crucero* at these two moments indicate, nature is neither a crushing force that determines one's actions in an indisputable way nor is it the binary opposite of human civilization that we are obliged to control and comprehend in an absolute fashion. What I propose here is that, beyond simply rejecting Zola's fidelity to determinism, Bazán, through the figure of Julián, challenges the mechanist worldview upon which the experimental method, along with the instrumentalist objectification of nature, is based. Although it might be a stretch to reclaim Emilia Pardo Bazán as an ecological standard-bearer *avant la lettre*, her work certainly presents the human relationship to nature in a much more complicated way than does Zola. First offering a literary analysis of these two scenes and then doing a comprehensive review of the scientific theories that influenced Zola's Naturalist manifesto, I demonstrate how the Galician author provides an early critique of such instrumentalist objectification of nature.

Finally, it is important to comprehend the intellectual and political contexts in which Bazán wrote *Los Pazos de Ulloa*, a novel that was, once again, published in 1886 but whose narrative occurs primarily in 1868. Intellectually, the novel was written during a period in which positivism – and associated philosophical and literary movements such as Naturalism – were still predominant, but had begun to wane, soon to be surpassed by an early-modernist, *fin-de-siècle* thought that was openly doubtful of positivism's faith in science and rationality. Additionally, given Spain's laggard adoption of wider European trends, the novel was written during a period – and, even more so, *about* a period – in which Romanticism was still a consequential movement on the Iberian Peninsula. Thus, although Bazán's novel is explicitly Naturalist, the writer nonetheless includes Romantic elements (in particular, the novel's Gothic setting) and, in her skepticism towards positivist defense of science, we can see precursors of an emerging, post-positivist sensibility in Western thought. In terms of Spain's political history,

the novel takes place in the consequential year of 1868, during which the “Glorious Revolution” dethroned the Bourbon queen Isabella II and initiated the short-lived triumph of liberalism in Spain. Likewise, the novel was published in 1886, at the end of the first decade of the *Restauración* that reestablished the Bourbon dynasty and brought with it a more conservative, albeit much more stable, government. While these rather significant events provide the historical backdrop for the text, as Henn notes, they “have little direct impact on the actions or attitudes of the characters of the novel” (125).³ When considered more broadly, though, the novel does serve as a commentary on the political transformations that occurred in Spain in the middle and latter half of the nineteenth century, a period during which modern, liberal ideas began to take hold and become extended throughout the whole of Spain.⁴ To summarize, and to bring together the intellectual with the national-political history, Bazán was writing within and about a period during which the modern, liberal subject – a subject who was defined and codified into law using positivist philosophies of science – was becoming established in Spain.

Two Horses and a Stone Cross: Bazán and the Nonhuman World in *Los Pazos de Ulloa*

As mentioned prior, Julián’s descent down that particularly steep hill on the first page of the novel can be interpreted both literally, as a final, physical trial in his approach to the *Pazos de Ulloa*, and figuratively, as his unhurried-yet-precipitous fall into a land of barbarism. One important, yet overlooked aspect of this descent is that it is not done alone. In fact, upon inspecting the first line, it is clear that it is not even Julián who is actively descending this hill, but his horse, a “peludo rocín” that the “jinete” – a title invoked in this first chapter with no slight irony – is not really controlling, so much as he is burdening with his presence (7). This notion that Julián is more “along for the ride” than anything else in this opening scene is furthered by the way in which the author constructs this sentence, reproduced here in its entirety: “Por más que el jinete trataba de sofrenarlo agarrándose con todas sus fuerzas a la única rienda de cordel y susurrando palabrillas calmantes y mansas, el peludo rocín seguía empeñándose en bajar la cuesta a un trote cochinerero que desencuadraba los intestinos, cuando no a trancos desigualísimos de loco galope” (7).

As we see here, although it is Julián to which Bazán first refers in this sentence, the main subject here is not “el jinete,” but rather “el peludo rocín,” whose uneven and unruly descent of the hill continues despite the discomfort it provokes in this rather incompetent man. Resigned to a prepositional phrase, the novel’s protagonist – the character who is so important for understanding the ideological standpoint of the author – is given second billing to his horse in this consequential initial line. In fact, it is not until the second paragraph that our ill-equipped horseman is the main subject of a sentence, as “aquel repecho del camino real de Santiago a Orense” is the subject of the next, final sentence of the first paragraph. While, of course, it is not rare for a principal character to be treated more as an object than a subject in the descriptive opening passages often found in the exposition of a lengthy novel such as this, it is

³ This contrasts, in particular, with *La Tribuna*, a novel in which these political upheavals play a significant role in the plot.

⁴ While 1868 is a particularly consequential year in this respect, the two decades prior were characterized by periods of liberal reform, most notably the *Bienio Progresista* of 1854-1856, a point that Pilar Faus brings up in her historical autobiography of Emilia Pardo Bazán.

worth remarking that, instead of making Julián the main subject of this opening sentence, Bazán instead has elected to construct these especially verbose, circumlocutive descriptions in which first an animal and then the landscape is performing the main action.

This opening sentence provides an example, right from the outset of the novel, of Bazán's rather complex depiction of Julián's relation to animals, plants, and other nonhuman figures. Developing this idea further, over the course of this section I look at Julián's interactions with horses and with the aforementioned *crucero* as seen in two specific paragraphs: the former being the one in the first chapter that recounts when Julián's prayer at the stone cross is interrupted by gunshots (11) and the latter coming at the end of the novel, when, on his way back to the city, he passes by that same cross, next to which lies the murdered body of Primitivo (300-301). While various details appear in these two scenes, only the horse and the *crucero* recur with such prominence, creating a parallel that highlights the contrast in Julián between the first and the penultimate chapter and allows Bazán to comment on the ever-*palpitante* questions surrounding nature, culture, and Naturalism.

Starting off with an analysis of the two horses, I claim that the difference between Julián's reaction at the beginning and end of the novel to what is an almost-identical instance of his horses unexpectedly suffering a fit of fright provides one of the clearest indications of how the protagonist's relationship to the nonhuman world has developed over the course of the novel. Whereas, in the first chapter, while saying a prayer at the foot of the *crucero*, Julián finds himself, upon hearing gunshots not far away, "a punto...de besar la tierra, merced a la huida que pegó el rocín, con las orejas enhiestas, loco de terror" (11), in this later chapter, the priest coolly controls his horse, which has been startled by the gory sight of Primitivo's corpse: "La yegua, de improviso, respinga, tiembla, se encabrita...Julián se agarra instintivamente a las crines, soltando la rienda" (300). While both of these circumstances are, for Julián, unexpected and unpreventable, his reactions quite clearly demonstrate how his relation to the nonhuman world changes over the course of the novel. By the end, not only does he expertly grab the horse's mane, loosening the reins so that he brings the horse back down on all fours, but he does so without hesitation – following this, upon calming the horse down, one of the next lines describes how he remains there ("permanece allí clavado"), staring at the corpse for a prolonged moment of existential reflection, in clear opposition to his equine companion's desire to run away from this bloody scene. Initially, the fear of death incited by the sound of gunshots caused the naïf priest to react in an automatic manner; he is not only at the mercy of an uncontrollable animal, but is analogous to that animal in his personal fright. In an antithetical fashion, then, when he adroitly restrains his spooked horse and obliges it to remain still at the end of the novel, maintaining composure the entire time, Julián reveals his development by overcoming both the horse's wild character and his own, innate apprehension upon passing Primitivo's corpse.

Going back to my earlier assertion that *Los Pazos de Ulloa* is an experimental novel in which the premise for the experiment is the very material determinism at the heart of Zola's Naturalism, I find that these two scenes and their apparent parallelism provides a particularly salient instantiation of this meta-experiment with Naturalism. Scientifically, the other variables are as controlled as one could reasonably expect them to be, and Bazán in this way shows that over time Julián has developed in reaction to his new environs. As readers, then, we can logically reject the more extreme, rigid ideas regarding determinism: Julián has clearly shown

that he is not the *bête humaine* and that he can, ostensibly, control nature. However, the situation is much more complicated than this brief analysis would initially suggest; that is, while these two scenes exemplify a human capacity for change, they likewise show that we are not alone, that our relationship with the nonhuman world is based on interdependence and cooperation. Julián's reaction to the horse in the twenty-ninth chapter demonstrates his development, but, perhaps more significantly, these two scenes show how he has developed through his interactions with the nonhuman other. Through the way in which she describes Julián's interaction with these horses, or, to be more specific, the way in which she demonstrates how humans develop in contingent relationships with nonhuman others, Bazán contests material determinism, but also goes further and obliges us to examine the epistemological divide that separates human from nonhuman and nature from culture.

What I find most striking in these two scenes, and a crucial part of my argument here, is Bazán's use of the loaded word "instintivamente" to narrate Julián's perfect reaction to the mare's unexpected rearing in this later scene. If we consider the four reactions being analyzed here – the nag's and Julián's reaction to the sound of gunshots in chapter 1, as well as the mare's and Julián's reaction to the dead body in chapter 29 – three of them could be reasonably classified as "instinctual," yet it is, precisely, the most blatantly non-instinctual reaction that is described as such. In terms of the horses, in both instances they react in a what is generally considered an instinctual way to what they perceive, incorrectly, as an imminent threat: for the nag on which he rides into town, this is manifest in the animal's ears shooting upright, while, for the mare on which he departs, this reaction is evinced by its excited rearing. Going even further in evoking the primitive, savage quality of the animal's reaction, the Spanish verb used here, "encabritarse," contains the word for the less-domesticated ungulate that is the goat, or "cabra." And for Julián in the initial scene, the reaction is no less automatic, thus manifesting the self-evident fact that Julián has not, in this early moment of the novel, learned to possess the wherewithal needed to compose himself, let alone to restrain the horse. Yet, quite clearly, Julián in this latter scene reacts in a way that is not indicative of his sheltered, bookish upbringing, but that is instead the product of his time spent with the brutish companions and natural environs found in and around the *Pazos*.

Through its ostensibly-contradictory usage here in this crucial moment, "instintivamente" reveals the complex perspective of the nature-culture binary presented by Bazán in this novel. At first glance, echoing some of the arguments made in *La cuestión palpitante*, the appearance of this consequential adverb seems to be an instance of the Galician author ridiculing those of her time who would use notions of "instinct" or "nature" as means of providing scientific defense, albeit by employing distorted and erroneous scientific hypotheses, for their antiquated and prejudiced points of view. This reading of the use of "instintivamente" would support Labanyi's assertion that the principal critique in the novel is against those in Bazán's day who would appeal to a mistaken concept of the "natural" to defend social power structures such as the subjugation of women: "[Bazán's] critique of naturalism is based not so much on a Catholic defence of free will (for *Los Pazos de Ulloa* shows that belief in this principle did not prevent the Church from restricting the free will of women) as on her objection to the contemporary use of biological argument to 'naturalize' women's subordination" (Labanyi 338). In general, what Labanyi points to here is the (mis)use of science – often bad science – to defend harmful cultural norms in Spain. Thus, while agreeing with Labanyi, I would like to

expand on her argument by recognizing how the scope of Bazán's critique goes beyond the question of gender and more broadly offers a criticism of the modern concept of nature, as defined in opposition to culture.

By bringing to the fore this question of "instinct," Bazán implicitly invokes its co-constitutive concept of the "natural": if someone is said to act instinctively, then they are acting without thinking, in a manner that is not so much practiced as it is always-known, innate. Diving deeper into the waters of Darwinist rhetoric, the first entry in the *Diccionario del Real Academia Española* describes "instinto" as the, "conjunto de pautas de reacción que, en los animales, contribuyen a la conservación de la vida del individuo y de la especie." In addition to once more bringing the discussion back to this ever-important binary of nature-culture, what these two definitions remind us is that to invoke "instinct" is to appeal to a material, scientific defense for some action. Rhetorically, it justifies this action by supplanting a normative explanation with a positive one. What I suggest, then, is that through the inclusion of "instintivamente" to describe this interaction between human and horse, Bazán obliges us as readers to reflect on how these two scenes engage with the ever-important Naturalist question of material determinism; in particular, its theoretical underpinning in the then-emerging field of biology. In a more immediate fashion, before occasioning such weighty, theoretical reflections, the use of "instintivamente" here compels us to reconsider how we interpret this interaction and what it might be telling us about Julián's progression over the course of the novel, especially in terms of his relationship to the nonhuman, natural world. If, as we established earlier, this is not instinct, then how can we describe this action and how does its usage here destabilize not only biological definitions of "instinct" but also the scientific defense for the separation of nature from culture?

The reason why this word appears so contradictory is because we know that Julián was not born acting like this; we very literally have the evidence in the first chapter, which is not even to mention how inept he appears throughout the novel when it comes to "acting naturally" amongst his new companions or dealing with the real world problems he confronts while at the Pazos. Nonetheless, the argument could be made, following on the definitions cited above, that since Julián in this moment reacts automatically in order to save himself from immediate danger (or, in this case, injury), then it in fact would not be incorrect to say it was instinct that produces this response. While I disagree with this argument, examining its logic helps understand the difficulties this scene presents for rigid theories of material determinism. In specific, if we follow this line of reasoning, then we either must divorce our idea of "instinct" from "nature" or we must engage in a much deeper questioning of this designation of "the natural," both of which imperil the discrete nature-culture binary that underlies material determinism.

To begin, if we truly see this act as "instinctual," then it would follow that Julián's time spent at the Pazos has served for him as a sort of instruction in a more natural way of living, one which he was denied given his upbringing in the refined urban milieu of Santiago. Following this logic, then, the "instinct" here displayed as he restrains the horse and meditates over the gory corpse of Primitivo is not how he would have acted given his upbringing (we saw how we would have acted in chapter 1), but rather how he should have acted in this situation (i.e. as a man in this time, he should be capable of adroitly controlling a horse); a corollary to this errant reasoning would be that the time spent at the Pazos has thus allowed our priest to (re)connect

with a more natural way of acting in the world – in other words, by spending so much time in these “natural” environs, Julián has recovered some innate sense or behavior that he never properly developed given his sheltered upbringing. Yet, as should have been made quite clear over the course of this exercise, this logic is shot through with contradictions. First, if the time spent at the Pazos has instructed Julián in how to act “with instinct,” then it is precisely through culture (i.e. through his interactions in the specific cultural milieu found at the Pazos) that he has come to act more naturally. Second, to see Julián’s later reaction as “instinctual” is to, once again, conflate the normative with the positive, that is, to supplant cultural norms with biological truths: i.e. Julián’s control of the horse in front of the dead body is seen as instinctual because this is how a man of this time should act, whereas his flight from the sound of gunshots is not considered “instinctual” for the same, invalid reason. As apparent in these two most prominent examples, this exercise in following the contradiction found in the use of “instintivamente” demonstrates a much more general difficulty of disentangling nature from culture, of drawing a definitive line that separates one from the other. In this way, it is not so much Bazán critiquing Naturalism here as it is her putting into question the tenability of one of its most fundamental, underlying assumptions.

If trying to defend the use of “instintivamente” here through the lens of material determinism leaves us in a state of contradiction, one in which the discrete separation of nature and culture is imperiled, then, I argue, that understanding this departure scene and its significance in relation to Julián’s transformation over the course of the novel requires a more fluid understanding of these categories and the reciprocal interactions through which they continuously constitute each other. Specifically, I propose using Haraway’s concept of “naturecultures” as elaborated in her *The Companion Species Manifesto*. In this essay – which according to the author should be read as a companion to and further elucidation of her earlier, oft-cited *A Cyborg Manifesto* – Haraway examines the relationship between humans and dogs as a means of understanding and informing “livable politics and ontologies in current life worlds” (4). Proposing the figure of the “companion species” to interpret human-canine interrelations throughout the millennia,⁵ Haraway offers a concept of life that is continuously in formation and always interdependent, constituting relations that go beyond discrete species as well as binary categories such as human-nonhuman or nature-culture (6, 12). The term naturecultures, then, is used in this context to think beyond this famous binary without abandoning its two constituent conceptual categories and the significant insights they provide to understanding the myriad forms and practices of life; instead, through this neologism, Haraway is capable of eschewing biological determinism on one end and cultural determinism

⁵ For Haraway, dogs serve as the exemplars for this concept of the companion species, both because of their ubiquity and because of the anthropocentric intentionality that is often associated with their roles in human lives. Countering perspectives that see the human-dog relationship as one of human’s dominating canines, Haraway argues that this relationship must be seen as constantly co-constituting and co-evolving. She uses this framework to question our everyday interactions with canines as well as the historical narrative of the domestication of dogs, which she argues that, instead of being the achievement of civilized Man converting a wild animal into an instrument, represents a much more complicated process of interaction, one that benefited both humans and dogs as they came to live together. In reconceptualizing human-dog relationships, both historical and current, Haraway’s intent is to trouble the common delineations of nature and culture, proposing instead this more fluid idea of “naturecultures” and its representative figure, the companion species.

on the other, while also rejecting a total relativism that would reduce both spheres to mere abstraction. When it comes to understanding dogs, this term allows Haraway to tell a story of domestication in which species formation is a constant, undeniably relational process that, counter the anthropocentric tale of triumphant dominion over nonhuman life, alters both humans and dogs in ways that cannot be discretely categorized as either biological or cultural.

Returning to Bazán and her pious protagonist, then, “naturecultures” and “companion species” are especially helpful for understanding Julián’s development over the course of the novel and, of course, these scenes in which he interacts with an animal whose history with humans rivals that of the dog. Specifically, I find this departure scene and the human-horse interaction it prominently describes as representative of the naturecultural entanglement theorized by Haraway in how it shows our protagonist developing through nature: Julián is neither predetermined by nature nor does he exhibit absolute control over the natural, nonhuman world that surrounds him, but rather the scene shows him working in coordination with the nonhuman other. While the human and the horse have quite divergent understandings of how, exactly, they will individually stay alive at this moment, they act together, responding to the other through a set of practices, each of which could easily be explained either through the lens of nature or that of culture. The end result in this moment – in contrast to the scene at the beginning of the novel – is successful cooperation between these two companion species. Thus, returning to Julián’s especially-significant act of bringing his rearing horse back down to the ground, I argue that we should not read this as the triumphant act of a dominant *Anthropos* manifesting his superiority over nature, but rather as an unremarkable example of inter-species interaction.

Bazán points in these two scenes to the fact that the nature-culture binary is an unstable epistemological base upon which certain ideologies – most immediately, naturalism – have been constructed. The questions that arise when interpreting “instintivamente” in this latter scene with the horse, which are at their core questions about how we construe Julián’s transformation during his time at the Pazos, are particularly complex because they revolve around the indeterminacy that accompanies these two, conventionally-opposed categories. Although Bazán may still use a loaded word such as “instintivamente”, it is difficult to say what exactly this word means outside of the conventional nature-culture binary and in a naturecultural framework, which is based on interdependence and cohabitation. Thus, if we are able to escape this binary logic, which is what ideas such as Haraway’s naturecultures and companion species allow us to do, then we can understand Julián’s transformation in a different, more nuanced way.

Immediately prior to his horse nearly throwing him to the ground in this earlier scene, we witness Julián interacting with the other prominent symbol that appears in these two moments in the novel: the *crucero*, or stone cross. After first passing by a wooden cross, of whose macabre significance he reminds himself as he dutifully prays an Our Father, our young priest is then led unwillingly by his horse to a crossroads where he encounters this other, stone cross:

Entre el marco que le formaban las ramas de un castaño colosal erguía-se el crucero. Tosco, de piedra común, tan mal labrado, que a primera vista parecía monumento románico, por más que en realidad sólo contaba un siglo de fecha, siendo obra de algún

cantero con pujos de escultor, el crucero, en tal sitio y a tal hora, y bajo el dosel natural del magnífico árbol, era poético y hermoso. (11)

While this marker should, when considered in isolation, ostensibly represent the barbarity of the countryside and, therefore, a natural inclination towards destruction, both mentions of the *crucero* paint it in what is, unexpectedly, a conspicuously positive and Romantic light: here, at the beginning of the novel, it appears “poético y hermoso” as it is framed by this “magnificent tree,” while in the penultimate chapter it triumphantly, “levanta sus brazos de piedra manchados por el oro viejo del líquen” (300). Analyzing this description of the *crucero* in these two scenes, I argue that, through her emphasis on the natural world and her use of a Romantic register, Bazán pushes against the anthropocentric and mechanist concept of life underlying Naturalist thought, instead presenting her readers with a more comprehensive concept of life that merges a more general, spiritual vitalism with her belief in Catholicism.

Returning to the initial description of the *crucero*, one can see the subjective, Romantic register clearly in how Bazán’s narrator plays with contrasts to provide the image of a simple, yet beautiful monument that at once stands apart from yet blends in with the natural world that surrounds it. In particular, the erect rigidity of the small, gray cross is both framed by and pales in juxtaposition with the enormous brown and green canopy of the chestnut tree at its side. Going beyond an objective description of this natural scene, the tree here is imbued with symbolism, as the natural frame of its branches endows the initial presentation of this macabre marker with a positive interpretation. While a sense of unease hangs over the preceding lines that narrate Julián’s encounter with the wooden cross, the predominant feeling evoked by the lines cited above is one of calm and beauty. Additionally, by placing the cross adjacent to a tree, Bazán relates the Christian belief in resurrection with a universal, primeval association of the natural world with perpetual regeneration. In this way, from the outset of the novel, the author points towards a nonhuman world, whether it be spiritual or terrestrial, that exceeds the actions of humans.

Nonetheless, at the same moment, there is the aforementioned sense of unease amidst the otherwise pleasant natural scene portrayed here: a brief interlude from the tension and discomfort that hangs over the rest of the first chapter, its evocation of “nature” is at once delightful and unsettling. While the tree, forming an idyllic frame around this poorly-hewn monument in an all-too-perfect way, suggests a universal concept of life and points towards the beauty and creative capacity of the natural world, the monument itself casts one’s mind to the destruction and violence that can similarly claim an origin in nature – that is, it points to what are, ostensibly, humanity’s most base instincts, or, as some may have it, their animalistic tendencies. This is apparent in the other main detail offered by the narration of this scene, which concerns the age of this monument: roughly a century old, given its poor sculpting, it could easily be mistaken for a vestige of the Romanesque art prevalent throughout Iberia almost a millennia ago, in the eleventh century (11). When considered in conjunction with its connotations of uncivilized human barbarity, the age of the *crucero* – both its true age and its apparent age – expresses, or, at the very least, seeks to confirm Julián’s initial fear (and the pessimistic, Naturalist understanding of human character) regarding the sempiternal human predisposition towards evil acts and brutality. In this one image, then, we as readers are shown

nature as a source of inspiration and respite, and simultaneously as the basis for violence and uncaring destruction.

Complementing my argument regarding Julián and the horse, then, I posit that this seeming contradiction is essential for understanding Bazán's critique of Naturalism, specifically, the way in which it comprehends life. At this crucial, early point in the novel, the initial sight of the stone cross occasions for our naïve protagonist a reflection on two ostensibly-contradictory approaches to understanding nature, one representative of the Romantic worldview, the other belonging to a more Realist or Naturalist worldview: to summarize, the *castaño's* natural framing of this monument demonstrates how nature, when left uninhibited, can be self-generatively beautiful and creative, while the overt symbolism of the cross, that is, its association with a violent act that occurred at some point on this spot, in an antithetical fashion points to the destructive capacity of nature. It is as if these two opposing views of nature, which coexist in the *crucero*, offer both Julián and the reader two divergent hypotheses for understanding the relationship between humans and nature, hypotheses that will be tested over the course of the Julián's time at the Pazos de Ulloa. While an argument could be made for the validity of both of these theses, my contention here, which is in line with my aforementioned reading of the novel as a whole, is that by depicting this very same *crucero* in an unabashedly positive way at the end of the novel and clearly associating it with a Catholic as well as a general, spiritual concept of vitality, Bazán privileges the Romantic worldview it embodies and in doing so criticizes the rational framework through which the Naturalists understand life. Which is not to claim her or her novel as essentially Romantic, but rather to contend that she embraces certain aspects of the Romantic worldview – specifically, its caution against the excesses of a Naturalist, positivist faith in science to explain the world and, most significantly, human behavior – at this crucial point in the novel.⁶

Amidst the generally pessimistic and grim climax of the novel, one in which Primitivo is killed by an assassin and Nucha's long-foreshadowed demise becomes a *fait accompli*, the *crucero* in this moment is described in an undeniably positive light: "El crucero, a poca distancia, levanta sus brazos de piedra manchados por el oro viejo del líquen" (300). In contrast with the opening scene and in opposition to the gruesome context in which it is seen at this moment, the cross appears so clearly associated with the Catholic symbolism of redemption and regeneration that any association with violence and death is almost entirely forgotten. If, as I contend, the *crucero* originally presented Julián with two possible interpretations of nature's effects on humans, then its appearance at this moment and its blatant symbolism seems to tell him that, while nature may lead humans to death and destruction (i.e. the material determinist understanding of human nature), nature also retains a positive force for

⁶ Despite being generally associated with the first half of the nineteenth century, Romanticism was still a significant movement in both science and aesthetics well into the later decades of this century, especially in Spain. In science and medicine, Fernández-Medina mentions how the Romantic ideology of neo-Hippocratic vitalism, "evolved and endured" in Spain well into the 1880s, even as it had been largely supplanted by positivist determinism in other countries (211). In literature, the popularity of Rosalía de Castro and Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, whose works were published contemporaneously with those of Zola, demonstrates the sustained popularity within Spain of Romantic or Post-Romantic art. The Romanticism that appears in Bazán's novel is at once a worldview and a literary style: a form of narration that represents subjective emotional expression in the place of objective, scientific description, in this way aligning with a worldview that opposes total scientific rationalism.

life that can and will overcome. To be clear, however, by reading this final scene and the symbolism of the *crucero* in this way, my point is not to argue that nature is an absolutely positive force for humans – whether in the fictional world of *Los Pazos de Ulloa* or in the real world it represents – and that the brutality and depravity depicted in the novel comes solely from culture, but rather to show how Bazán rejects the absolute validity of the determinist concept of nature. To put it in a slightly different way: although the characters in the novel may act like animals or machines at various points throughout the work – that is, they may seem to confirm the determinist, mechanist view of humans that is invoked by the cross’s associations with violence –, this departure scene and the way in which this prominent symbol reappears points towards Bazán championing a conception of humans, nature, and life that is not beholden to the determinism or the mechanism that underlies Naturalism. Presenting these contradictory perspectives on what nature is or does, Bazán obliges us to recognize that this concept of “nature” is, ultimately, an abstraction, a discursive construct that can take on different, contradictory qualities depending upon when and by whom it is being used.

Nonetheless, given the much-noted religiosity of the writer in question and the importance of religious symbolism for making this argument, one could disagree with this reading and say that this stone cross does not demonstrate Bazán’s refutation of determinism so much as it exemplifies a belief in God to overcome the baser instincts or failings of humans. In other words, one could interpret this final image of the *crucero* as instead emphasizing that it is only through supernatural intervention that we can overcome the depraving or determinant influence of nature. While this interpretation would certainly offer a way to reconcile the materialist determinism of Naturalism with the Catholic defense of free will, I disagree with this line of reasoning insofar as it overlooks the golden lichen that is at this point in the novel described as adorning the *crucero*. The presence of a lichen itself is not all that remarkable, in fact it is quite reasonable or even expected for a worn stone monument in Galicia to have some lichen on it. However, I contend that by including the lichen – a nonhuman form of life that is notoriously mysterious and strange – in this description that is so charged with religious symbolism, Bazán uses the *crucero* to align the Catholic belief in everlasting life with a more comprehensive, spiritual understanding of life as vital force that is antithetical to the mechanist understanding of life espoused by Naturalism. That is, I see in the symbol of a lichen-adorned stone cross the evidence not of Bazán’s Catholic embrace of Naturalism, but rather her Catholic critique of Naturalism.

To begin, more than just reminding her readers of the unexpected beauty of nature, I contend that Bazán’s calling attention to the lichen’s place on this especially-important symbol offers a nuanced critique of the dualistic worldview established in the Scientific Revolution and sustained by the Naturalist embrace of experimentation. In particular, this lichen on the stone cross appeals to a domain of the natural world that is proof against simplistic, mechanist categorization and prompts us to consider the capacity of the nonhuman world to effect change. First, this carefully-placed symbiont troubles the dualism inherent in notions of human mastery over nature simply because of the fact that it is a lichen and, to put it rather bluntly, lichens are rather strange organisms – ostensibly appearing from nowhere, but growing just about anywhere, even a casual, firsthand account of the lichen reveals a certain degree of troubling of basic, anthropocentric accounts of the nonhuman world. Furthermore, research into the lichen, which is not one organism but rather a composite organism that is constituted

through a symbiotic relationship between algae and cyanobacteria, has shown that it upsets scientific conventions such as the view of organisms as “discrete individuals” (Gilbert, Sapp, Tauber 326) and the anthropocentric definition of mortality (Pringle), both of which have been essential for establishing and sustaining mechanist understandings of the nonhuman world since the early Scientific Revolution. While it would have been implausible for Bazán in the 1880s to have conceived of the truly radical potential of the lichen as it is understood today (in spite of her well-noted erudition in a diversity of fields), I maintain that, in choosing to describe this stone cross as being decorated with a lichen, the Galician author appeals to a domain of the ecological world that has been historically resistant to total comprehension within the schematic mechanism underlying modern Western science.

Not only does the figure of the lichen offer a reminder of the limits of this epistemology, but it more importantly counters what Tsing describes as the “modern synthesis”: the interchangeable, scalable, ahistorical, and self-replicating model of life that underlies the modern epistemological framework (140). Just as Haraway uses dogs and the concept of companion species to explain the errant, binary logic that separates humans from nonhumans and nature from culture, in her *The Mushroom at the End of the World* book Tsing studies a rare mushroom’s preponderance in industrialist ruins to demonstrate the fallacy of modern, Western science basing its teleological concept of history on a simplistic, anthropocentric understanding of species reproduction. In contrast to the Western emphasis on certainty and scalability – concepts that are fundamental for determinism – Tsing proposes a form of history that is based instead on concepts such as precarity, difference, disturbance, and chance encounters. While Tsing’s critique is very expansive, her rejection of the “modern synthesis” and its basis in certainty and scalability has much to do with literary Naturalism: like the medical experiments on which it is based, the literary experiment presupposes a world that is both orderly and reproducible. The lichen on the *crucero* then, just like the matsutake mushroom Tsing studies in her book, whose preponderance in post-industrial logging environments and resistance to synthetic cultivation confound this modern synthesis, stands as a manifestation of doubt within the epistemology of modern science.

Bazán calls our attention to a lichen as a way of destabilizing the concept of science and of nature on which Naturalist literary experiments are based. Just as the novel is coming to its close and the results of the author’s literary experiment are made apparent, this lichen here obliges us to ask: if we claim these experiments are based on nature, then what is the nature to which we refer and how does this nature actually act in the world? The interest here is not about what lichens are or how they act, of course, but rather how the lichen, through its strangeness, makes us question how science is applied to the study of humans. If we base our epistemology not on certainty and scalability, but on the uncertainty and difference that is manifest in the lichen, then the premise of performing literary experiments is itself thrown into doubt. Uncertainty, for one, plays a significant role in how the novel unfolds, specifically in chapter 29 of the *Los Pazos de Ulloa* (famously narrated by the young Perucho), which directly precedes the chapter in which Julián departs the Pazos. In specific, the climactic actions of this chapter, which include Julián’s dismissal under suspicion of adultery and Primitivo’s assassination, are set forth by Julián’s forgetting to pay Perucho for his help in the church, a chance error that makes the young boy tell of the priest’s post-liturgical rendezvous with Nucha to Primitivo, whose own rush to accuse Julián makes him ill-prepared for the eventual attempt

on his life. Of course, a scientific, deterministic explanation could be created to account for all these actions, but my argument here is that, by including figures such as the lichen, which subtly appeal to the points of doubt within the determinist epistemology, Bazán is emphasizing the importance of uncertainty for human actions and, in doing so, is critiquing the Naturalist faith in a positivist experimental method. It is not a coincidence that this questioning of the Naturalist understanding of science occurs at moments that are crucial for the literary experiment: at the beginning, as the parameters of the experiment are set, and at the end, right after we have witnessed the results of the experiment.

In addition, Bazán's mention of the lichen during this all-important scene further troubles the concept of life that is inherent in material determinism and its defense of the nature-culture binary insofar as the presence of this symbiont points towards the natural processes that will eventually erode this simple monument. In this respect, the usage here of the past participle of "manchar" is especially important for understanding this passage. Although the most apparent translation would be that the *crucero* is "stained" by this archetypal symbiont, the alternative I propose here is that the golden adornment of the lichen is being likened to the first stroke of painterly color on this canvas of stone.⁷ Understood in this way, then, this passage is not just remarking on the recently-realized natural beauty of the *crucero*, but is likewise gesturing towards the beginning of a natural process that will break down this human construction, eventually leading to its ultimate decay and disappearance. What I propose, in other words, is that we consider this lichen as an *actant*, to use Latour's term, whether individually or collectively with other nonhuman forces, whose action is the long-term deterioration of this stone marker. Not only is the lichen beyond the comprehension of this mechanist schema, but it likewise reveals the delusion of anthropocentric control implicit in this quintessentially modern schema. Bazán here advances an understanding of life, whether human or nonhuman, that aligns considerably with that of the vitalists, a group of diverse thinkers who, from a variety of perspectives, epistemologically opposed the mechanist theory of life (Fernández-Medina 4). An "antimovement," in the words of Fernández-Medina, vitalism has become defined in opposition to mechanism, and thus rejects the proposition that the natural world functions like a simple machine or that humans maintain a unique capacity to study, learn, and eventually control the mechanisms of these "machines". In addition to showing that life is more complex and less human-like than mechanist thought customarily esteems it to be, this lichen, by alluding to the processes through which nonhumans act in the world, exemplifies the fallacy of absolute human control over the nonhuman.

In depicting the *crucero* in this optimistic, Romantic way – rather significantly, by associating the vital force of nature with the Catholic narrative of salvation, that is, Christ's conquering of death – Bazán advances a concept of life that is unaccountable within the wholly materialist, mechanist worldview espoused by orthodox Naturalism. Far from representing the brutality of humans when left in their natural state, and thus becoming a token of what is generally considered to be the novel's Manichean struggle between nature and civilization, the stone cross as seen in this moment of the novel, with its arms outstretched and its gray stone adorned by a golden lichen, instead undermines this dualist opposition by demonstrating a

⁷ From the *Diccionario del Real Academia Española's* entry for "manchar": "3. tr. Pint. Iniciar la pintura del cuadro aplicando los primeros colores."

much more ample comprehension of life. When considered together with the other example of the horse, we see that these two symbols function neither to confirm the Naturalist hypothesis nor to provide any clear substitute for the rational, scientific epistemology upon which it is based. Instead, what I show in my reading of these two scenes is that Bazán presents to her readers and obliges them to speculate on a world that is far more complex than the one that would be provided by her adherence to a more clear-cut Naturalism, with the material determinist and mechanist theories that underlie it. It is a world in which divinity, science, and politics all play a significant role in shaping and making sense of, but, more importantly, a world in which none of them exclusively provides a complete or total understanding. Hence the appeals to contemporary scholars such as Haraway, Tsing, and the others whose work I have used in these readings of *Los Pazos de Ulloa*: like these thinkers, Bazán shows, by rejecting a facile understanding of human behavior and demonstrating the complexity with which we should comprehend the world, how the categories and divisions that constitute the modern framework can quite easily and quite dangerously become normative constraints that limit our comprehension of the surrounding world and can be used to sustain harmful structures of control or domination over that world.

Conclusion: The Radical Potential of Bazán's Naturalism

Beyond its importance for refuting determinism by showing Julián's change over the course of the novel, this scene depicting the protagonist's departure exemplifies the complex way that Bazán depicts the human relation to the nonhuman, natural world. Significantly, though, this troubling of the nature-culture binary – what could, more generally, be described as a critique of a facile dualistic worldview – is offered by Bazán as she writes within a genre whose formal practice is based on a method of experimentation that is indebted to the Scientific Revolution and its establishment of the modern concept of nature. It is this period that scholars such as Bruno Latour and Carolyn Merchant, amongst a host of others, have identified as the point of rupture in which a modern concept of nature began to emerge. While these two thinkers scrutinize different aspects of this transitional moment – whereas Latour emphasizes the importance of this break for establishing the Western idea of “the Modern,” Merchant retraces this history to demonstrate how misogyny and environmental exploitation were fundamentally ingrained in the foundational treatises of modern science – they both, by the same token, point to this moment and demonstrate how the experimental method as developed in the Scientific Revolution requires comprehending nature as an object, thus dividing the world along the nebulous frontier of the human and the nonhuman. Specifically, by supplanting an organic, animistic cosmology in which nature was seen as alive with a mechanist worldview positing a “system of dead, inert particles moved by external, rather than inherent forces” (Merchant 281-2), the Scientific Revolution effected what Merchant terms “the death of nature.”

As Merchant argues in her article of this name, by replacing the organicist view of the world with a conceptual framework based instead in mechanism – a “view [that] nature can be divided into parts” from which “facts can be extracted from the environmental context and rearranged according to a set of rules based on logical and mathematical operations” (282) – the “fathers of science” were able to excuse their gruesome experimentation on the nonhuman

world and promote these endeavors as fundamental accomplishments within a Western narrative of progress. This same rhetoric of saving or advancing humanity through gruesome acts of experimentation on nonhuman others passes through Claude Bernard, whose defense of experimentation as a means of manipulating and mastering natural phenomena reproduces much of Bacon's arguments from two centuries prior (Merchant 276), on its way to Zola and his much-discussed manifesto. Bernard's reputation for performing vivisection, and his defense of this practice in his *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, caused no small scandal in his day, giving rise to ardent anti-vivisection societies, including one led by his former wife, who divorced him over his unwavering support of this practice. And while the association of scandal was, as Oancea points out (680), a significant impetus in Zola's aligning his scandalous literary genre with Bernard, the novelist was primarily drawn to the idea of vivisection as a metaphor for his new form of literary practice: just as Bernard would experiment on living bodies to better understand the physiological maladies of humans, Zola would intervene and (perhaps not so literally) experiment on the real, existent social body in order to better understand the maladies that society was suffering. It should come as little surprise then that Zola, as he calls for applying the experimental method to literature in *The Experimental Novel*, rehearses the language of this mechanist, rational worldview as well as that of a masculine instrumentalism.

Thus, when Bazán presents a more complex view of the human relationship with nature in *Los Pazos de Ulloa*, she is not just rebuking the more extreme ideas found in Zola's literary proclamations, but is likewise rejecting many of the ideologies underpinning these ideas. Julián – this ever-important character – most clearly stands as a repudiation of determinism, as most critics of this master work would contend. Additionally, though, as his interactions with the horses and the *crucero* in these two scenes demonstrate, this character likewise manifests a relationship to the nonhuman world that is not based in the associated ideologies of dualism, instrumentalism, or mechanism, but rather in mutualism and interdependence. These interactions offer an example of a relation between humans and nonhumans in which humans can be exceptional but also are dependent upon and can be exceeded themselves by nonhuman others. Thus, beyond simply critiquing material determinism, by depicting nature in such a complex fashion, Bazán undermines the entire scientific epistemology underlying Zola's Naturalism. What I see as the radical potential of Bazán's work, then, is that, in doing this, she likewise critiques the techno-scientific worldview that justifies the capitalist exploitation of nature. Essentially, Bazán shows the instability of a concept of "nature" that is defined discursively, of a "nature" that is "that which is not human culture," which has been used to both shape and defend various ideologies that have then sought to exploit whatever has counted as "nature" at that given moment.⁸

⁸ Williams (1980) explains how the Western construction of a discursive "nature" constitutes, simultaneously, the delimiting of the nature-culture binary and the establishment of nature as a secular, "constitutional" force, whose scientific properties are used retroactively to comprehend that which is considered "nature" (72-73). The dual force of this transition to an abstracted concept of nature, one which Williams labels the historicization of nature (69-75) – an idea which has its analogues in, for instance, in Latour's concept of the modern Constitution or Tsing's idea of the modern synthesis –, is essential for understanding how science is then used to justify the exploitation of these convergent categories of "nature" and "the nonhuman."

Throughout this chapter and, especially, in the analyses offered in the previous section, I have framed Bazán's critique in the context of this well-worn binary of nature and culture. However, beyond just overturning this dualistic logic, *Los Pazos de Ulloa* more importantly shows the limits of this logic, pointing towards a way of comprehending humans acting in the world that is not predicated on our absolute separation from this binary other, nature. For example, as is evident in my readings of these two critical scenes with Julián, attempting to interpret them through this binary logic of human civilization and nonhuman nature leads to some slight incoherence, as it is rather difficult and complicated to describe them without alluding to interdependence, mutualism, or some degree of vitalist organicism. In this way, I find that Bazán's view of nature aligns much more clearly with non-binary understandings of the human-nature relationship, such as Haraway's aforementioned "naturecultures" or the "web of life" metaphor offered by Jason W. Moore in his *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, which contends that nature is not "a set of objects that humans act upon," but instead "a web of life that human relations develop *through*" (44, emphasis in the original).

Moore's idea, likewise captured in his use of the term *oikeios* to signify "the creative, generative, and multi-layered relation of species and environment" (14), is noteworthy not only for how it characterizes human existence as an inseparable and constantly-developing entanglement with our world, but also for how it rather comprehensively connects capitalist exploitation with the dualist logic through which we have othered the nonhuman nature with whom we cohabit this planet. Similar to Merchant before him, who points broadly to the Scientific Revolution as the period during which a mechanist worldview emerged in lockstep with a uniquely capitalist exploitation of this newly-defined and ordered nature, Jason W. Moore argues that "Capitalism is a way of organizing nature" (14) and that "the view of Nature as external is a fundamental condition of capital accumulation" (14). The main focus of Moore's project then is to show how conceiving of the human-nature relation through the metaphor of a web of life – in lieu of the binary dualism that has characterized modernity – allows us to understand the history of capitalism/modernity as, essentially, "environment-making processes" (22). While such a reconfiguration will not in and of itself put an end to capitalist exploitation or undo the environmental harm effected by centuries of global capitalism, it can help us better understand – and thus confront – the specific mechanisms through which capital employs a mix of political power, cultural conventions, and techno-scientific knowledge to appropriate the labor/energy from the world, whether human or nonhuman (Moore 63).

In the same way, I do not believe that Bazán's more complex depiction of the relations between humans and nature in *Los Pazos de Ulloa* directly challenges capitalist modernity's appropriation of nature, but, nevertheless, it quite significantly opens up a discourse in which these practices can be contemplated and questioned. Specifically, by dwelling in Naturalism, by not outright rejecting the determinism, mechanism, and instrumentalism that underlie this genre but by carefully and thoroughly exploring these worldviews, displaying both their strengths and their limitations, Bazán offers her readers an opportunity to inspect and scrutinize a "modern" world that these ideas have formed and continue to form. This is, to return once more to Labanyi, especially important given the historical period in which our author is writing: the novel takes place in 1868, the year of the revolution that "opened Spain up to modern ideas" (342), and is written during the period of the Restoration, when the modernization project became extended through a Spanish territory that was becoming

established as a national community (4). It is precisely in this specific historical moment, as Spain was becoming a modern, capitalist nation, that Bazán cautions against the positivist epistemology underlying this process of modernization, showing the tension and the instability of the scientific truths on which it is based.

Coda: Bazán, Zola, and the Limits of Science

As alluded to earlier in this chapter, one of the more inconvenient impediments to reading Emilia Pardo Bazán's work in an environmental way is her undeniably-valid and earned reputation as a Catholic writer. In specific, it is difficult to interpret her as, on one hand, supporting a more holistic view of humans being in a state of mutualistic interdependence with the nonhuman world and, on the other hand, professing the human exceptionalism associated with Christianity. However, while we cannot discount her faith when reading her oeuvre, I do not find her religious belief to be a severe encumbrance to regarding her work as belonging to an environmental tradition. First, as discussed earlier, her disagreement with Zola is based as much in religious doctrine as it is in her intellectual skepticism of his appeals to dubious scientific theories. Second, Catholicism offers her a diverse set of approaches to the question of humanity's relation with nature: as Binde points out, a Catholic perspective of the nonhuman world could range from being a materialistic view that shares much of the same provenance in Western thought as the mechanist approach of the Scientific Revolution, to an idyllic view of the countryside as an uncorrupted domain that is spiritually closer to the divine, to, finally, a mystical, supernatural approach that borders on pantheism, as espoused in the Franciscan tradition (Binde 23-24). While all three of these perspectives appear in some form in *Los Pazos de Ulloa* and its depiction of a Catholic chaplain, I would like to highlight how the vitalist concept of life, which I argued earlier is found in the symbol of the *crucero*, is quite clearly an indication of this third perspective. In addition to showing how Bazán's faith does not lead her to supplant one brand of human exceptionalism for another, her emphasis on this third Catholic approach to nature shares many commonalities with non-Western, indigenous concepts of nature that similarly counter modern dualism. Although I would caution, as I did earlier with regards to lichens and environmentalism, against recovering Bazán as some neo-indigenous scholar, I do find this resonance significant insofar as it exemplifies the inconsistencies and contradictions embedded within European modernity and its interconnected ideologies of capitalism and imperialism.

At least in terms of allowing Bazán to present her readers with a much more complex and practical portrayal of the nineteenth-century milieu depicted in her novel, then, I find that Bazán's Catholic faith provided her an advantage over a writer such as Zola insofar as it allowed her to imagine a world that was not wholly beholden to capitalism and its logic of selfish accumulation and exploitation. Although the French writer is certainly not the "bad guy" that he may have been characterized as up to this point in the chapter – it is worth noting that his project was in its time both revolutionary and progressive, with an ethical commitment to put on display the uncomfortable and oft-ignored realities of modern life in order to diagnose and improve the health of the social body (Oancea 685) –, his novels admittedly offer a cynical vision of the modern world in which selfishness is the principal determinant of human action. To this effect, Brown remarks that, "Zola frequently writes as if the barest essentials of

Christian charity had never been known on earth. In many of the books all of his people are at heart purely selfish, purely wolfish. They present a picture of society as it would be were all virtue and altruism dead; even common human sympathy is often lacking” (65). While Zola’s repudiation of religion was not without merit – in his effort to dispel society of the taboos and superstitions that prevented truthfully naming the ills that plagued it, he rightfully depicted the Church as a willing impediment to social change through its hypocritical imposition of outdated morals and dogma –, he perhaps failed to recognize the capacity for unselfish righteousness that a religious morality can provide. If Zola’s novels present a brutally-capitalistic modern world replete with selfishness in which one’s fate is determined by factors out of our personal control, it is because he was depicting a world in which this generally was – and to a large degree, today still is – the (capitalist) reality. However, in faithfully depicting the capitalist hegemony of society and in applying the very same scientific theories used by capitalism to justify its exploitation of the nonhuman world, Zola ends up reproducing its selfish logic, offering zero possibility for even imagining a different world. Thus, while Bazán likewise presents a world in which selfishness is much more the rule than the exception, she nonetheless leaves a significant space in which there is an opposition to this capitalist logic, one in which altruism can still exist. While such a non-reciprocal concern for the well-being of others may appear to be a naïve response to an inherently-selfish ideology, perhaps even more so today than in the time of Zola and Bazán, an extended form of altruism clearly informs Haraway’s concept of “significant otherness,” which proposes a form of ethical relating based on an awareness of “otherness-in-relation” between and amongst species: an awareness of otherness that nonetheless recognizes the inextricable entanglements of being that bind us to these human and non-human others (*The Companion Species* 49-50). Going beyond the anthropocentric limits of “altruism,” then, we can thus read the character of Julián as likewise exemplifying significant otherness, that is, being aware of his “otherness-in-relation” to the many forms of life which he encounters during his formative time at the Pazos.

Nonetheless, in a simpler way, what I hope to show here in the final section of this chapter is that the author from Galicia is not just some religious zealot whose faith offered her and her readers a glimmer of false hope within a hegemonic capitalist system that was actively and rapidly restructuring Spanish society in the late 1800s. As is evident in *La cuestión palpitante*, Bazán understood and accepted much of the prevailing scientific theory under discussion during her time, but she also recognized its limits, which in and of itself was significant during a crucial period in which this scientific discourse was increasingly being employed as a means of understanding the world and was, in particular, serving as the theoretical basis for modernity’s increasingly-hegemonic capitalist ideology. Whether this skepticism was a product of her general intellectual discretion or her religious belief is not as important as the fact that her worldview both allowed for the possibility to resist the cynical selfishness that epitomizes capitalism and, as I show in the remaining paragraphs of this chapter, presented a much more accurate and interesting impression of modern science.

In this respect, perhaps the most harmful aspect of Zola’s *Experimental Novel* manifesto is how it has, at least for generations of humanities scholars, solidified an image of Claude Bernard as a fanatic, unwavering mechanist, hell-bent on performing gruesome experiments to corroborate his extremist ideas regarding science. He did unabashedly perform some horrifying experiments, as his divorce proceedings surely could attest, and he did publish a treatise

defending his reasons for doing so, yet this *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* reads today as a rather surprising document given the degree to which it openly identifies the limitations of the method that it is ostensibly endorsing. Although Bernard constantly relies on masculine, mechanist rhetoric to defend the importance of his contribution to science, at various moments he comes across as a vitalist, acknowledging a mysterious life force that resists even the most trailblazing acts of experimental investigation: for instance, at one moment, he writes, “If I had to define life in a single phrase, I should clearly express my thought by throwing into relief the one characteristic which, in my opinion, sharply differentiates biological science. I should say: life is creation” (Bernard 93) Unexpected statements like this bespeak the strained, self-limiting logic in Bernard that, at once, defends mechanism and admits that there exists a vital force of life that his method of experimentation is insufficient for explaining: as Normandin states, “he admits that one comes to a point, usually reached when the question of first causes begins to arise, where science fails us. The life force is thus for Bernard as much of an ‘occult’ force as gravity was for Newton. Yet this does not prevent him from using all the tools of experimental medicine to try and understand the workings of the human machine” (527).

In reexamining the legacy of Bernard, what scholars such as Normandin and Wasserstein have uncovered is the French physiologist’s acceptance, albeit partial, of a vitalist epistemology that is at odds with the mechanism he is so famous for championing. Similarly, close readings of Bacon’s foundational writings by Pesic have argued, counter Merchant, that his treatises on experimentation put forward a much more restrained attitude toward the treatment of nonhuman nature than that which is customarily attributed to him. While I hope that this brief apologia for Western science does not undermine my overall thesis here in this chapter – for starters, the important point is not what these thinkers actually said, but rather how their writings have been interpreted and used in practice –, I include it because it helps vindicate Bazán’s more measured take on science as found in her essays and her fiction. In particular, this non-caricatured, non-dualistic review of scientific history is more compelling and more accurate insofar as these fundamental writings, in their attempts to defend and impose mechanist or deterministic ideas on the earth, ultimately end up recognizing the limits of this endeavor and acknowledging the validity of what is described as, through various names, some abstract, ineffable source of life. In fact, as Bernard’s work unintentionally reveals, the more “objective” and more mechanist that we try to make the sciences, the more we realize that there is something that cannot be accounted for with these schemas. Put differently, these “fathers of modern science,” in their attempts to present an objective and mechanist view of the natural world, oft end up invoking a mysterious, idealist perspective of the world that is not all that different from Emilia Pardo Bazán’s use of a more Romantic mode at crucial points in her novel. Thus, it could be said that, in breaking with Zola’s Naturalism, Bazán ends up presenting a much more complicated, but also a much more faithful application of modern science to the realm of literature.

Chapter 2

Transhumant/Transhuman

A Posthuman Reading of Julio Llamazares's *La lluvia amarilla*

Originating as a term in the various Romance languages spoken throughout the Pyrenees, “transhumance” describes the seasonal movement of peoples and their herds of grazing animals across different lands, generally from lower elevations that provide refuge in the winter to higher elevations with open pastureland in the warmer months of the year.⁹ Neither nomadic nor sedentary,¹⁰ “transhumance” and its associated verb “to transhume” describes a specific way of living that emerged in the northern Mediterranean and became especially prevalent in the Spanish Pyrenees, but also has come to signify a tendency of humans to move or to seasonally change the land on which they reside in search of resources.

Although its usage broadly encompasses ways of life in other regions that similarly lie between nomadic and sedentary, the emergence of transhumance in the Pyrenean region owes to the specificities of physical geography of the region as well as the cultural history of the Iberian Peninsula. As Davies explains, both the mountainous landscape, with close proximity of high and low elevations, and the climate, which creates seasonal variation between these high- and low-laying lands, were significant geographical factors in the formation of this lifestyle in northern Spain (Davies 155-156). However, as Ruiz and Ruiz describe in their “Ecological History of Transhumance in Spain,” the various waves of Arab conquest of Spain brought new peoples, new animals, and new concepts of property to Iberian lands, which helped further establish transhumant ways of life in Spain during the second millennium AD. In specific, Ruiz and Ruiz argue that transhumant practices were enhanced by three principal factors during the eight centuries in which the Iberian Peninsula was ruled as Al-Andalus: the “cultural influence of North African Berber peoples” who were nomadic or transhumant (76), the arrival of the economically important Merino sheep in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Moorish invasions (77), and the adoption of an Arab concept of property based on the common usufruct of the land, which opposed the Roman idea of individual property rights (76).¹¹

⁹ The OED defines it, concisely, as “The seasonal transfer of grazing animals to different pastures, often over substantial distances.”

¹⁰ Perhaps given to binary habits of thought that define societies as either sedentary or nomadic, “transhumance” is often referred to as an example of a nomadic lifestyle and economic system, a classification that is periodically rejected by geographers who study the phenomenon: for a more detailed discussion of why this is wrong and misleading, see Evans (1940) and Jones (2005).

¹¹ Ruiz and Ruiz use the very broad term “Arab culture” to describe these customs. Their source for this claim, Julius Klein’s *The Mesta: A Study in Spanish Economic History, 1273-1836*, points to the nomadic, desert lifestyle of different groups of the North Africans who migrated to Spain during the time of Al-Andalus as well as the “character of Mussulman property law, which, unlike the Roman law, gives precedence to the possession and actual use of the land over any claims of title” (297). Interestingly, in the chapter on “Pasturage,” Klein describes how the *Reconquista*, with its increasing enclosure of the land by private individuals and individual towns, progressively made these transhumant practices more formalized through a variety of legal measures.

Although it is no longer practiced widely in the Pyrenees, transhumance still exists in the world. It has always been, as Davies states, a marginal practice in the strictest sense of the word: it generally occurs in regions that are adjacent to uninhabited ones, where just enough possibilities for sustenance exist to justify habitation, and it is economically associated today with unstable or uncertain conditions (155). Thus, in the Spanish Pyrenees, as this mountainous region has become emptied and its many economies have become increasingly modernized, depending much more on tourism or industry and far less on agriculture, the transhumant lifestyle has nearly disappeared. In fact, as Ruiz and Ruiz note, though the practice had begun to die out because of the economic and social restructuring that was brought about by the progressive end of the *ancien régime* across Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was the industrial modernization of Spain in the 1960s that conclusively marked the end of transhumance as a way of life in the Pyrenees (80, 84).

“Transhumance” is, in spite of homophonic similarity, not to be confused with “transhumanism,” a philosophy that “seeks the continued evolution of human life beyond its current human form as a result of science and technology guided by life-promoting principles and values” (More 1). These two terms are thus as semantically distant as they are phonetically similar. While I initially discarded this as nothing more than a humorous coincidence, in the process of researching and writing this chapter on the posthuman in Julio Llamazares’s 1988 novel about the depopulation of the Spanish Pyrenees, I have persistently come back to these nearly-identical words, wondering what these countervailing linguistic tendencies can inform what I am trying to do by analyzing this work of literature through the framework of the posthuman. Through a brief exercise in scrutinizing the differences between these two concepts, in this introduction I deconstruct the linguistic origins of the idea of the “human” that Llamazares questions over the course of his novel.

La lluvia amarilla (1988), is much more about transhumance than transhumanism: written entirely as a first-person inner monologue told by its aging protagonist Andrés, it gives a fictionalized account of the depopulation of Ainielle, a real *pueblo* in the Spanish Pyrenees that was left abandoned in the late 1960s. From what we read in the novel (a period that covers the last ten years of the protagonist’s life), Andrés lives a mostly traditional life; no explicit references to transhumant grazing practices are mentioned in the book, but he does take advantage of the summer thaw to both go up to higher grounds and there is a passing mention to shepherds passing through the valley with their flocks. However, scant references are made to modern technology – while Llamazares’s depiction is not one of a primitive, fully-isolated village unbeknownst to civilization, the photographs of the village’s past are perhaps the exception when it comes to allusions to the technologies most associated with twentieth-century modernization.

If there is no technology throughout this work, then what is the posthumanist framework that I am trying to uncover here? As the myriad frameworks employed across this dissertation can attest, the concept of the posthuman is both very broad and ideologically malleable. Like other “post-” concepts, it scrutinizes and seeks to move beyond the term on which it is formed; in this case, the Western, modern idea of the human. On one of the more extreme ends lies transhumanism, which claims that science and technology have given humans the capacity to exceed the biological limits of the human. Imbued with both technological optimism and human exceptionalism, transhumanism is posthuman in that it

questions the conventional limits of the human, actively seeking to replace it and create a new, techno-biological cyborg in its place.¹² This is not, however, the main concept of the posthuman that I am working with in this chapter or in this dissertation, as explained briefly in the Introduction. In spite of their mission to transcend the biological limits of the human, the posthumanism of the transhumanists is one that “derives directly from ideals of human perfectibility, rationality, and agency inherited from Renaissance humanism and the Enlightenment” (Wolfe xiii); in contrast, the idea of the posthuman that I see as most relevant to Llamazares’s novel is one that – in accordance with how this term is used by thinkers such as Hayles, Haraway, and Wolfe – explores the ways in which this modern concept delimits and sets the human apart from the nonhuman world in which it is embedded.

Which brings me back once more to the differences between these two terms, “transhumance” and “transhumanism”. They both use the prefix “trans-“ to describe a movement, whether conceptual or physical, across or beyond. The “-hum-“ root that they move across is different, though: the former comes from “humus” meaning ground or soil,¹³ while the latter comes from “human.” However, the further we delve into etymology, these differences come back around and become similarities once again: “human” and “humus” may come from distinct Latin roots, but this is because both words originated from a pre-Latin root, a legacy that is maintained in the ancient distinction between “humans,” who were of the earth, and the gods.¹⁴ Of course, etymology can and should only get us so far, never bringing these two words together entirely, but instead making us more attentive to how and why such a semantic divergence arose between two concepts with nearly identical linguistic origins. The end result is a “grounding” in the most literal sense of the word, demonstrating that “humans” are not so different from “humus,” in a way that is reminiscent of Haraway’s provocations of “Chthulucene instead of Anthropocene” or “We are compost, not posthuman!”¹⁵ Ultimately, the common “-hum-“ root shared by “transhumance” and “transhumanism” serves as a reminder that humans are of the earth, inherently and inextricably embedded within a nonhuman, material world. And, in this way, this exercise in etymology offers an implicit rebuke to the immortal ambitions of the transhumanists, since this connection between human and nonhuman is precisely the connection that they want to break by moving beyond the human as

¹² Critiques of transhumanism abound, from Haraway’s *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), in which she appropriates the masculine, techno-scientific paragon of transhumanism and uses it to critique Western binary thought with regards to the human; to Hayles’s *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), in which the author scrutinizes cybernetic and transhumanist understandings of the human/machine binary and ultimately critiques a Western, Cartesian dualism that errantly divides human and machine in terms of cognition; to Fukuyama’s (2009) socio-political critique of transhumanism’s general ignorance towards questions of equality and politics.

¹³ Specifically, the OED lists “humus” as “Vegetable mould; the dark-brown or black substance resulting from the slow decomposition and oxidization of organic matter on or near the surface of the earth, which, with the products of the decomposition of various rocks, forms the soil in which plants grow”.

¹⁴ See the OED entries for “humans” and “homo-“. Less reputable, but providing a more straightforward synthesis, is the *Online Etymological Dictionary’s* entry for “human.”

¹⁵ Characteristic of Haraway’s general critique of dualist notions of humans as separate from the nonhuman world, the “chthulucene” (from the Greek, “chthonic,” of the world or underworld) and compost are both examples offered in *Staying with the Trouble* to provoke considerations of the human as embedded within the organic earth, part of her calls to “make kin” with others as a way of maintaining life on Earth in a moment of planetary precarity.

a biological being; the transhumanist end is one of finally dividing the “human” from “humus,” of making humans into gods that are ever living and, thus, no longer of the earth.

Nonetheless, and despite the fact that Llamazares’s rural novel may unsurprisingly offer a vision of the posthuman that is more transhuman than transhumanist, both of these concepts of the posthuman are important for understanding how *La lluvia amarilla* depicts the changing relationship between the human and the nonhuman world that has occurred in Spain during the past half century. As I review in the following section, the novel is written – with twenty or thirty years remove – about a period in Spain’s history during which there occurred large-scale changes between humans and nonhuman nature: in specific, during the decades of the 1950s and the 1960s there were, first, substantial demographic changes that transformed Spain from a primarily agricultural, rural country into an urban one whose economy was based on industry and services, and second, substantial infrastructural developments that transformed the physical landscape of Spain. Both of these macro changes represent a conceptual distancing of humans from nature – the first makes life less dependent on direct interaction with the natural world while the latter posits that we are separate from nature, that we can express our dominion over that nature by changing it through our use of technology. Understanding the novel within the context of these two large-scale transformations, my proposal in this chapter is thus to consider the novel’s central meditation on the boundary between the human and the nonhuman – the novel essentially offers a drawn-out example of the classic “character vs. nature” narrative trope – as a reaction to changing perceptions regarding the concept of the human in Spain during the latter half of the twentieth century.

In the following section, I review what I see as the two consequential changes in Spain with regards to the human and nature during the later decades of the twentieth century in Spain: the rural exodus of the Spanish population, and the modernization of Spain’s infrastructure. Although the focus in this section is on the more general, nationwide changes that occurred during the second half of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship and the first decades of its transition to a democratic government, in order to better understand the narrative, I first review briefly how these changes specifically affected the town of Ainielle and its surrounding region. Following this historical review, the chapter moves to an analysis of the posthuman in Llamazares’s novel, focusing on three specific binary distinctions by which the author interrogates the figure of the human: human-tree, human-animal, and human-environment. By analyzing distinct passages of the novel according to these three categories, my goal is to demonstrate how Llamazares scrutinizes the concept of the human during this moment of rapid, substantial modernization and transformation in Spain.

Ainielle and Modern Spain: The Changing Relationship between Humans and Nature in the Twentieth Century

At over 1200 meters above sea level, located some fifteen miles south of the border with France and roughly thirty miles north of the eponymous, provincial capital of Huesca, Ainielle belongs to the Sobrepuerto region of Aragón, delimited on the east and the west by the Ara and Gallegos rivers, respectively. As Marco Kunz describes in his article, “Realidad y ficción de un pueblo abandonado: *La lluvia amarilla*,” culturally and agriculturally, Sobrepuerto is caught between the *Prepirineo* and the *Pirineo alto*, was settled at some point in the Middle

Ages and functioned up until the mid-twentieth-century in autarkic fashion with “una agricultura de subsistencia [que] producía lo necesario para vivir” (122). Similar to the many other Spanish villages that suffered a gradual process of abandonment during the twentieth century, there were myriad reasons for the depopulation of Ainielle, of which Kunz lists, “la falta de trabajo, carreteras, electricidad, teléfono y otras comodidades en los lugares apartados, las condiciones materiales que ofrecían los valles y los centros urbanos, más una política estatal de expulsión en la época franquista” (120). Beyond these more general causes of depopulation, Kunz states that, in the case of Ainielle and similar mountain villages in this region, the exodus began in force during the Civil War – during which the region was bombed heavily given its strategic importance at the border – and then continued steadily during the Franco period until it was ultimately abandoned in the late 1960s, with many of the migrants settling in regional centers such as Sabiñánigo or Huesca, with even more ending up in larger cities such as Barcelona or Zaragoza (123).

Dissimilar to the other small towns across Spain in which this twentieth-century exodus occurred is the fact that, as Kunz points out, the story of Ainielle’s depopulation has been memorialized in fiction not just once, but twice: the local author Enrique Satué Oliván first published a short story in his *El Pirineo abandonado* collection about this town, which later found its way into the hands of the Leonese author, serving as the inspiration for what would ultimately become his novel-length depiction (120). Expanded from a short story entitled “Nochevieja en Ainielle,” written by the author after a visit to the region in 1986 and published at the end of that same year in *El País* (Kunz 125-6), Llamazares’s novelistic account imbues this not-all-too-uncommon episode in Spain’s recent history with rich, haunting symbolism. But behind this fictional account is a story that is far from uncommon amongst the countless abandoned *pueblos* of Spain, one that was brought about by the Francoist dictatorship’s twentieth-century modernization of Spain and its complicated, contradictory ideological posturing in the decades that followed the Civil War. Additionally, Llamazares’s account allows for a unique historical perspective: originally written (1986) and published (1988) in the years following what many see as the end of Spain’s *Transición* to democracy (its official accession in the European Communities, now known as the EU, on January 1, 1986), the novel discusses a phenomenon typical of the transformations brought about by late Francoism (the 1960s and early 1970s), with a narrator who recounts memories of early Francoism, the *Guerra civil española*, and the time immemorial that ostensibly preceded the historical events recounted in the novel. In this way, the author folds one generation’s lives and memories on top of another through the fictional device of the novel.

Expanding the scope beyond the particular case of Ainielle and taking a rather broad view of what are substantial changes, in this section I discuss the causes and effects of Spain’s mid-twentieth-century rural exodus, as well as provide a brief review of the Francoist modernization of the landscape that occurred during this same period, focusing on the long-deferred, *regeneracionista* dream of modernizing the hydrological infrastructure of the Spanish state. As mentioned above, the depopulation of the smaller, rural settlements of Huesca represents just a sample of the widespread, national exodus from the countryside to the city that occurred quite precipitously in the middle of the Francoist dictatorship, primarily during the decade of the 1960s, preceded by the limited economic expansion of the mid-1950s and accelerated in 1959 by the complete abandonment of early Francoism’s ever-shaky autarkic

economic model with the Economic Stabilization Plan. While, as Paniagua notes in his study of different perspectives towards depopulation during Francoism, the emptying of the *campo* had been discussed in written publications since at least the mid-nineteenth century, and, as Williams famously argues in his *The Country and the City*, this sentimental yearning for the halcyon days of the countryside has been an evergreen exercise in exaggerated nostalgia since the dawn of Western civilization, it is essential to note that the migration of people from the country to the city that occurred in Spain during the 1960s and 1970s was a particularly acute example of such a geo-demographic transition both in terms of the proportion of the national population who migrated and the rapidity with which they did so.¹⁶ Similarly, the infrastructural modernization that occurred in the latter decades of Francoism did not occur in a historical vacuum, and this period should not be considered the final realization of a long, teleologic modernization process.¹⁷ However, the rapidity with which this modernization occurred – in a time frame that paralleled the abandonment of the countryside – and the focus of this modernization, on creating a long-desired national hydrological infrastructure that would evenly distribute water and produce electricity for an increasingly-urban national populace, make this process especially apposite for inclusion within this discussion of rural exodus.

As Shubert remarks in his *A Social History of Modern Spain*, the end of autarky and the accompanying liberalization of the Spanish economy allowed for the economic “miracle” that led to the unprecedented economic growth, transformed the composition of the labor force, and served as the catalyst for Spain’s rural exodus. Prior to 1960, Spain was a primarily agricultural economy – and a terribly inefficient one at that (Shubert 206-207) – with a considerable surplus of laborers toiling, for low wages and low yield, in the agricultural sector.¹⁸ This substantial misallocation of labor and general impoverishment of the Spanish populace was far from unknown in these early decades of Francoism, yet the protectionist model of economic self-sufficiency championed by the government, coupled with fascist Spain’s political isolation in the American-led post-WWII world order, meant that Spain would not receive the foreign investment necessary to adequately diversify and industrialize its economy. For example, citing Martín’s 1946 study on the agricultural sector, Paniagua states that, in this moment, Spain’s economy had roughly fifty percent of its working population employed in agriculture, doubling what was then considered to be the estimated maximum level of workers needed in this sector for an efficient, sustainable level of national economic production. Put differently, Spain had up this point a very unevenly modernized economy in an increasingly globalized, capitalist world. In order to participate and compete in this world, it would have to remedy this macroeconomic inefficiency: converting the surplus of rural laborers into the urban

¹⁶ Estimates for the total number of migrants vary depending on the temporal frame one chooses: Paniagua, ostensibly using 1960 as his starting point, states that four million emigrated, while Moreno-Caballud cites a number of six million, using the years of 1955-1975 as his range. Taking the average, these five million emigrants would represent one sixth of Spain’s population in 1960; one seventh of its population in 1970.

¹⁷ Shubert, for example, describes how the original creation of the railway system in mid-nineteenth-century Spain occurred during a period of two decades between 1848-1868.

¹⁸ It was, effectively, a massive underemployment of agricultural labor. As Paniagua makes clear, despite the surplus of labor in the primary sector during these decades, one could still find employment in agriculture during this time, but such jobs were very low-paying because of this surplus of agricultural labor and the conditions of life in the countryside were marked by extreme poverty given the poor state of the Spanish economy.

workforce of an increasingly industrial and service-based economy. To actually effect this transition, however, would require a massive demographic shift and the abandonment of what were many of the ideological pillars of Franco's purported vision for the Spanish state.

Although Francoist technocrats were well aware of this incongruity in the size of the agricultural sector, they could do little to effect a transition in the workforce so long as the national economy was restricted by Francoist adherence to autarky, as it was in the first decades of the dictatorship. Perhaps surprisingly, Payne mentions that the 1950s were a period of substantial growth for Spain's economy, mirroring a trend seen throughout Europe during this decade (464). Substantial national investment in industry during this period helped spur on this trend, but the limits of self-sufficient growth were likewise becoming increasingly apparent to the advisors in the dictator's inner circle: given its isolation, the Spanish economy was limited to inferior goods and inferior technology, which dragged down the entire economy and hampered any further development of industry (Payne 465). Once Spain ultimately decided to abandon the autarkic model in 1959 – after two years of active resistance by Franco and Carrero Blanco (Payne 467-469) – and it began to receive foreign investment that allowed it to modernize and expand industry at a greater capacity, many of those living in the country ultimately decided to instead look for work in the nation's urban centers, even with the still-rather-low wages, unfamiliar environs, and poorly-planned living conditions that greeted these internal migrants in the city.¹⁹ In spite of these setbacks, the prospect of comparatively higher wages after decades of agricultural underemployment, as well as the chance to take part in the modernization that came with Spain's meteoric economic growth, provided a strong impetus for the masses of migrants who would choose to leave the countryside.

Thus, in these final fifteen years of Franco's life, as Shubert points out, "Spain ceased to be primarily an agricultural economy: employment in the agricultural sector fell from 41.7 percent of the labor force in 1960 to 23.1 percent fifteen years later, while industrial employment rose from 31.8 to 36.8 percent and employment in the service sector from 26.5 to 40 percent" (208). Importantly, however, this was a very uneven readjustment of the national economy, one that not only privileged the city to the country, but also exacerbated the already-existing differences between the more-industrially-developed and the less-industrially-developed urban centers, leading to a concentration of industry in a select group of urban-anchored regions (Shubert 208). As was the case with the economic adjustments that led to the emptying of the countryside, for which there was no formal expulsion to the city, there was likewise no explicit policy that favored such an uneven distribution of this new wealth; however, as Shubert states, "the Development Plans of the 1960s minimized investment in infrastructure so that by and large industry located where this already existed" (208), meaning that the vagaries of the market coupled with the already-existing geographical distribution of development ultimately determined where and to what extent such growth would occur.

While this influx of new urbanites was necessary for Spain's galloping growth during this period, the adverse effects of this geo-demographic change did not go unnoticed. Not only did

¹⁹ The low-paying, industrial jobs and the abject living conditions that these migrants found in the *suburbios* of these rapidly-growing urban centers led to many other social problems. Fictionalized in the famous *quinqui* cinema of directors such as Eloy de la Iglesia, these narratives serve as the verso to the narratives of rural exodus found in works such as *La lluvia amarilla*.

it empty specific regions of much of their population and lead to the total abandonment of thousands of *pueblos*,²⁰ it also constituted a complete volte-face for the Francoist regime. Citing various Franco-era thinkers who criticized this rapid exodus from the countryside and the governmental policies, tacit and otherwise, that led to its occurrence, Paniagua states that this emptying of the countryside during the middle years of Francoism and the myriad social problems it caused serve as prime examples of the internal contradictions that plagued the dictatorship as it transitioned from its original economic ideology of national autarky towards its embrace of a modern, industrial, and increasingly interconnected, global capitalistic world order championed by the United States. Primarily, at odds with the Francoist emphasis on a Catholic, social conservatism and associated traditional values such as family and community, the poorly-managed displacement of roughly four million people from the sparsely-populated countryside to these rapidly-growing urban centers abruptly fractured many of these social ties and created a Spanish populace that was distinctively more urban by the time Franco's life came to an end. Summarizing these changes with only a touch of hyperbole, Payne writes that:

The real Spanish revolution was not the defeated struggle of 1936-39 but the social and cultural transformation wrought by the industrialization of the 1960s and 1970s. Rapid urbanization sucked populations from the small rural towns and farming districts that at least in the north had provided much of the backbone of the traditional society and culture. By the time of Franco's death, 40 percent of the labor force was employed in services (reflecting the massive growth of tourism), 38 percent in industry, and only 22 percent in agriculture, the primary sector. This pace of development reoriented social psychology, which became attuned to the common consumerist and hedonist culture of the western world in the second half of the twentieth century. (Payne 483-484)

Less explicitly concerned about hedonism and writing as this exodus was underway, Gallo, a contributor to a 1966 regional farmers' cooperative in Asturias, writes quite prophetically about the irreversible transformations to the small towns that occupy the countryside: "Al paso que vamos, quedarán desiertas zonas no pequeñas de nuestra geografía nacional, con los graves inconvenientes de orden económico y moral que ello supone. ¡Quiera Dios que al intentar dar marcha atrás, no encontremos el camino cerrado!" (Gallo, qtd. in Paniagua). Much more concerned about moral loss than contemporary thinkers, what Gallo refers to here is nonetheless the very same crisis that *La lluvia amarilla* approaches, albeit from the opposite historical perspective; coincidentally, Gallo was writing these words at roughly the same time that the real village of Ainielle became completely and permanently abandoned. While this transition from an agricultural to an urban society was all but inevitable for a country such as Spain given its modernizing ambitions and the massive misallocation of its labor force, and while this redistribution of population starting in the 1950s was more "the continuation on a much greater scale of developments which had begun before the Civil War" (Shubert 218) than it was an *ex nihilo* exodus, the speed at which this redistribution occurred and the lack of

²⁰ An article in *El País* from the early 1980s, cited by Shubert (219), states that Spain had at that moment 2,000 abandoned villages, with another 3,000 predicted to be abandoned in the next years. As many recent news articles about entire villages up for sale could attest, this trend has neither abated nor reversed in the decades since.

planning for its consequences led to outcomes that were as devastating for many of these rural communities as they were antithetical to Falangist ideologies regarding the relationship between national identity and the Spanish *campo*.

Yet, as Richardson and Moreno-Caballud emphasize in their respective analyses of late-Francoist *desarrollismo*, for as much as this rapid rural exodus was ultimately the straw that broke Francoism's ideological backing, these contradictions were embedded within Francoism and its capitalist worldview.²¹ Writing about these very contradictions, Moreno-Caballud states that, "el franquismo utilizó la cuestión rural para dos grandes operaciones, notablemente contradictorias: ensalzar la tradición nacional y alentar la modernización capitalista" (522-23). By appealing to the quintessential, simplified binary of country and city, early Francoist propaganda depicted the former as a space of authenticity and moral fortitude, while the latter was the site of "moral depravity and political corruption," as Richardson explains (11-12). This was a quintessentially conservative, traditionalist inversion of the modern, liberal binary of civilization-barbarism that was a key theme of *Los Pazos de Ulloa*, as discussed in the last chapter. While Bazán's novel, which was published a half century before the Nationalist uprising that commenced the Civil War, complicates any facile or universal equation of the urban with civilization or the rural with barbarism, it nonetheless demonstrates at various moments that "moral depravity and political corruption," to use Richardson's phrase, are not limited to the city. Early Francoism, in contrast, upholding the unquestionably virtuous customs of the rural, used this simplified binary in its inverted form to reinforce the regime's claim to legitimacy as the sole ideology capable of defending true Spanish identity from the insidious cosmopolitanism brought forth by modernization. The dictatorship's celebration of the *campo* and the hard, thankless life of its *campesinos* in this way provided the regime its historical and moral authenticity. In specific, as Richardson mentions, Franco appropriated literary evocations of the "impassive Castilian peasant," matched in its rugged character by the "rugged native soil...of the Castilian *meseta*," to project an ideal of national strength and Spanishness (11). This was a symbolic gesture that is indebted a conservative, nationalistic brand of Romanticism, both in its idealization of the more natural life of the countryside and, as Moreno-Caballud points out (523), its appeal to a concept of nationhood based in the common history shared by a homogenous people in a specific region. In a way that is especially important for *La lluvia amarilla* and its depiction of a very idiosyncratic way of life in the mountainous valleys of Sobrepuerto, Moreno-Caballud likewise notes how this Romantic celebration of a specific ideal of rural life likewise permits the erasure of alternative rural livelihoods such as these as well as the erasure of the significant class differences that characterized those rural spaces ("Trasplantando" 523, "La otra transición" 114).

Thus, not only was Francoism's ultimate destruction of Spain's rural communities in plain contradiction to his celebration of that very same rural way of life as essentially Spanish, but this appeal to the rural was likewise constructed on the base of paradigms that presented an over-simplified, oft contradictory conception of the world. This fact should be, as Moreno-

²¹ Of course, Francoism was not as homogeneous and coherent throughout its four decades as this sentence may suggest; in fact its early emphasis on an autarkic economic model offers a statist, conservative alternative of liberal economic principles. Nonetheless, as Moreno-Caballud argues, these "coqueteos con el fascismo anti-liberal" should not distract from Francoism's eventual and much more consequential adoption of a modern, capitalist ideology (523).

Caballud convincingly argues in his “La otra transición” essay, not all that surprising: its early adherence to autarky notwithstanding, Moreno-Caballud explains how Francoism was not an aberration from the long process of implanting a modern capitalist economy in Spain, but rather represented a more socially conservative and overtly unsympathetic period of this process. Upon opening to the international market economy in the late 1950s, then, Franco’s technocratic economists conveniently abandoned any semblance of fealty to the peoples or cultures of the countryside, and it was, in fact, that very same *campo* and its *campesinos* that became the substantial, unrealized supply of resources that allowed Spain to achieve its “economic miracle.” As both Moreno-Caballud (536) and Richardson (12) attest, it was the fracturing of this link between rhetoric and reality that ultimately made untenable the mythical base underlying Francoism’s nationalist ideology. However, even as this appeal to a national myth fell apart under the weight of the authoritarian regime’s technocratic modernization, it is important to note that the binary of city-country did not similarly collapse; instead, as Richardson explains over the course of *Postmodern Paletos*, it took on myriad different forms, responding to the transformed lived realities of these migrants as well as to the increasingly interconnected, globalized world of the post-Franco 1980s and 1990s. This is, as Raymond Williams argues in *The Country and the City*, to be expected given the fact that this idealized, “pure” ideal of the country can never be fixed on a certain place or time (35), but is instead a structure of feeling used to capture a general sense of longing for a former “organic” or “natural” society that exists apart from an increasingly urban, industrialized present reality (96). Thus, even though the collapse of Francoism’s contradictory ideology towards the country may have disabused the Spanish populace of a specific notion rural authenticity, the binary paradigm of country-city remained, albeit in a country in which there was an ever-decreasing number of citizens who had a direct experience of the realities of rural life and its many idiosyncrasies.

However, it was not just the market-induced abandonment of these *pueblos* that greatly altered the late-twentieth century landscape of Spain and started to manifest the fissures in Francoist ideology regarding the rural: “Junto a él [el éxodo masivo] habría que recordar los cientos de pueblos hundidos bajo los pantanos del franquismo” (Moreno-Caballud 537). That is, not only did the Francoist regime oblige many of its citizens to leave the countryside and leave behind abandoned *pueblos*, it was also quite literally drowning hundreds of those towns under the reservoirs that accompanied its grand projects of hydrological modernization. As mentioned earlier, this is the other significant facet to this story of the dynamic between country-city in Francoist Spain, one which is less concerned with sweeping demographic or labor changes, but rather is about how various infrastructure projects undertaken during the nearly forty years of the dictatorship technologically transformed and helped consolidate, at a national level, a distinctively modern way of relating to nature. Although the first two decades of Franco’s rule were unsurprisingly marked by a lack of national investment,²² the latter decades represented a period of significant construction during which the government realized many of the ever-delayed goals of *regeneracionista* national planning, as principally exemplified by the redistribution of national water resources through a network of dams, reservoirs, and

²² The exception to this trend being the various infrastructure projects – such as the *Canal del Bajo Guadalquivir* or the *Canal de los presas*, as it is aptly known today – that were constructed with the labor of political prisoners.

aqueducts. As Swyngedouw describes in his analysis of water politics in modern Spain, although such plans for a large-scale, national redistribution of hydrological resources had existed officially since the late-nineteenth century, popularized by intellectuals such as Joaquín Costa and having become especially popular as a solution to Spain's prolonged post-imperial decline during the post-1898 period of *regeneracionista* fervor, economic and political instability prevented many of these modernization plans from becoming a reality until the latter half of the twentieth century (Swyngedouw 45-47, 53).

With the financial backing of foreign investors provided by the Economic Stabilization Plan, the authoritarian government of Franco more than quadrupled the number of dams in Spain from 180 to 800 between 1936 and 1975 (Swyngedouw 132), with the majority of this construction occurring in the brief window between 1955 and 1970. This was in addition to the construction of the country's first inter-river basin transfer system, which was "designed to balance the uneven hydraulic geography of Spain" (132). Of course, the complete lack of labor standards, coupled with the dictatorship's total control of national media, meant that this hurried pace of construction was marked by various industrial accidents that killed scores of workers (as in the 1965 Monfragüe accident in Extremadura) or unintentionally leveled entire villages (as occurred in the remote Leonese village of Ribadelago, with the 1959 failure of the Vega de Tera reservoir). Similarly, as brought up earlier, this expansive transformation of the country's infrastructure likewise contributed to the depopulation of the countryside as the authoritarian technocrats of the regime, unhindered by democratic norms and unbothered by the cultural history of the more sparsely-populated provinces, permanently flooded hundreds of *pueblos*, including Vegamián in León, the native town of Julio Llamazares.

Beyond offering a biographical connection and further evincing the Francoist hypocrisy regarding the rural, this infrastructural transformation of Spain is also important for understanding the changing perspectives towards the interrelated concepts of the country and nature in the second half of the twentieth century. First, as was alluded to earlier with the quote from Moreno-Caballud, this much more literal transformation of the country and the annihilation of hundreds of villages across Spain further destabilized Francoism's ideological appeals to the *campo* as the repository of authentic, eternal Spanish values. In a way that was much more literal than the economically-driven exodus, this drowning of hundreds of towns severed a connection between rural cultures and the places they inhabited; it quite literally altered the landscape in ways that, at least in terms of scale and rapidity, have no natural equivalent. Second, following the analysis of Swyngedouw, one of the most important aspects of this change is how it served as the realization of a certain idea of modernization in Spain. In a general sense, the effective control of water through national infrastructure projects has become a benchmark for modernization, as Matthew Gandy writes in *The Fabric of Space*: "the development of the modern state and its characteristic forms of expertise and knowledge production, is to a significant degree entwined with the impetus toward greater control over water, ranging from the public-health needs of cities to larger-scale interventions for agriculture, power, and flood control" (3). For Spain, a country with a very uneven natural distribution of water, the ability to control and redistribute water became a project that was especially charged with Promethean aspirations of techno-scientific dominance of nature. Greatly expanding Spain's hydrological infrastructure would thus serve as a symbolic achievement of modernity, one that had taken on an almost mythical historical status thanks to

its role in the *regeneracionista* discourse on how to restore the nation's global standing following the abrupt end of its imperialist ambitions in 1898.²³ Significantly, in a very material sense, the drowning of hundreds of villages and the creation of countless reservoirs, done almost entirely within a span of fifteen years, constituted an especially visible act of modernization given the grand scale of these interventions and the national expanse of this hydrological infrastructure. In other words, in terms of its alteration of the land, this was far from being an abstract project of modernization, but was and still is notably visible. While it is hard to measure the effect of such a symbolic, affective transformation of how individuals see nature, the publication of books such as Llamazares's *Distintas formas de mirar el agua*, which describes a family's memories of their ancestral *pueblo desaparecido*, or Ana María Matute's *El río*, which contains biographical stories of the drowned village in La Rioja where the author spent her summers, helps show how tangible these changes have been.

Considered together, these two changes represent different aspects of the same thoroughgoing process in Spain that was started in the second half of Francoism: the rapid and definitive imposition of capitalism on what was, until that point, a country that was haphazardly modernized and considerably rural. The end result of this process was an irreversible emptying of the countryside throughout Spain, one whose disastrous effects for traditional, rural spaces and cultures revealed the blatant hypocrisy of Francoist rhetoric towards the rural. However, important to note here is that "the country" and "the rural" both name spaces that are generally considered to be in a closer proximity to nature, but none of them are equivalent to nature as such.²⁴ Although recounting and scrutinizing these historical changes is necessary for understanding the context surrounding the depopulation of towns such as Ainielle, my theoretical interest in this chapter is, in slight contrast to these sources cited above, less on the binary of country-city and more on that of human-nonhuman nature. The question regarding the human-nature binary in contemporary Spain is, of course, the one that I seek to approach through my analysis of the posthuman in *La lluvia amarilla*. As a way of concluding this section on the Franco-era transformation of the country, then, I would like to briefly present some possible avenues for understanding how these two large-scale changes to rural Spain affected the concept of nature.

Offering a decidedly posthumanist way of understanding the effects of the hydrological modernization of Spain, Swyngedouw declares that these infrastructural transformations constitute the realization of a modern "cyborg [world], filled with proliferating socio-natural imbroglios" (20). In borrowing Haraway's famous concept of posthuman provocation here, Swyngedouw imparts his thesis that these expansive infrastructural projects are continuously formed and reformed through a co-constitutive process of social and environmental

²³ It is important to note that the *regeneracionista* vision of infrastructural modernization found in Costa was one that was explicitly meant to *counter* nationalist myths of Spanish exceptionalism (thus, in opposition to the later, Francoist discourse), especially with regards to the thankless toils of the Spanish *campesino*, as he makes clear in the sardonic introduction to his "Política hidráulica (Misión social de los riegos en España)."

²⁴ Williams, in his unpacking of this opposition, insists on emphasizing the dialectical relationship that exists between country and city in his seminal book. Additionally, various ecocritics have worked against the early pastoral grain of their field, highlighting the way in which "nature" is likewise present in more urban narratives (Heise's second chapter in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* models such scholarship, as does the second section of Prádanos's *Postgrowth Imaginaries*)

interaction: the social (for him, the political) determines how we comprehend the natural, which itself determines the social, constituting a feedback loop that results in a cyborg world that is neither fully human nor fully natural (226-28). For Swyngedouw, as he declares in the conclusion to his *Liquid Power*, this cyborg world realized in Spain over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries refutes any claims to “nature” as such, as a concept that is separate or distinguishable from the human (228). In his analysis, then, the technological modernization of the Spanish countryside serves not only as a contradiction of the Francoist myth of rural purity and authenticity, but also of the much larger, more elemental myth that sustains the human-nature divide.

Yet, for as amenable as I am to Swyngedouw’s posthuman interpretation and its capacity to critique the human-nature binary in contemporary Spain, I also worry that it is too eager to declare an absolute end of this binary and a final rejection of any idea of a pure nature. Instead, even if such a cyborg world could be said to exist in Spain, it does not in and of itself mean that the concept of nature does not still carry weight. This persistence of “nature” in spite of the many contradictions that plague this concept is something that is acknowledged in the work of various scholars, including Soper in her comprehensive study of Western philosophical approaches to the question of “nature,” as well as Raymond Williams’s Marxist analysis in “Ideas of Nature.” Williams, after having provided a history of nature that highlights the role of monotheistic religion and scientific revolution, himself recognizes the blatant contradictions and simplifications that accompany this binary, yet nonetheless insists that only by studying and understanding the persistence of this abstraction can we begin to unravel its role today (82-83). Importantly, as both argue, the concept of nature in all its idealist abstraction has in the modern period been strengthened by further encroachments – whether via the consolidation of modern scientific study (Williams 77) or the first great wave of industrialization (Soper 29-30) – on those places seen as natural. Given how this process of hydrological modernization and increased industrialization represents a more contemporary, more visible process of modernization, it might in fact strengthen the idea of nature as separate from humans, pushing the abstraction further, conceptually and geographically, from this world of industrialized cities and techno-scientific infrastructure. Thus, while the idea of a cyborg world may help theoretically comprehend how such modernizing projects exist in a feedback relationship between humans and nature, I would disagree with Swyngedouw in his corollary claim that such projects absolutely refute this idea of nature.

Following this logic, I would also propose that the rapid depopulation of the countryside in late Francoism had similar effects on the concept of nature, heightening the relevance of its abstraction precisely as more of the population became further distanced from those spaces where nature was seen as more proximate. The feeling of loss or of “a fall” that accompanies “the transition from a rural to an industrial society” (96), as Williams writes in his study of the country-city dynamic, is in fact the root of this modern idealization of the rural or the natural. While, in the case of Francoist Spain in the 1960s and 1970s, this transition may have also brought with it a sense of disillusionment with a certain myth of the rural as authentic and pure, as described at length above, the strength of this feeling of loss and its importance for constructing idealized notions of nature should not be overestimated. In addition, given how fast this transition occurred in Spain during this time period and the degree to which it entirely emptied (or purposefully drowned) many *pueblos*, it is also necessary to recapitulate Moreno-

Caballud's earlier point regarding the conceptual flattening that occurred to the ways of understanding nature: various cultures and traditions based in a specific place were lost, and with them went alternative forms of understanding this human-nature relationship. The point is not to revert to nationalist myths of an unchanging, uncorrupted rural culture, but instead to recognize how this rural exodus helped further consolidate the idea of nature as wholly separated from humans.

Ainielle and the greater Sobrepuerto region, are very instructive in this sense. Replete with completely abandoned *pueblos* such as Ainielle as well as semi-abandoned ones whose preserved houses are now sold as vacation homes, and just a few kilometers downriver from the primarily hydroelectric *Embalse de Búbal* – construction completed in 1971 –, Sobrepuerto today sustains itself mostly as an ecotourist destination. Far from being a deromanticized, cyborg environment, it has become one in which the very construct of pure nature is sustained through its reification into a commodity.

A Study of *La lluvia amarilla* by Julio Llamazares

La lluvia amarilla (1988) is the second novel published by Julio Llamazares, whose oeuvre spans various genres of literary production, from novels and short stories, to poetry, screenplays, essays, and travel literature. His first novel, *Luna de Lobos* (1985) as well as the two other most recognized novels produced by the author – *Escenas del cine mudo* (1994) and *Distintas formas de mirar el agua* (2015) – are similarly focused on rural Spain in the latter half of the twentieth century and the early decades of the twenty-first century. While *Escenas* and *Distintas*, like *La lluvia amarilla*, are both about the aforementioned transformations of rural life in Spain, the emphasis on nature is most pervasive in *La lluvia amarilla*. Commenting on this tendency towards the figurative in the Leonese author's oeuvre, Richardson considers the works of Llamazares – especially *La lluvia amarilla* – as focusing excessively on “a country life of myth...[portrayed] through an apolitical, intensely poetic filter” (144), in contrast to works by other authors that more explicitly deal with the social and political narratives of country-to-city emigration.²⁵ For that reason, he groups Llamazares with other novelists and directors – such as Luis Mateos Díez, Miguel Sanchez-Ostiz, and Manuel Gutierrez Aragón – who are similarly interested in poetically depicting a depopulated rural Spain and belong to a generation who came of age in the waning years of Francoism. Mayock, in contrast, is less critical of this more poetic focus of Llamazares, instead seeing him as belonging to a group of “Neo-Naturalist” authors such as Camilo José Cela or Miguel Delibes, whose narratives emphasize the determinist elements of nature in their narratives of rural life (587). Stylistically, Llamazares's novelistic experimentation with more autobiographical and multiperspectival narrative styles, places him within a generation of Spanish authors in the post-Franco period who play with the representational conceit of literary fiction, such as those analyzed by Sobejano-Morán in his study of metafiction in Spanish postmodernism. While *La lluvia amarilla* neither contains biographical elements nor is told from the perspective of multiple narrators, it nevertheless exhibits a degree of genre experimentation with its entirely monologic form.

²⁵ This is, of course, the subject analyzed by Richardson in the book from which this quote comes.

For as brief of a novel as it is, *La lluvia amarilla* is not an especially easy read, given how it presents an uncomfortable, at times grotesque portrayal of Spain's sparsely-populated rural villages. As discussed earlier, the novel offers a fictionalized account of the depopulation of Ainielle through the character of Andrés de Casa Sosas, a lifelong resident of the town who has, by the mid-1960s, through the death or migration of his friends and family, come to achieve the unwelcome honor of being the last resident of Ainielle. Despite the sentimental and monotonous potential inherent in a book about such a topic, *La lluvia amarilla* is neither maudlin, nor mundane. In the novel's first chapter, Andrés narrates a future perfect description of his decaying corpse being overtaken by the elements, a scene which he expects to occur some months after his impending death, once the spring thaw allows the men of the neighboring villages to visit Ainielle and look for any signs of life. As if this gothic, macabre sight was not enough to set the tone of the work, the following chapter begins by describing the heartbreaking, progressive departure of Ainielle's older residents and ends with Andrés discovering the lifeless corpse of his wife, the only other remaining resident of the town at that moment, who had hours earlier committed suicide by hanging herself from the machinery of the town's mill. While the rest of the novel is, by comparison, less gruesome than these opening pages, it is clear from the outset that Llamazares does not pretend to uphold any illusions of an idyllic life in the country. A "Beatus Ille" Ainielle is not, at least not through the lens of Llamazares.

For the rest of the novel, the author uses the figure of a solitary Andrés to explore in greater detail the process by which a town becomes abandoned. At times, this narration matches the intensity of those first two chapters, describing life in Ainielle as a constant struggle against death, one in which humans must be unceasingly prepared mentally and physically to combat the dangers of the natural world. For example, following his wife Sabina's suicide, he experiences an especially difficult, snowy winter in which he must forage through the abandoned houses of his long-departed neighbors for sustenance; later, during warmer months, he barely survives a viper bite, which obliges him to spend various days bedridden, caught between life and death in a fever dream, with his dog as his only companion. Nonetheless, Llamazares's narrative is not wholly pessimistic in its portrayal of rustic life in Spain's remote *pueblos*. As the snow thaws after that brutal winter, for instance, Andrés describes in meditative detail the humble labor of maintaining the town's ever-deteriorating constructions. Similarly, the novel includes various passages in which the narrator-primary character of Andrés gives bucolic descriptions of his wanderings through the mountain forests and streams of the surrounding wilderness.

Throughout the novel, Llamazares emphasizes the memory of Andrés and the way in which he has become the remaining repository of Ainielle's history. Every experience calls to mind an earlier moment from a time before the others left: his spring trip to pick up mail and tobacco from the neighboring town reminds him of similar journeys made every March or April by a band of Ainielle residents, singing and laughing as they walked down the road; the deterioration of the neighboring houses reminds him, one by one, of all of the families who once lived in Ainielle and their respective departures or deaths. However, for as lucid and specific as his memories of the *pueblo* are, Andrés himself comes to appear like less and less of a reliable narrator as the novel progresses. In general, even though ten years supposedly pass from the death of Sabina until the passing of Andrés, the narration of Andrés does not provide

a clear, linear concept of time during this decade. For example, from chapter 7 onwards, after he recounts the fever dream state induced by the viper bite, Andrés demonstrates difficulty interpreting and then conveying reality, often saying that his whole life post-Sabina is a dream or a vision, or, as he does on page 94, conjecturing whether he has in fact already died. Perhaps confirming this idea, he begins to see ghosts: at first just one or two – usually his mother, Sabina, or one of his deceased children –, but then he starts to imagine the entire town being full of ghosts and he has more realistic visions, such as in chapter 13, when he seemingly hears the voice of his dead daughter yelling out to him in the night. Similarly, his impression of the surrounding world likewise appears increasingly strange and unreal. In chapters 10 and 15, to cite the most striking examples, Andrés describes his surroundings as appearing yellow (in accordance with the novel's title), from the leaves on the ground, to the houses, to the sky, and even to the presumably-verdant surrounding mountains. This confused perception of reality is heightened as the novel proceeds towards its conclusion, with Andrés becoming more reflective on death, digging his own grave, killing his dog, and waiting for his ultimate demise. Formally, the book reflects the anxiety and tension that accompany the main character's impending death with four final chapters (17-20) that are markedly shorter than the others and pass by much more rapidly. In the final chapter, which creates a symmetry with the opening chapter, our narrator-protagonist once more imagines his decaying corpse and the final discovery of his body, some years in the future. Breaking the monologic structure of the narrative and, perhaps, marking a narrative jump to the actual day when Andrés's body is discovered and Ainielle is officially uninhabited, one of the men poetically states, “ –La noche queda para quién es” (143) and the novel abruptly ends.

Given its fictionalized recuperation of the memory of a forgotten *pueblo*, the novel has to a great degree been appreciated critically for its role in the historical memory of rural Spain. Since its publication, the novel has served as an inspiration for more extensive non-fictional study of the rural, mountainous culture of the Pyrenees, especially in the province of Huesca in which Ainielle resides. In this respect, there is the ethnographic study of Ainielle, *La memoria amarilla* (2003), written by Sobrepuerto author and historian Enrique Satué Oliván, as well as the aforementioned historical article about Ainielle by Marco Kunz. Beyond the question of memory, scholars have typically focused their investigations of this novel on, first, the compelling and abstruse symbolism apparent throughout the work (Pardo Pastor), or, second, the determinist discourse regarding nature that is apparent throughout the tale of a dying man and his soon-to-be-abandoned village (Mayock and Baah). With regards to my argument in this chapter, the analyses of determinism found in the articles of Mayock and Baah are particularly helpful for understanding how others have looked at this relationship between humans and nature in the novel. Baah, for one, sees Andrés's progressive descent into madness as the logical result of the solitude and silence that defines the final ten years of his life in Ainielle. The extremeness of this social deprivation, and the novel's explicit and repeated emphasis on solitude and silence, obliges the reader both to see Andrés's fate as inevitable (deterministic) and to compassionately respond to this tragic fate, according to Baah (39).

Building off of this reading of determinism in the mental and physical demise of this protagonist-narrator, Mayock claims that Llamazares belongs to a movement of “*neo-naturalista*” authors in Spain whose novels recontextualize the preoccupations of this nineteenth-century genre within a more contemporary period (587). In *La lluvia amarilla*

Mayock argues that this Naturalist concern is most evident in the novel's representation of the elemental struggle between nature and humans, that is, between the deterministic force of nature and the freedom of the human to resist and make their own way within these imposed limits (586, 589). Although Mayock's arguments are both well-constructed and intriguing, I am not quite as convinced by her Neo-Naturalist appellation. There is clearly a deterministic element in Llamazares's novel, but absent from the novel is much discussion of science or social class, not to mention the lack of a clear "experiment" occurring in the novel – all of which were central to the original Naturalist method, as I reviewed in the previous chapter's analysis of Bazán. In addition, as it is central to my argument in the following section, the relationship between human and nature developed over the course of the novel by Llamazares is one that is very complex and does not simply reproduce the anthropocentric, instrumentalist worldview that I previously argued was fundamental for orthodox works of nineteenth-century Naturalism.²⁶ Although there may be clear determinist and fatalist themes in this rural novel, I do not agree with the claim that the novel as a whole defends a Naturalist philosophy of determinism. Instead I find that this genre comparison delimits our interpretation of the novel, foreclosing the possibility of seeing the distinction between human-nonhuman as anything except a strict binary.

Considering the ways in which the novel destabilizes or challenges this ideological division of human culture and nonhuman nature, my analysis of *La lluvia amarilla* is, borrowing a structure employed by Zoe Jacques in her study of the posthuman in English children's literature, loosely divided into three parts: tree, animal, and environment. Blending into and building off of one another, these three are not meant to be exclusive categories that delimit any one way of understanding the posthuman, but rather each section of the analysis offers a different way of approaching and understanding how *La lluvia amarilla* presents a critical perspective of the human-nonhuman binary. In the most general sense, this analysis represents a classic exercise in environmental or ecocriticism, one that highlights the moments in which *La lluvia amarilla* represents the ways that, "human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (Glotfelty xix). Ultimately using this ecocritical provocation as a way to challenge the modern idea of the human, I ask two interrelated questions over the course of the analysis. First, how does Llamazares question the elemental binary between human and nonhuman throughout *La lluvia amarilla*? Second, considering the prior discussion on the changes to the rural in late-Francoist Spain, why is this critique of the human-nonhuman binary important at this specific moment in Spanish history?

Trees, Animals, and the Environment: Three Approximations of the Posthuman in *La lluvia amarilla*

In chapter 17, as the novel nears its end and Andrés starts to make preparations for his death, his ever-digressive inner monologue, having started the chapter describing how he has recently dug his own grave and planned to carve his own wooden coffin, tells us about how trees are alive, feel pain, and can suffer just as humans do:

²⁶ Mayock does mention moments in which nature is not treated in a purely anthropocentric fashion in the novel, but they are nonetheless used by her to strengthen an idea of human exceptionalism.

También había pensado hacer mi propia caja, igual que un día hice las cajas de mis padres y mi padre hizo, a su vez, las de los suyos. Al fin y al cabo, yo ya no tengo a nadie que me pueda hacer la mía. Pero no pude. La madera que tenía preparada para ello todavía estaba húmeda, pese a que la corté en la primavera, con la luna en menguante, para que el viejo tilo de la escuela no sufriera y su madera pudiera resistir bajo la tierra muchos años. El secreto lo aprendí, todavía niño, de mi padre. Aunque no nos demos cuenta, un árbol está vivo, y siente, y sufre, y se retuerce de dolor cuando el hacha entra en su carne, formando las estrías y los nudos por liso que penetrarán más tarde el moho y la carcoma que acabarán pudriéndola algún día. En cambio, con la luna menguante, los árboles se duermen y, como cuando un hombre se muere, de repente, en pleno sueño, ni siquiera se dan cuenta de que están siendo cortados. Y así, su madera queda lisa, compacta, impenetrable, capaz de resistir la podredumbre de la tierra muchos años. (131-132)

In addition to the tragic sadness that comes with reading about a man who must dig his own grave and make his own coffin (made even more tragic by the insinuation that this labor is the expectation of the oldest son who has long ago emigrated²⁷), the comments made in this paragraph about trees are especially remarkable. Taken at its most literal, the paragraph here offers some advice for cutting down trees and storing the chopped wood. But instead of sharing tips that are purely practical, our narrator ends up imparting a vitalist conception of ethics that implicitly critiques human exceptionalism, typifying a tendency throughout the novel to subvert the anthropocentric binary that separates humans from their nonhuman environment, emphasizing instead the interconnections between these two spheres.

There is one particular line in this above paragraph that stands out with regards to the human-nonhuman binary: “Aunque no nos demos cuenta, un árbol está vivo, y siente, y sufre, y se retuerce de dolor cuando el hacha entra en su carne” (132). Working from left to right, the first point to note here is the use of the first-person plural in the introductory clause: not only is this a particularly exceptional usage of the first-person plural within a novel that is primarily written from a first-person singular perspective, but, by virtue of the universalness of this “we,” it also a way of implicitly introducing and critiquing anthropocentric perspectives towards nonhuman nature. The “nosotros” of “no nos demos cuenta” is undefined, and in this way it points to a general human act of ignorance towards trees, at least according to our narrator-protagonist. Second, in the remaining parts of this quote, Andrés attributes to the tree three qualities that have been fundamental for distinguishing the human from the nonhuman: life, subjectivity, and agency. While the statement that “a tree is alive” is important in its own right and should not be overlooked, what I find most important here is how the narrator presents his claim about the subjectivity of trees, in particular the idea that a tree can feel and that it can experience pain and suffering. In this respect, the author’s use of polysyndeton in his construction of this sentence – that is, the repeated use of the conjunction “y” to introduce these verbs associated with feeling – is especially significant, as it emphasizes each one of these

²⁷ And, lest it be overlooked, the fact that natural conditions have prevented him from making the coffin at all!

verbs, obliging the reader to slow down and recognize the subjectivity that Andrés ascribes to this ostensibly-inanimate object. The special attention paid to these subjective qualities in this one line, like the entire passage here, builds compassion for the tree, but it likewise makes us question the degree to which a conscious recognition of feelings such as pain, a product of our subjectivity, are an exclusively human quality.

By emphasizing the feelings, pain, and suffering of the tree, this quote by Andrés aligns with a general tendency in posthuman and posthuman-aligned theory to critique the ways in which subjectivity has both been constructed and used to defend an exclusive idea of the human. As fields as diverse as animal studies, gender studies, science studies, and postcolonial studies have argued in their respective critiques of the modern concept of rational Man, the issue of subjectivity has historically been paramount for determining where the line of human-nonhuman is drawn and, in turn, for exploiting those entities that at a certain moment fall on the wrong side of this boundary. Similarly, within those authors that identify explicitly with the posthuman, from Braidotti to Morton to Hayles to Latour, the question of subjectivity reoccurs in their respective examinations of the human, often with a critique of the philosophical and biological defenses that maintain this construct. For example, in Bennet's *Vibrant Matter*, she remarks on how, "the philosophical project of naming where subjectivity begins and ends is too often bound up with fantasies of a human uniqueness in the eyes of God, of escape from materiality, or of mastery of nature; and even where it is not, it remains an aporetic or quixotic endeavor" (ix). What Bennet captures particularly well is the fact that subjectivity is a moving target, and one that is tactically employed at different historical moments for myriad ends. Thus, although Andrés may not, with this declaration, fell the historical construct of subjectivity, by offering up this defense for the poor tree, he nonetheless participates in a larger, posthuman destabilization of this concept. As readers, we may not agree with these affirmations about the feelings of a tree, especially since they are declared by a character whose claims to rationality are questionable at best, but they nonetheless provoke a further reexamination of those qualities equated with an exclusively-human idea of subjectivity.

This exercise in destabilizing subjectivity is, of course, just one, particularly salient example of a larger tendency in this passage to question the human-nonhuman binary in terms of the environment. In particular, the sentiment expressed here not only seeks to build compassion for the tree and other nonhuman entities, but it also typifies a worldview that is in opposition to a modern, capitalist way of conceiving nonhuman nature as lifeless, inert, or as a raw material that exists solely for human exploitation. As hinted earlier, this worldview could be defined as vitalist – hence the appeal to the neo-vitalist Bennet –, insofar as it shares an idea of a common life force that is possessed by all things, one which, as detailed at length in the first chapter, cannot be reduced to a mechanist interpretation of the world. In a slightly different way, emphasizing the importance of consciousness in Andrés's description of the tree and connecting this worldview with others that are considered nonmodern or pagan, it could also be described as organicist or animist.²⁸ The ritualistic aspect of the chopping off the tree,

²⁸ Whereas vitalism (as well as its resurgence in contemporary thought as neo-vitalism) is a distinctly modern belief system that exists in opposition to the mechanist interpretations of life, animism represents a broader belief system that upholds the idea that there is a spiritual essence common to all things. Andrés's ideas about trees then, in that they ostensibly invoke a non-Christian or pagan belief system particular to the Sobrepuerto region, would most accurately be described as animist, albeit sharing many commonalities today with vitalism.

as well as the connection made between the tree, the human (Andrés), and the natural cycles of the earth (the waning moon; the season of spring) would perhaps point towards this more spiritual, animist interpretation. Regardless of how we define this belief, what I want to highlight in this paragraph is how this practice of caring for and recognizing the life of the tree stands in direct opposition to the anthropocentrism inherent in the modern, capitalist exploitation of nonhuman nature. The choice of the tree is especially important in this respect given the fact that the Pyrenean forests, including those of Sobrepuerto, have for centuries been the site of extensive logging operations. Thus, far from simply expressing the atavistic habits of a dying man in an abandoned rural town, I see this passage as standing in opposition to an extractivist capitalist ideology based on a fundamental, anthropocentric “othering” of nonhuman nature. The fact that this quote occurs so soon before the novel’s end, when both personage and *pueblo* ultimately perish, emphasizes how the rural exodus of late Francoism did not simply depopulate towns such as Ainielle, but likewise eradicated alternative worldviews that, amongst other things, offered ways of relating to nature that were not beholden to a modern, capitalist binary of human-nonhuman. In this way, it calls to mind Moreno-Caballud’s point regarding the conceptual flattening of the rural that occurred through Francoism’s elevation of a general idea of the “campo,” whose homogenous symbolism effected the erasure of, “las profundas diferencias culturales autóctonas de algunas zonas rurales” (523). Although the passage from *La lluvia amarilla* does not name a specific tradition or belief system, it nonetheless offers a distinctly local way of comprehending the natural world that presumably comes before and stands in opposition to Christian Spain, one whose persistence precariously depends on someone such as Andrés.

In a more elemental way, then, this allusion to an alternative belief system reminds us as readers of the constructed character of the human-nonhuman binary. Once more, despite not naming a specific religion, this passage appeals to ancient traditions that antedate and offer an alternative to, not only a modern concept of the human, but also monotheistic Christianity’s break with animist belief systems.²⁹ Just as they question the degree to which subjectivity should serve as the arbiter of the human-nonhuman binary, these lines likewise offer a different ontology (one that is, in in the most literal sense of the word, indigenous) that opposes the conceptual schism of humans from their environments. Of course this begs the question as to whether Andrés’s sympathy for the tree represents a posthuman perspective or rather a pre-human one. Given how the novel as a whole does not emphasize the world of objects that surrounds Andrés, I do not see Llamazares as trying to connect any ancient animist

²⁹ Williams’s essay on the origins of the modern concept of “nature” establishes monotheistic Christianity’s diffusion and dominance across Europe as a crucial foundation for the formation of this binary:

A singular name for the real multiplicity of things and living processes may be held, with an effort, to be neutral, but I am sure it is very often the case that it offers, from the beginning, a dominant kind of interpretation: idealist, metaphysical, or religious. And I think this is especially apparent if we look at its subsequent history. From many early cultures we have records of what we would now call nature spirits or nature gods: beings believed to embody or direct the wind or the sea or the forest or the moon. Under the weight of Christian interpretation we are accustomed to calling these gods or spirits pagan: diverse and variable manifestations before the revelation of the one true God. But just as in religion the moment of monotheism is a critical development, so, in human responses to the physical world, is the moment of a singular Nature. (69)

ontologies with contemporary, posthuman theories such as speculative realism or object-oriented ontology (OOO).³⁰ Instead, I understand this passage as posthuman in the way that Cary Wolfe defines posthumanism as paradoxically pre- and posthuman at the same time: recognizing both the way in which the human has been embedded within a surrounding world since “before that historically specific thing called ‘the human’” and the way in which a contemporary “historical moment in which the decentering of the human...is increasingly impossible to ignore” (xv). That is, Llamazares reaches back an ancient past to recognize the plurality of local cultures and traditions in the territory now known as Spain and, in doing so, he obliges us as readers today to both consider a time before “the human” existed as such and to reevaluate how we understand the human-nonhuman binary in a moment of environmental precarity. To conclude, the perspective put forth here is one that is non-Spanish, non-modern, and non-anthropocentric.

This account of arboreal ethics represents just one example of how the novel questions the human-nonhuman binary. Soon after this passage, in the following chapter, Andrés indicates one of the other ways in which this binary is brought into doubt, via the difference between the human and nonhuman animal: “¿O qué soy yo, sino ya más que un perro? ¿Qué he sido yo estos años, aquí solo, sino el perro más fiel de esta casa y de Ainielle?” (136). Clearly, there is a metaphorical meaning to these words in that they convey, using that ever-popular figure of the dog, the enduring loyalty of Andrés to his ancestral home and *pueblo*. However, in addition to this more common interpretation of such a canine comparison, I would assert that this rhetorical question, found some seven pages before the novel’s end, likewise serves to call our attention to and explicitly name a tendency that is apparent throughout the work: the animalization of the character of Andrés. This animalization begins in the first chapter, as Andrés narrates the state of his unceremoniously-decomposing corpse, and continues throughout the novel as he speaks repeatedly of how he wanders aimlessly through the desolate emptiness of Ainielle like a dog or how he refuses to speak to others when he has an opportunity to do so. Reviewing these examples in greater depth, what I argue over the following few paragraphs, then, is that the animalization of the main character does not solely function as a metaphorical comparison but is, instead, a way of further questioning the human-nonhuman binary, obliging the reader to reflect more critically on what distinguishes humans from other animals. The general thesis of this argument is thus similar to the preceding one regarding the tree, but, in contrast to the tree example, this analysis approaches the human-nonhuman binary from the opposite direction, asking how this specific human’s lack of certain faculties or rituals makes it so that he seems less human and more animal. The goal of this analysis is not to demolish this difference, but rather to explore it further and also to consider why such a process of animalization is brought up within this context of rural exodus and abandoned *pueblos*.

In addition to this rhetorical question asked near the end of the work, the narrator-protagonist explicitly compares himself to a dog at various other moments, for example, repeating in chapters 4, 7, and 11 the same idea that he is just wandering around the *pueblo*

³⁰ Kate Rigby, in her essay “Spirits that Matter: Pathways toward a Rematerialization of Religion and Spirituality,” offers a review and an evaluation of such attempts to merge non-Western animist, spiritual traditions with the more contemporary, secularist thought of speculative realism or OOO.

without any clear purpose or ambition.³¹ In all of these passages, there is an explicit use of the simile, comparing himself to a dog, often a solitary or abandoned one (42, 61, 100). It is especially significant that it is a dog that provides the most specific, explicit animal of comparison because, not only is the dog the most popular of domestic companions and thus the one to which we have commonly compared ourselves, but also there is a more immediate, narrative point of comparison that is significant for thinking through this human-animal binary as it appears in *La lluvia amarilla*. That is, there is a dog – a *perra* – that is present throughout the work, an animal that serves as Andrés’s sole companion for the last ten years of his life, following Sabina’s suicide. This dog stays by his side through arduous winters and desperate moments such as the viper bite, up until Andrés decides to mercifully shoot the dog some days before his own death so that she does not starve in the abandoned *pueblo*. In fact, in spite of the tragic end that befalls this animal, one of the most hopeful aspects of this work is the intimate companionship that develops between Andrés and his dog. This is, I argue, in part a way of heightening of our awareness of the human-animal distinction, which thus emphasizes the more general animalization of Andrés. However, given the historical importance of human-dog relationships as well as the importance of this relationship for the novel’s protagonist, I likewise contend that the novel makes us think about the sort of bonds between species that are described by Haraway in her *The Companion Species Manifesto*, as brought up in the previous chapter. From the moment in which Sabina dies until the end of the book, we witness how Andrés and his *perra* depend on one another for their mutual livelihood and wellbeing, rehearsing a historical, evolutionary interrelation between two species that, Haraway states, “shape each other throughout the still ongoing story of co-evolution” (29). Thus, before even considering the ways in which the animalization of Andrés questions the human-nonhuman binary, recognizing the importance of this relationship and reading it through Haraway’s discussion of companion species reminds us that these categories – human and animal – can neither be dissolved into one another just as they cannot be absolutely divided.

Moving on to the protagonist’s animalization, one of the most significant and thoroughgoing ways in which this is made evident is through his lack of speech. The novel is pervaded by the explicit mention and the impression of silence; in fact, “silencio” is, perhaps even more so than “amarilla,” the most repeated word or concept we find in its pages. However, what Llamazares narrates is more than just the eerie silence of a desolate, depopulated place that is apparent throughout the novel, but also the narrator’s refusal to speak. Andrés is not mute – he describes earlier conversations with his immediate family and recounts past times when the villagers would walk into town singing and laughing together –, but the novel passes without Llamazares having him say one word. This is emphasized at different moments in the novel when, amongst the company of other humans, Andrés has the opportunity to speak but does not. In chapter 5, when he tells of his first trip out of Ainielle since the winter of Sabina’s death, Andrés states: “No hablé con nadie” (48). Although he runs a few errands while in the valley town of Biescas, he avoids any social outings such as a trip to the café and apparently grunts or gestures his way through the tasks he does end up doing, even stating that he picks up his mail from his now-deceased friend’s daughter, “en silencio” (49). Similarly, in chapter 11, he has two interactions with other humans that pass by without a

³¹ The verb uses in chapter 4 is “vagar” (42), while that used in the latter two chapters is “deambular” (61, 100).

word. First, a former neighbor, Aurelio, returns to his long-abandoned home to collect some objects, Andrés meets him at the doorway with a shotgun. First, they lock eyes – “durante unos segundos, los dos permanecemos frente a frente, sin hablarnos” (95) –, then Andrés scares him away – “le obligué a que se marchara sin cruzar una palabra” (96) –, and he ultimately warns him about returning by firing a shot into the air as Aurelio is headed out of town. Second, soon thereafter this wordless encounter, Andrés goes to the neighboring town of Berbusa to buy food, and he once again refuses to speak, ultimately telling us how, “me había acostumbrado a vivir solo y, en el fondo, prefería su silencio a sus palabras” (96). These moments in the novel, already exceptional in that they relate the rare occasions during which Andrés leaves Ainielle, are especially notable in that they represent the only real times after Sabina’s death that our protagonist interacts with other humans; in each one, there is an emphasis on the fact that he does not speak.

This refusal to speak is also apparent by virtue of how the novel is written. Although we read his inner monologue over the course of the book, there is not one instance in which Andrés is depicted as speaking with anyone or anything during his ten years of isolation in Ainielle: not the tree with which he empathizes, not the ghosts of his family who return to the town in spectral form, and not even his beloved dog with whom he shares this final decade. Specifically, the novel never describes him speaking, nor does it show him speaking through the use of quotations or other punctuation: this is emphasized by the last line of the novel, written with a preceding dash: “–La noche queda para quién es” (143). This lone sentence of speech, which is uttered by one of the men who discovers the corpse of Andrés some months or years later, interrupts the internal dialogue that solely has been used up to this point and, in doing so, emphasizes the complete lack of speech in all those preceding pages. To conclude, then, it is not that Andrés lacks the capacity to speak or even to conceive of his thoughts through the use of language (his inner monologue would disprove this much larger assertion), but rather that the novel, both in specific instances and in its overall form, belabors the fact that he does not speak, even refusing to do so when he interacts with those few people he does encounter.

In his analysis of *La lluvia amarilla*, Baah, for one, reads this reduction of Andrés’s humanity as the logical result of his extreme loneliness, which serves to elicit in the readers an emotional identification with the narrator-protagonist (35-36, 39). However, diverging from Baah’s interpretation, I would point out the extreme, specific nature of this loss of humanity and how it helps further establish the animalization of Andrés that is signaled by the aforementioned comparisons to a dog: loneliness is one thing, madness another, but this total aversion to speaking, as it is presented in the novel, is a particularly remarkable way for Llamazares to, as Baah describes it, “make [Andrés] something less than human” (39).³² Andrés

³² Baah, in fact, does not see Andrés as a character who does not speak, despite being surrounded by silence. Relying solely on a line in chapter 10 that describes how the ghost of his mother comes to join him in the kitchen, often accompanied by other deceased relatives, Baah argues that this spectral communication is what helps reestablish the humanity of Andrés (Baah 42-44). The line in question reads: “Durante mucho tiempo, me resistí a aceptar su compañía. Pero siguieron acudiendo, cada vez más a menudo, y, al final, no tuve otro remedio que resignarme a compartir con ellos mis recuerdos y el calor de la cocina” (92). While we could logically imagine Andrés sitting in the kitchen, conversing about his memories with a coterie of ghosts, I would first like to point out that he is, nonetheless, never described as speaking in this quote (i.e. much is inferred from “compartir” here). Given the fact that this is a supernatural interaction, as well as the fact that these ghosts are at other moments in

can still think, rather importantly he can still think of himself as an I, but he does not speak. He may grunt, gesture, or otherwise signal his desires through other forms of communication, but we never read an example of him partaking in the very human act of using language to interact with others. Although Derrida, in his *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, goes to great lengths to specify that it is neither language nor speech, as such, that separates humans from animals, the use of language is nevertheless one of the most noticeable ways by which humans have historically made this distinction; in this respect, it would be useful to note that Derrida only arrives to this point by reviewing a canon of modern, Continental philosophy that has constantly (from Descartes, through Kant and Levinas, up to Lacan and Heidegger) returned to the question of speech in its interrogation of the human. Pointing us towards this association of speech with a modern understanding of “being human,” Andrés’s lack of speech thus makes him appear less human, which further heightens what I see as the animalization of this narrator-protagonist.

Finally, the last point that I argue regarding how the Leonese author establishes this animalization of his main character is also the first way in which he does so. As mentioned in the prior section’s synopsis, the first chapter ends with an especially grotesque description of the state of Andrés’s decomposing corpse, which serves as the climactic resolution to the tension built up over the course of the novel’s eight opening pages: “Un ruido de alas negras batirá las paredes advirtiéndoselo. Por eso, nadie gritará aterrado. Pero eso, nadie iniciará el gesto de la cruz o el de la repugnancia cuando, tras esa puerta, las linternas me descubran al fin encima de la cama, vestido todavía, mirándoles de frente, devorado por el musgo y por los pájaros” (16). It may not be a very long description of a dead body, but it is nonetheless explicit in its emphasis on the rotting, partially-decomposed state of his corpse. Similar to the houses that are described in the novel, his body has been left to be devoured by animals and the elements to the point where the clothes left on his body are the only way in which he can be recognized as human. Adding to this sense of animalization is the fact that his body has been, up to this point, left to die without any religious rite, a fact that is alluded to in the quote above through the mention of the sign of the cross and which is made more explicit in the novel’s penultimate page when it infers that no one will seek out a priest or say a prayer when they do ultimately bury his half-decayed body out of respect (142). Even though he may be finally buried at the end of the novel, the image of his decomposed body, presented at the beginning of the novel so as to heighten the effect of his posthumous state of neglect, remains with the reader throughout. For as much as it emphasizes from the start how Andrés has been left to die “like an animal” because of the abandonment of his family and fellow villagers, it likewise reminds us of the fact that death, and the ensuing decomposition of our bodies, is the ultimate way in which humans are shown to be similar to those other animals. Put simply, this image of Andrés – or, of what remains of him – makes us confront a shared mortality that humans intrinsically share with all other animals.

Yet, for as much as Llamazares clearly presents the animalization of Andrés and uses the figure of the dog to heighten our attentiveness to the points of contact between these categories of human and animal, the author neither overturns nor abolishes this binary. In fact,

the novel described in not-quite-so-friendly terms (at one moment his daughter yells at Andrés, with no response), I do not read this moment as evidence of an otherwise-overlooked penchant for communication in Andrés.

it is just as clear that Andrés maintains a very human capacity to control the animal world around him. Similar to how he cuts down the tree that he considers capable of feeling and suffering, out of mercy for what might become of her after he dies, he uses his shotgun to kill the dog, the animal with which he comes to identify and compare himself. Yet, just as these examples of human superiority cannot be denied in order to claim a total leveling of the human-animal distinction, neither can this animalization be ignored either by being explained away as pure metaphor or, per Baah's reading, by being seen simply as a way to establish a compassionate connection with characters such as Andrés and the real people they represent.

Far from being a contradiction, the ostensible limitations of this animalization of Andrés are helpful for rethinking the human-animal binary in this context. Returning once more to Derrida's famous treatise on animals, he states that the goal of his and other such exercises is not, "effacing the limit [for example, between human and animal], but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply" (29). This is the concept of "limitrophy" that he sees as his subject in this analysis (29), a critical exercise that seeks to answer the following question: "What are the edges of a limit that grows and multiplies by feeding an abyss?" (31). Derrida's limitrophy is useful for thinking about binaries in general, offering a way of dwelling in this limit or this threshold as a way of better comprehending it – both in its strengths and its weaknesses –, while at the same time using this exercise to gain a better understanding of the two different categories that meet at this limit. The animalization of Andrés is an exercise in limitrophy insofar as it brings into focus the ways in which human and animal resemble one another, while at the same time heightens our awareness of the differences between the two categories. For each of these examples – wandering like a dog, refusing to speak to other humans, and decomposing as if he were an animal – there is a strong tendency of animalization in Andrés and also a countervailing tendency that reaffirms his humanity: he may wander like a dog, but he also has the capacity to go into town and trade seeds for tobacco; he may not speak to others, but he has the capacity to reflect on his own thoughts and actions through this inner monologue that we read; he may be left to rot like an animal, but he still wears clothes and confronts those who discover his body with a distinctly human look.

What this exercise in limitrophy shows, especially when put together with the earlier consideration of the companion species relationship between Andrés and his dog, is how Andrés is at once a human, an animal, and also inherently entangled with a world comprised of nonhuman others. In the broader, posthuman sense, the reflection on limits that is incited by this animalization obliges us to reconsider what the human is and how the human coexists with nonhuman others. However, for the purpose of this chapter, my interest is not in delving deeper into this human-animal aporia, but rather asking why this interrogation of the animality of human occurs in this novel with regards to this specific historical context. That is, this is not some generic representation of animalization that is being depicted here, but rather an animalization of a character in a novel that is about a rural, mountain village on the verge of abandonment in response to the demographic, political, and infrastructural changes of late-Francoist Spain. A time, as I argued earlier, when the very idea of the human, and thus the binary of human-nonhuman, was changing as a result of this modernization: reiterating my earlier claim, the demographic and infrastructural changes of Spain had the effect of distancing, conceptually and physically, the human from the nonhuman world. Read in response to these

changes, what I see as the animalization of Andrés thus has the effect of resituating the human back into that nonhuman world, emphasizing the animal-ness of the human and our human embeddedness within this nonhuman world. Andrés is a character with which we can sympathize insofar as he represents those other Spaniards who were forced from their now-abandoned *pueblos* either through economic obligation or literal destruction, but this sympathy reaches a limit with regards to these animal characteristics: he is dirty, visceral, and earthy in a ways that are strange and, at times, grotesque. In its own limitrophic way then, the conceptual distance between Andrés as a character and the contemporary reader marks the difference between two conceptions of the human: in his humanness, we can recognize and sympathize with him, but through his animal-ness, we perceive a divergence.

Through this process of naming, by stating as I do in my argument that Andrés appears to be “like an animal” or “animalistic” in his character’s depiction in *La lluvia amarilla*, I mark a difference between the normal “human” and the divergent “animalized human.” Hence the appeal to Derrida, whose question of the animal departs from the deconstructionist question of what is hidden and what is revealed by this simple act of calling another species an “animal.” The question then is, what is this difference with regards to Andrés? That is, what is the difference by which we can refer to him as in some distinct way as an “animal”? My answer to this question returns to the dirty, mortal characterization of Andrés, connecting it to the way in which this last resident of Ainielle is represented as almost wholly excluded from the larger society in which he lives. His is a marginal, almost hermetic, lifestyle, that is depicted in the novel as nearly proto-capitalist and self-sufficient: for as much as this may be attributed to literary embellishment more than historical fact, Andrés is, at least for the years in which we witness his life, a subject that in many ways exists apart from modern governance. Specifically, he is a subject that exists outside of the biopolitical regime of Francoist Spain.³³ The difference, then, is enacted through his animal-ness, through his resistance to the larger technologies of “disciplinización y normalización” (Cayuela Sánchez 36) that characterize biopolitical forms of governance. If, as Campbell and Sitze posit in their reading of the importance of the animal in Foucault’s formulation of “biopolitics,” that modern humans are animals with a distinct relationship to “living” (15-16), then the “difference” between Andrés and other humans resides precisely in the fact that he retains some aspect of this non-modern biological concept of life that has yet to be “encountered” by the political, to use the Campbell and Sitze’s verb for this formulation (14).³⁴ To further qualify an argument made at various points in this chapter, then, what I see happening conceptually in this period is not only the distancing of human life from a nonhuman nature with which it is inherently entangled (a topic on which I focus in the following paragraphs), but also, a distancing – or, perhaps more accurately described as a definitive rupture – of the human from the animal that it is. Representing the animalization of

³³ Cayuela Sánchez, in his book-length study of this topic, distinguishes between the biopolitics of early Francoism, which sought to control the bio-social activities of Spanish citizens as a way to, “engrandecer la Patria” (200), and the biopolitics of later Francoism and beyond, which sought to impose similar apparatus of control in order to “aumentar la economía en el ámbito global” (201).

³⁴ Of particular interest for the animalization of Andrés as depicted by Llamazares, Campbell and Sitze highlight the “lessening of death’s felt presence” and “science’s mastery of life through the body” (14) as their preconditions for the imposition of such technologies of biopower.

Andrés is thus an act of naming a difference, one that questions the exclusions that come to define the modern human.

While digging deeper into these respective examples of the tree and the animal provides significant avenues for complicating the human-nonhuman binary, both are nonetheless encompassed within a larger, more comprehensive examination of this binary that occurs with regards to how the novel depicts the limit between the human and the nonhuman environment. This examination in fact begins before the novel itself, in the paratextual author's note that serves as the book's epigraph:

Ainielle existe.

En el año 1970, quedó completamente abandonado, pero sus casas aún resisten, pudriéndose en silencio, en medio del olvido y de la nieve, en las montañas del Pirineo de Huesca que llaman Sobrepuerto.

Todos los personajes de este libro, sin embargo, son pura fantasía de su autor, aunque (sin él saberlo) bien pudieran ser los verdaderos. (7)³⁵

In Mayock's analysis of this quote, she argues that this line "establece un predominio del espacio sobre el tiempo...establece la primacía del lugar, un lugar concreto de montes, ríos, árboles y viento..." (588). Although I cannot disagree with her statement that the author establishes the importance of place here, I would contend her claim that it is a "predominance of space over time" given the temporality likewise implied by the verb form, "existe." In fact, it is this indeterminacy that accompanies the verb "existir" as used here that sets the tone for the entire novel, prompting the reader to question what, exactly, Llamazares means in this succinct opening sentence and, more broadly, to question what it means for an abandoned *pueblo* such as Ainielle "to exist." This focus on the existence of Ainielle is not only present in this line but is also one of the major leitmotifs of the novel, one which constantly reminds us of this binary that separates human culture and nonhuman nature, obliging us to interrogate and reevaluate the way in which we construct its limits.

Picking up where this prologue leaves off with regards to this binary, the first chapter of the novel, as it narrates the arrival of the group of men from nearby villages that will discover Andrés's decomposing body, describes a place that is in a state of neglect and decay. Before arriving to Ainielle, when the group first comes to the *Casa de Sobrepuerto*, a family house that was left vacant after a fire long before the abandonment of the *pueblo*, Andrés narrates how they will work their way through "las aliagas y [el] montón de ruinas y escombros" (9). Then, he describes the state of the path into the town as disappearing, "entre los matorrales...bajo un espeso manto de líquenes y aliagas" (10), all of which is preparation for Ainielle itself, where they will encounter a local fountain covered in nettles and a village church that will have been overrun by grass and brambles (13). While all of this will occur following the death of Andrés,

³⁵ An effort is made in this citation to capture the typographic idiosyncrasy of this page.

this process of the surrounding environment overrunning the edifices of Ainielle is one that we read about throughout the novel. In chapter 5, for example, after an especially brutal winter, Andrés describes how the springtime thaw, as much as it serves as an evergreen sign of hope, brings with it the further erosion of the *pueblo's* abandoned houses: “Al mismo tiempo, las casas comenzaron a enseñar sus muñones mutilados y sus huesos” (46). Some, Andrés tells us, have had their roofs and walls torn apart by the winds, while others have simply been reduced to a pile of rubble, leaving nothing but doorways surrounded by the overgrowth of briars (46); walking through these desolate ruins, the narrator-protagonist appeals to metaphors of battle, seeing himself as, “un general loco que regresara en solitario a las trincheras en las que todos sus soldados habían desertado o estaban muertas” (46). Although he attempts to upkeep his own house and its surrounding constructions, narrating in chapter 7 the labors of a following springtime during which he repairs some deficient beams and removes the lichens that have begun to populate his shed (60-61), Andrés nonetheless recognizes how these acts are futile, makeshift measures that do little more than occupy his days and keep his mind distracted from the solitude (61).

As the book continues, the rewilding of Ainielle, both in the present moment of Andrés's narration and in the future that he envisions for the town after his death, becomes more and more of a recurring, obsessive theme on which he becomes fixated at certain moments. In chapter 7, for example, he describes venturing into neighboring houses, each one in a different state of decay depending on how long it has been abandoned and what was left behind:

Otras...yacían en el suelo completamente hundidas, con las paredes desplomadas y los muebles sepultados bajo un montón de escombros y de líquenes. En unas, el musgo crecía ya como una oscura maldición por los tejados. En otras, las zarzuelas que invadían los portales y las cuadras se habían convertido en árboles auténticos...Pero todas, al fin, más viejas o más nuevas, más tiempo o menos tiempo abandonados, aparecían ya entonces heridas por la nieve, roídas por óxido, convertidas en refugio de las ratas, las culebras y los pájaros. (61-62)

For as exhaustive as this quote is in describing the different ways in which the house comes to return to nature, including the myriad types of flora and fauna that abound in the semi-destroyed buildings, it is complemented only two chapters later by yet another description of the process by which a house gradually comes to be overtaken by nature. This time using an analogy of a body stricken by a fatal ailment, Andrés describes how it is first the “moho y humedad” that infects the house like leprosy, then come the “líquenes silvestres, las negras garras muertas del musgo y la carcoma,” all of which weakens the house so much that, eventually, a strong wind or other storm comes along and the structure collapses, letting out a death rattle of crashing stone and wood that abruptly awakens Andrés (82-83).

In addition to these more thorough passages, there are countless, smaller examples of such details being mentioned over the course of the novel, constantly reminding us of the way in which nature has begun to reassert itself in Ainielle. The prolonged fixation, however, returns once more as the novel nears its end, in chapter 16. Andrés, again ruminating on the future of the *pueblo* after his death, states that the houses will eventually disappear: “Como arena, el silencio sepultará las casas. Como arena, las casas se desmoronarán. Oigo ya sus lamentos.

Solitarios. Sombríos. Ahogados por el viento y la vegetación” (125). But not only does Andrés obsess over how time and desolation will make Ainielle fade away, he also imagines how his son, if he ever decides to come back, will find few signs of past habitation, only a bunch of old buildings covered in moss: “no encontrará ya más que un gran montón de arbustos y ruinas” (128). Finally, emphasizing the symmetry of the narrative, the penultimate paragraph of the novel narrates the group of men who, having buried the body of Andrés, stop once again at the *Casa de Sobrepuerto* and stand amongst, “las aliagas y [el] montón de ruinas y escombros” (143). From the first page of its novel to its last, then, Llamazares, provides recurring and exhaustive descriptions of how Ainielle is currently and will continue to be overrun by the surrounding environment.

The most apparent purpose of this leitmotif is to serve as a reminder of what Andrés’s death means for Ainielle and for those other abandoned towns across Spain that, as Mayock sagely remarks, Ainielle metonymically represents (588): in other words, the death of Andrés represents not just the death of one man, but rather the end of a certain way of life that is connected to a specific place, and we feel this importance with each successive mention of a house overrun with grass or lichens. At the same time, however, it prompts us as readers to think about the difference between human culture and nonhuman nature. This repeated focus on these liminal states of being asks us to consider when each of these constructions – and, likewise, when the entire town of Ainielle – ceases to belong to human civilization and when it becomes a part of nature. But it should also make us reflect on the tenability of such a discrete division. Andrés, for one, with his metaphors of a diseased body and of a war, makes this seem like a strict binary by rehearsing a common trope of “nature as human adversary.” Just like the body as a discrete organism must be protected from harmful, foreign pathogens, so must the houses of Ainielle be protected from animals and plants, lest it perish. Likewise, by comparing himself to a general who has come back to the trenches to find a desolate, devastated landscape, he establishes the relationship between humans and nature as a zero-sum battle, one that he must continuously fight. Although such a perspective goes against the entire anti-binary perspective of this chapter, it is hard not to sympathize with the man: the “victory” of nature would signify not only his death, but the death of his particular civilization.

Yet, for as evocative as these metaphors may be, I do not believe that they are representative of the novel as a whole with regards to the human-nonhuman distinction, but that they instead serve to exemplify the extreme perspective held by its very obstinate first-person narrator. Not only does Andrés, at various other points in the novel, seem to demonstrate a much more complex, interdependent relationship with the nature that surrounds him in this rural space, but the persistence of Ainielle, albeit as the ruins of a once-inhabited human settlement, also controverts such a facile distinction. The first line of the book – that aforementioned “Ainielle existe.” – is particularly instructive in this respect: memorable, concise, and immediately preceding the novel proper, these two words, when read in light of the narrator’s repeated fixation on the destruction of Ainielle, serve as an antidote to the extreme, black-and-white thinking imparted by Andrés in these prolonged descriptions of nature taking over his native *pueblo*.³⁶ Furthermore, there’s a certain playful, paradoxical

³⁶ The rhetoric of Andrés is in these moments, decidedly determinist, to bring the discussion back to Mayock’s genre classification of the novel. This determinist worldview, as I discussed in the prior chapter on Bazán, is based

aspect to this two-word sentence insofar as the entirety of the novel that follows it ostensibly describes the main character's long, drawn-out fight against the process by which Ainielle has come to *not* exist. Given the way this line is at odds with the book that follows it, I see it not as a thesis, but rather a provocation: instead of being read as affirming the fact that Ainielle exists, this simple line should make us consider what it means for a town such as Ainielle to exist, as well as reflect on how preconceived notions of the human-nonhuman binary condition how we understand this statement.

To approach this question requires, as was mentioned with regards to Mayock's analysis of this prologue, thinking about the human and the nonhuman in terms of time. Whereas this initial use of the word "existence" as well as the more extreme perspective of Andrés presupposes a binary – existence and nonexistence – marked by a strict temporal limit, what we are presented through these lengthy descriptions of, for example, woodworms slowly reducing a building or moss and brambles gradually growing over human constructions, is a process. More importantly and precisely, these are processes that occur on time scales that exceed the human. The lichens might cover a house's keystone in a few years, just as those woodworms might reduce a wooden pillar to dust in a similar time frame, but it will take decades, even centuries, for those stones to become completely eroded or for the yellowed photographs so prominently mentioned in the novel to become entirely decomposed. These processes, while themselves quite short in comparative duration, belong more to a geologic time scale, one that we as humans have difficulty comprehending given the relatively-minuscule scales of our existence.³⁷ Yet, despite the presence of these more expansive temporal frames, the novel is also quite clearly delimited by a very human timescale: Andrés does not imagine what Ainielle will look like in a hundred years, or a millennium, or in some very distant future when humans are extinct, but rather he imagines what will become of his *pueblo* in a few months, a few years, or in the lifetime of his son. Although the temporal perspective of Andrés is undeniably a product of his own determinist division between human-nonhuman, it is nonetheless significant that it is also Andrés who is mentioning all of these processes that operate on timescales that exceed his own, anthropocentric perspective of time. The protagonist's own contradictions regarding time, reflected in his more general contradictions regarding his relationship with the nonhuman nature that surrounds him as well as in the paradoxical quality of the epigraph's dramatic first line, thus emphasize the way in which Andrés himself exists simultaneously within these two time scales.

The general question then is one of comprehending the human as, at once, within an anthropologic time scale and within a geologic time scale. It is, to put it back into the context of *La lluvia amarilla*, recognizing the historical importance of villages such as Ainielle and the significance of their loss within the political context of twentieth-century Spain, while at the same time recognizing that all human constructions will, in a geologic time scale, at some point

on a binary comprehension of nature as absolutely separate from humans. Thus, to elaborate on a point I made earlier, I do not see the novel as traditionally Naturalist insofar as it controverts this essential tenet of determinism; the difference in our readings comes down to the degree to which we see Andrés as representative of Llamazares or the novel as a whole.

³⁷ The capacity to comprehend and coexist with things whose scale exceeds those of humans is a subject to which I return in the final chapter of this dissertation, using Morton's concept of a hyperobject, with regards to the 2002 *Prestige* oil spill off the coast of northwest Spain.

not exist. This dual perspective on time exemplifies a point that has been approximated throughout this chapter – but especially in the two prior sections of analysis – in that humans maintain a dialectical relationship to nonhuman nature by which they can be understood as simultaneously existing apart from and within nonhuman nature. But there is nonetheless a very real difference in how we rhetorically frame our relationship to nature, just as there is an important difference regarding the timescale in which we see Ainielle as existing: it is not a simple as just recognizing the partial truth of both perspectives, but in understanding the effect of these perspectives as they become enacted in the world.

This is a distinction that Moore highlights particularly well in his *Capitalism in the Web of Life* by differentiating between a view that sees humans “acting upon” nature and one that sees them as “developing through” it (54).³⁸ It is in this perspective of “acting through nature” that Moore posits that what distinguishes humans is not their mere capacity to make environments – all species have this capacity, he argues – but their “unusually effective” adeptness in this act of environment-making: “reconfiguring the web of life to accommodate, and to enable, definite relations of power and production” (54). Thus returning to the question of Ainielle and the temporal frame through which we comprehend it, I propose that we consider this now-abandoned *pueblo* within the context of the environment-making capacities of humans and, thus, the “end of Ainielle” as the end of a particular example of humanity’s environment-making capacities and the beginning of an environment-making process by other species in this web of life. The point is not to make the existence of Ainielle abstract or insignificant in the broader scope of the Earth and its planetary history, but rather to put its existence into the context of other environment-making actions by humans, in particular, those environment-making activities that have effected the abandonment of towns like Ainielle. Using this concept allows us to reflect on the specific values, ideologies, and power relations that determine what types of environments we choose to make, which ones we choose to un-make, and how these different forms of environment-making affect the nonhuman others with which we constantly interact in this web of life. By reflecting on the differences between certain acts of environment-making, we are offered another way of imagining how humans can be comprehended within the configuration of human-nonhuman in the modern world.

Conclusion: Less Transhumans, More Transhumance

What *La lluvia amarilla* provides today, both as a literary text and as the nexus around which various practices of rural memory have developed, is a history of environment-making practices, each one overlapping the other that came before it: the contemporary period is seen covering a former period during which towns like Ainielle existed, which itself covers a fainter, more distant time in which environment-making practices such as transhumance were prevalent in this mountainous region. In this way, it creates a sort of stratification of these various processes, ultimately offering a cross-section through which we can view each form of environment-making as well as see the progression that has led up to this present moment. Looking at this stratification thus offers a way to situate ourselves in the much larger temporal

³⁸ Instead of using the abstraction of “nature,” Moore proposes the concept of a “web of life” or the “*oikeios*,” which includes humans and conceives of their actions as developing through this comprehensive set of relations.

scale of the past, offering a way to rethink and contrast the present. Recovering the origins of transhumance might not offer a way out of the crises of the present, just as reading about the depopulation of Ainielle will not reverse the damage effected to rural Spain during the final decades of Francoism, yet by engaging with and understanding these former practices of environment-making, it can defamiliarize the present moment and its particular configurations of humans within the environment.

As presented at the beginning of the chapter, my thesis regarding *La lluvia amarilla* stated that this poetic meditation of the human-nonhuman binary in the novel serves as a way of responding to the changing concept of nature in Spain during this period of demographic and infrastructural change. However, considering the prior section's discussion, I would edit this argument to claim that it is not a changing concept of nature to which the work responds, but instead to a new form of environment-making. A transition from one form of environment-making that was quintessentially practiced in the rural life of towns such as Ainielle to a distinctly-capitalist form of environment-making. Between these two forms, it is not so much a difference marked by conceptual distancing from nature, as I earlier phrased this process, but rather a transformation in terms of how humans were both configuring and being configured within the web of life.

The difference in terminology is important as it provides a way to comprehend how change is effected in the world using a rhetorical perspective that is not based in anthropocentrism. As I stated in the closing paragraphs of this preceding section, the way in which we use language to understand our relationship to the world is not a neutral act. Nevertheless, the decision to maintain the human-nature vocabulary in the earlier parts of this chapter – that is, the decision to not revise the entirety of the chapter, replacing all mentions of “nature” with more accurate metaphors such as “web of life” and “environment making” – is one that was made not out of indolence or indifference, but rather to underscore the larger question of what it means to change the fundamental frameworks by which we comprehend the world. The point is, to return to the discussion brought up in the opening paragraphs of this dissertation, not to expunge or deny the importance of our modern conceptual imagination, but rather to reflect on what happens as we recognize its deficiencies and begin to map new frontiers of thought.

Chapter 3

Unhelpful Tools with Destructive Inertia

Posthuman Destruction in Eugenio Tisselli's *degenerative* and *regenerative*

In *amazon* (2019),³⁹ one of Eugenio Tisselli's most recent works, by the moment users become aware of what is happening, they have already become complicit in a simple, digital rehearsal of this precious biome's destruction. Upon running a block of code that we have been instructed to copy, paste to a plain text editor, and save to the personal drive of the computer we are using as "amazon.HTML," we witness a forest of green "trees" (represented by the "*" symbol) become replaced by brown numerals at an ever-increasing speed until, after a few minutes, the screen becomes almost entirely covered by these ever-changing digits, soon resembling an indecipherable, illogical stock ticker where once there was a peaceful forest. Characteristic of the Mexican-born, Barcelona-based artist's oeuvre, which features works that similarly use algorithmic processes to explore the real-world, material effects of the digital, *amazon* obliges its users to recognize the exploitation of natural resources for an ever-more-abstract concept of growth in a capitalist economy today based on digital tools and increasingly controlled by algorithms. Operating with an unaccommodating, destructive inertia that is likewise a hallmark of Tisselli's aesthetic style, works like *amazon* put the onus on users to comprehend their complicity in all of this: it is not only that these digital objects are designed to be destroyed or corrupted in response to user interaction, but also that, upon interacting with them, we end up witnessing a process that we feel powerless to stop.

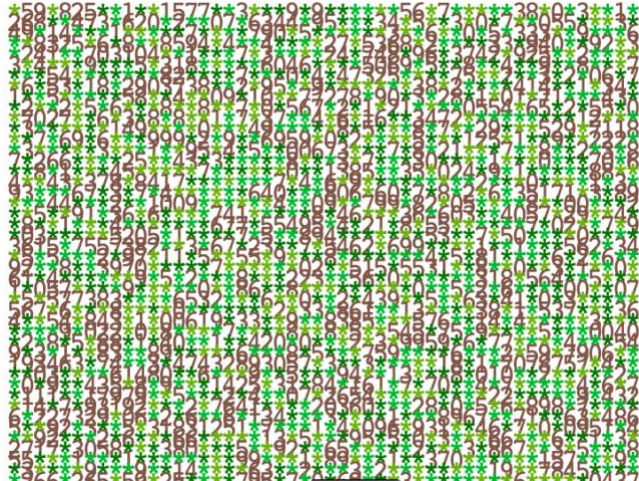
Significantly, although this same aesthetic is utilized in various works, the mechanism of change and the object being transformed is consistently different between works. For instance, in contrast with *amazon*, which is a file that each, individual user must download and run on their personal computer, in one his earliest and most visual works, *fadeaway* (2006), a digital self-portrait photo of the artist is incrementally altered by each visit to the web page on which it is hosted and is thus transformed gradually by a collective of users. To offer another example, *The 27th || El 27* (2016) consists of an article of the Mexican constitution (specifically, the 27th article, which outlines land rights to the Mexican state) that is, one fragment at a time, crudely translated into English as the New York Stock Exchange index rises. Another notable example – in fact, the proto-example – of this aesthetic of self-destruction is *degenerative* and *regenerative* (2005), a pair of works with similar mechanisms that playfully explores the network dynamics that constitute the internet, both its possibilities and its dangers.

³⁹ The titles for Tisselli's works are written entirely in lowercase to reflect a stylistic decision by the author, with the exception of *The 27th || El 27*.



This is a picture of me, taken on the day of my birthday in 2006. Each time you visit this page, a white pixel will appear on the picture. After 120,000 visits, this image will be nothing but a white rectangle.

Screenshot of *fadeaway*



Screenshot of *amazon*

The 27th. El 27.

[EN] Each time the New York Stock Exchange Composite Index (Symbol: ^NYA) closes with a positive percent variation, a fragment of the 27th article of the Mexican Constitution is automatically translated into English. [\[more\]](#)

[ES] Cada vez que el Índice Compuesto de la Bolsa de Valores de Nueva York (Símbolo: ^NYA) cierre con una variación porcentual positiva, un fragmento del artículo 27 de la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos será traducido automáticamente al inglés. [\[más\]](#)

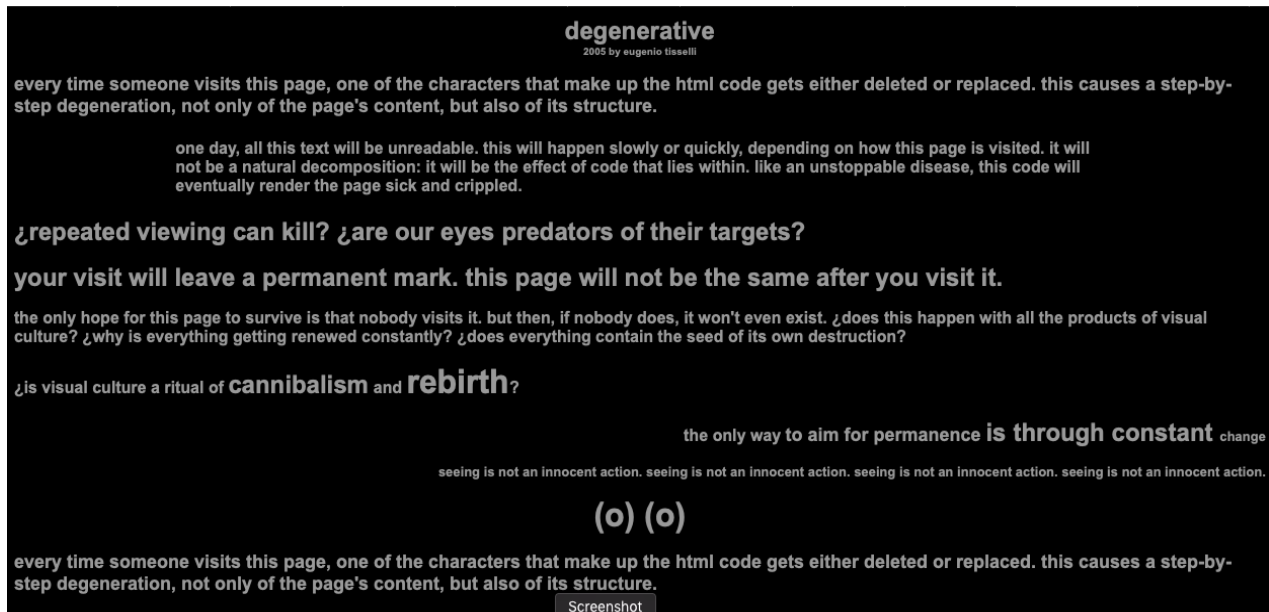
Code: ^NYA
Name: NYSE COMPOSITE INDEX
Last closing price: 12341.01
Last closing date: 10/31/2017
Last closing time: 5:27pm
Percent Change: +0.17%

ARTICLE 27. LAND PROPERTY AND FALLING WATERS WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE NATIONAL TERRITORY, ORIGINALLY CORRESPONDS TO THE NATION, WHICH HAS HAD AND HAVE THE RIGHT TO TRANSMIT THE DOMAIN OF THESE INDIVIDUALS, CONSTITUTING PRIVATE PROPERTY. EXPROPRIATIONS MAY ONLY BE BECAUSE OF USEFULNESS PUBLIC AND THROUGH COMPENSATION. THE NATION WILL HAVE AT ALL TIMES THE RIGHT TO IMPOSE ON PRIVATE PROPERTY MODALITIES THAT DICTATES THE INTEREST PUBLIC, AS WELL AS THE REGULAR, SOCIAL BENEFIT, IMPROVING THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES; IN ORDER TO MAKE AN EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH PUBLIC, CUIDAR DE SU CONSERVACION, LOGRAR EL DESARROLLO EQUILIBRADO DEL PAIS Y EL MEJORAMIENTO DE LAS CONDICIONES DE VIDA DE LA POBLACION RURAL Y URBANA. CONSEQUENTLY, WERE RENDERED MEASURES NECESSARY TO ORDER HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AND ESTABLISH APPROPRIATE PROVISIONS, USOS, RESERVATIONS AND DESTINATIONS OF LANDS, WATER AND FORESTS, IN ORDER TO EXECUTE WORKS TO PUBLIC AND TO PLAN AND REGULATE THE FOUNDATION, CONSERVACION, IMPROVEMENT AND GROWTH OF POPULATION CENTRES; TO PRESERVE AND RESTORE THE ECOLOGICAL BALANCE; FOR THE FRACTIONATION OF THE ESTATES. PARA DISPONER, OF THE INCOME THE ORGANIZATION AND COLLECTIVE EXPLOITATION OF THE EJIDOS AND COMMUNITIES; PARA EL DESARROLLO DE LA PEQUEÑA PROPIEDAD RURAL; FOR THE PROMOTION OF AGRICULTURE, DE LA GANADERIA, OF THE FORESTRY AND OF THE OTHER ACTIVITIES ECONOMIC IN THE MIDDLE RURAL, AND TO PREVENT THE DESTRUCTION OF THE NATURAL ELEMENTS AND GIVES THEM TO YOU THAT THE PROPERTY MAY SUFFER TO THE DETRIMENT OF SOCIETY. CORRESPONDS TO THE NATION THE DOMAIN DIRECT OF ALL THEM RESOURCES NATURAL OF IT PLATFORM CONTINENTAL AND THE SOCKETS SUBMARINE OF THE ISLANDS; DE TODOS LOS MINERALES O SUSTANCIAS QUE EN VETAS, MANTO MASAS O YACIMIENTOS, CONSTITUTE DEPOSITS WHOSE NATURE IS DIFFERENT FROM THE COMPONENTS OF THEM LAND, SUCH AS MINERALS THAT ARE

Screenshot of *The 27th || El 27*

One of the earliest works published by Tisselli, and thus an exemplar for this now-established aesthetic of self-destructive digital poetics, the paired web pages of *degenerative* and *regenerative* become progressively less comprehensible the more users interact with them, transforming through a process that is similar to the one by which *fadeaway* operates. Both pages are today accessed through an information page that explains the project and provides a way to view the changes they have undergone since their initial publication: in *degenerative*, a webpage with a paragraph of text gradually became reduced to a black screen over the course of forty-four days as a character was “destroyed or replaced” each time the page was visited, while in *regenerative*, a paragraph on a similar webpage has been expanding into incoherence as it extracts and adds text from any referring pages. Published simultaneously with versions in Spanish, the sensibly titled *degenerativa* and *regenerativa* display a similar trajectory from coherence to incoherence; however, as I discuss further at the end of this chapter, one that bespeaks the significant power differential between these two languages in the world today.

The original screen of *degenerative*, as was ostensibly seen by the ordinary reader on that fateful day in 2005 in which Tisselli published the webpage, displays a short text that explains the mechanism of the work and offers a provocative reflection on the impermanence of the objects of contemporary visual culture. Accessed today through the archival page by which one views the work and its progressive transformations, a screenshot of this original page is reproduced below:



Original screen of *degenerative*

The active webpage for *degenerative* is still accessible today, yet, having expunged the entirety of this text, as each successive visit either deleted or replaced a character, it persists as an entirely blank, black page. More appealing than this wholly-degenerated webpage, however, are the ten links provided by Tisselli from the information page. Through these links we can see the changes wrought by the users who visited this page up until day 44 of its existence, a period during which considerable changes were still apparent:

degenerative

2005 by eugenio tisselli

a web page that slowly becomes corrupted. each time the page is visited, one of its characters is either destroyed or replaced.

[click here](#) to visit the page.

this is a history of the page's corruption:

[original page](#)

[day 1](#)

[day 2](#)

[day 4](#)

[day 6](#)

[day 8](#)

[day 13](#)

[day 21](#)

[day 24](#)

[day 36](#)

[day 44](#)

Archival page for *degenerative*

Designed in a similar fashion, but with a green background befitting the hopeful connotations of its altered prefix, *regenerative* presents its readers a text with a familiar content and tone:

regenerative is the second part of the [degenerative](#) experiment, in which a web page became increasingly corrupted each time it was visited. in the regenerative web page, text degenerates with each visit, but it also attempts to regenerate itself by trying to extract some text from the referring page. if extraction succeeds, the new text is implanted within the degenerating text and becomes part of it. this gives way to a cycle of degeneration-regeneration.

in the previous experiment, some questions were asked: repeated viewing can kill? are our eyes predators of their targets?

now, we can ask some new ones: does everything we see contain a part of us? maybe what we see is only a reflection of ourselves. is our own self the only image we can see?

so, if our eyes are predators of their targets, then **seeing** is an act of **self-destruction**. the part of ourselves contained in that which we see is slowly killed with every view.

every time you visit this page, the text gets corrupted. but if you link to this page from another one, a piece of text extracted from the referring page will be implanted within the degenerating text. this new regenerating tissue is a part of you. it comes from the same place as you. it becomes a part of the degenerating tissue.

will the new tissue become a tumor? will this page regenerate faster than it degenerates?

this page will not regenerate at all if no one creates a link to it.

seeing (and linking) is not an innocent act.

does everything contain the seed of its own destruction? does everything we see contain a part of us?

self-destruction, self-regeneration -- endless cycle.

Screenshot

Original page of *regenerative*

In one way mimicking *degenerative*, this second work of the pair also deletes or replaces a character with each successive visit. Yet, instead of proceeding inevitably towards destruction, true to its title, *regenerative* maintains a capacity to persist, albeit in a mangled, incoherent state, as it extracts characters from any webpage that links to it. Resisting oblivion, *regenerative* nevertheless shows us that there are many paths to incoherence in the digital

sphere, as it now offers a long, incoherent scroll whose blocks of colored text, taken as a whole, resemble more a crude work of geometric abstract art than it does a web page:



Screenshot of a portion of *regenerative*

Bespeaking a fundamental difference between how the two works function and have progressed since 2006, the screenshot above shows how *regenerative* has become an archive of its own transformations, in this way resembling a geologic strata of a webpage, while, by contrast, *degenerative* can only evince its transformation through the screenshots that Tisselli provides us today as contemporary viewers. Nonetheless, in both works, by giving prominence to their respective narratives of change – that is, by directing viewers from his website to the works via these archival, information pages – Tisselli highlights the rapid devolution of the text from coherence to incoherence, from utility to uselessness, and, in doing so, emphasizes how they both reveal the importance of code for digital communication. No longer fulfilling its instrumental goal of communicating a coherent text, the web page for each work can today only impart its impairment, having become a broken tool that reveals that which it had originally concealed: its materiality, that is, its code. Going sequentially through the links provided by Tisselli on the information page of *degenerative*, for example, a contemporary viewer can read and interpret the way in which the original text stopped making sense, seeing how the HTML code, the mechanism by which the text appears on the user’s chosen interface, gradually overtakes the original text: font names such as “Helvetica” and “Arial” show up in various lines, while symbols and punctuation, which at first just interrupt the flow of communication, soon become predominant before their presence, too, becomes gradually reduced. This, for example, is a screenshot of the webpage on its sixth day:

```
<al-gn=" e t*r>st* <*o*t si e=" fa**= _A il, He-etica* s* _erifD*ge*ra_ veont<*o*_ s_ _="*-f e=Aia_-el_etico*_ _-sr*f">/*_o*_ _pp>
s*rm> fo_ siz=" fac=A*ial*H-v_ ti-a sa*s_ j">* _ r-j* s*mone - is- h_ e_ o*_ _ the_ cha cters hat k*u*th hit_*c_ e gets-e_ ther e*eted o_ _l_ ced. t_*-ca*ses a se*- -i*-dege-e*a*i_ -n*t_ _ of th_ _e's c ntn_ _but_ _s of t*
t-u_-re_* * < valig_*e* ><_r>/dvt_ >*/p_ p-l*_ _>*/tr g_ _p><_g your r*nl**eave a_ e mane*ma_ _is-ag*willn i be *he_ame a_er_ u i-i it. font>-trg>t_*_ oly_ efor t_s pg_ _o su*vi eis *at_ _ _vis-t_ _ but_
h** if_ _o_ody-e_*_*w_ t vn-ex_st_ qust*es t-ishap*e w-th-al**_o duct o_ _isu latur*i est w s vr*t*_ _ eti_ _e_ _d con_ ta_ ll_* & iuest; do s_ _ ev* _yt-ing _ntan_ _he_ _eo it_ w_ s_ _uc-i- < -t>_ sto*g>_ nt_*z*="3 fac*= i
l**Hel_etic_ _an*_ser_> & u_ s_ _vis*_al_c_ _u* e a ri a_ o_ _ontsi_ ="3" _nibal-sm/_on_> and_ t_ z="6">rebi h*fo_ _ _fon_> _trong>/*>
<_trn>*a_ g / _**_f_n**fjn_ se_g_ _not n *n-o et_ -- se_i_ i_ tan_ _nocent a_ -i-n_ eei gi_ _o_ n-in_ -e*_ ction_ _e*_ g_ i_n i an*_n_e_j act*on.<*fo_j_ _p> --<* align= e_te_ str_g < n s e=" _fa*_ Ari_ _ H lvet a,*ns f_>( * o) on_
<_d_>
```

Page of *degenerative* on day 6

In other words, the text goes from communicating as a natural language, to communicating as a corrupted, semi-comprehensible formal language, to finally not communicating in any language. The contemporary viewer thus experiences the progressive transformation of the text, from, first, the struggle between the natural and the formal language to effectively communicate, and, then, to the negation of any successful communication. The signification of the code in sustaining the instrumental purpose of the text rapidly goes from being a minor consideration for the viewer to the undeniable reason why the text ever made sense.

Focusing on these two paired works of *degenerative* and *regenerative* (with a concluding comment on their Spanish-language versions), in this chapter I argue that Tisselli offers two very poignant demonstrations of code that fails to fulfill its instrumental purpose of sustaining a webpage and a posthuman assemblage that is unwilling to resist the destructive inertia programmed into those webpages. Starting off, in the following section, I situate Tisselli’s oeuvre, especially his particular aesthetic of destruction, within the field of electronic literature. Additionally, I briefly summarize the existing scholarship on Tisselli, reviewing how various academics contextualize his artistic output within different traditions – linguistic, artistic, and national. Ultimately, I assert the importance of reading his works within the context of Iberian electronic literature. In the analysis, I analyze these works in three different ways: close reading the functioning of the code, reviewing what happened to these works through the framework of the posthuman, and analyzing the literary content of the original texts. In these first two analytical sections, respectively, I argue that Tisselli directly critiques the instrumentalist ethos of the digital⁴⁰ and cautions against the dangers of digital posthuman assemblages. Using this third section to consider the more figurative dimensions of *degenerative* and *regenerative*, I then conclude the analysis by considering the allegorical connections between these two works of electronic literature and contemporary Spain. Finally, bringing in *degenerativa* and *regenerativa*, I argue that the presence of these alternative, Spanish-language versions allows Tisselli to situate these interventions within a non-abstract, political concept of digital posthumanism.

⁴⁰ In “Unhelpful Tools: Reexamining the Digital Humanities through Eugenio Tisselli’s *degenerative* and *regenerative*” (2020), I similarly looked at the connection between Tisselli’s works and a critique of instrumentalism, but in that case I considered this question with regards to the academic field of Digital Humanities.

Eugenio Tisselli's Electronic Literature: Influences and Interpretations

Two of his earliest works, *degenerative* and *regenerative* are perhaps also Tisselli's most well-known, at least outside of the Spanish-speaking and electronic literature spheres, thanks in part to their mention in a brief article posted on *Wired.com* soon after their creation. Published during roughly the same period of artistic production for the artist, *degenerative* and *regenerative* formally operate in a way that is almost identical to the aforementioned *fadeaway* and another work, *meaning* (2005). In each one of these objects, some transformation of a web page occurs in response to a user visiting this page: most similar to *regenerative*, *meaning*, instead of becoming destroyed, replaces one of the words in its page-long text with a synonym each time a user visits. In contrast with later pieces that also operate under a similar formal mechanism but are more explicitly political, these three, earlier works are based more on a philosophical, structuralist reflection on communication in the digital sphere. Grouping these works together, we can easily divide his artistic production into two distinct stages: a less political, early stage and an explicitly political, later stage. I say easily because, not only is this difference quite discernible in the works themselves, but also because Tisselli himself helped distinguish his production into two stages, as marked by a hiatus he took in the early 2010s to reflect on electronic literature as a field. Describing in his 2011 essay, "why I have stopped creating e-lit," the process by which he had come to comprehend the pernicious effects of digital society on the environment, most notably its effects on those places that have in modern times been exploited for resource extraction and waste disposal, Tisselli uses this personal realization to admonish himself and other creators of electronic literature for not being more critical about the material effects of the digital tools they use to create their works. Ultimately returning with a more explicit, political thrust to his artistic practice, these more recent works are not only different by virtue of their politics, but also distinguish themselves by evincing a transformation in the formal processes by which the later works operate. For example, whereas *degenerative*, *regenerative*, *fadeaway*, and *meaning* all change in response to a user visiting the page, later works such as *The 27th || El 27* and *amazon* become transformed through a different mechanism: the former changes in response to an outside force (the stock exchange) while the latter runs a program that is individually executed by each user. Thus, although many of the works found in Tisselli's oeuvre display a shared tendency towards destruction or transformation, each one does so in a slightly different way, highlighting a different aspect of human interaction with digital infrastructure.

Paying attention to what I see, broadly, as the two predominant tendencies found in Tisselli's electronic literature – the formal interest in the destruction of digital objects and a more thematic interest in creating overtly political works of electronic literature –, over the next few paragraphs, I contextualize these tendencies within the field of electronic literature.⁴¹ First, beyond Tisselli, this formal interest in the self-destruction or deterioration, in its myriad forms, belongs to a tradition in electronic literature that emphasizes the precarious materiality and ephemerality of the digital. For example, one of the field's most well-known works, *Agrippa*

⁴¹ Electronic literature is defined by the Electronic Literature Organization as "work with an important literary aspects that takes advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer" (qtd. in Hayles "Electronic Literature: What is it?").

(1992) by William Gibson, consists of an artist book containing a floppy disk which, when opened on a computer, would run a program that scrolled through the lines of a poem that would encrypt itself and thus become unreadable upon completion, similar to how the original webpage of *degenerative* was permanently altered with each user's visit to the page. Although famously meant to disappear upon completion for those few readers who were able to purchase a copy of the book, the poem is perhaps more famous for its persistence, as videos of the verses' slow scroll into oblivion still circulate quite freely on the internet today. In a similar, albeit much more humorous, self-aware fashion, Rob Wittig's *The Fall of the Site of Marsha* (1999) presents a tale of an early-internet-style personal home page that becomes absurdly corrupted by evil forces, a process of degradation that reflects its fictional creator's real-life hardships. While, unlike Tisselli's works or the poem by Gibson, Wittig's work does not transform directly in response to user interaction, *The Fall of the Site of Marsha* effectively tells and archives a "narrative of destruction" in a manner similar to that of *degenerative*, as the three separate stages of corruption were originally released over the course of various months in 1998 and are currently archived on the author's website. As a final example of this tendency, Noah Wardrip-Fruin's *The Impermanence Agent* (1999-2003) uses the content collected from a user's browsing history to incrementally edit a narrative told through passages that appear in a small window of the user's chosen browser. By taking a simple narrative and replacing its given words or phrases with analogous ones picked from the pages of one's browser history, *The Impermanence Agent* not only exemplifies this tendency towards corruption of digital texts, but it also, like *regenerative*, freely incorporates content from the user as an essential part of this process of corruption, in this way highlighting the oft-nefarious exploitation of the user data that is accumulated as we navigate the networked connections that constitute the internet.⁴²

What these three works share, and what I see as their influence on Tisselli, is an emphasis on the instability of digital texts, that is, "texts which are produced to be read [by humans] in digital formats" (Trimarco 1). As will be brought up in the analysis of *degenerative* and *regenerative*, in addition to the digital text that we as humans read, the other text that is essential for transmission of information through digital media is the source code. The source code constitutes the plain text instructions written by a human using a human-readable programming language such as Python or Java, which are customarily executed by a compiler program, converting the source code to instructions for the physical hardware before it is ultimately used to run the computer programs we interact with as users: put in a simpler and slightly reductive way, source code is the set of instructions by which digital media function. While none of these works are explicitly about source code, in a very different way, each one presents the disruption of the digital text through processes that are unseen or otherwise uncontrollable by the user: from the literal disruptions of a self-destructing algorithm in *Agrippa* or the unsuspectingly-user-generated changes to the narrative in *Impermanence Agent*, to the metaphorical disruptions caused by the "demons" in Wittig's piece, all three point to the unstable, easily-corruptible nature of digital texts. In more technical terms, these works

⁴² For a more contemporary example that demonstrates the continuation of this tendency towards erasure in electronic literature in the years since Tisselli published *degenerative* and *regenerative*, *thedeletionist.com* (2013) – a collaboration between Amaranth Borsuk, Jesper Juul and Nick Montfort – is a browser application that converts any webpage with text into an unexpected work of poetry by erasing certain words on the page and leaving the user with a concise, lyric poem.

all emphasize an oft-overlooked connection between content (the digital text) and mechanism (the source code, as well as various other programs and infrastructure), which is precisely the connection to which Tisselli calls our attention in *degenerative* and *regenerative*.

While these rather diverse works offer a possible genealogy for Tisselli's various iterations of self-corrupting digital objects, I would also like to briefly note that these concepts of ephemerality and precarity are also particularly salient throughout the entire history of electronic literature as a field. For instance, the hypertext, a genre that has often been regarded as synonymous with electronic literature itself, presents its readers with a constant reminder of the impermanence of digital "pages," as each act of navigation to another page of text – a "lexia" – carries with it the vanishing of the former page. These types of digital texts, which use the basic and oft-overlooked affordance of the computer to "link" from one page to another in response to the click of a mouse, offer a different experience of textual navigation from the codex book, especially in terms of the binary of permanence and ephemerality: whereas the successive sections of a codex book are always, often literally, at hand, in general the lexia of a hypertext narrative no longer appears on screen once we proceed to the next one. While each individual hypertext has a distinct way of navigating and visualizing the lexia of which it is composed – for instance, some may prevent the reader from returning to a previous lexia while others may invite readers to return to a former page – I bring up this essential facet of hypertexts here to highlight what I see as a much broader, fundamental aspect of electronic literature with regards to the interplay between permanence and ephemerality: specifically, the precarious, impermanent manner by which we access digital objects such as web pages, digital texts, or images.

This question of access with regards to electronic literature does not just simply concern how we navigate or interact with discrete pages or aspects of a work, but also has to do with the entire work itself. Given the speed with which digital commodities are innovated or updated (commonly due to the economics of creative destruction by which technology companies make profit), many of the operating systems or platforms on which works of electronic literature are created or are hosted become either obsolete or inaccessible not long after they are created, a well-known problem that Moulthrop and Grigar in their book *Traversals* both discuss and explore first-hand. Although, as they describe in this book, through the efforts of individuals and organizations, such works can generally be preserved for future readers, the ongoing necessity and labor required to do so (as occurred most recently when December 31, 2020 signified the end of support for Adobe's Flash player) evinces the constant preoccupation with ephemerality and permanence that fundamentally characterizes almost every piece of electronic literature.⁴³ Thus, even though there may be a few, choice works of

⁴³ Moulthrop and Grigar comment on how this process is often forestalled by "specially modified browsers or reader software" (4). It nonetheless represents the beginning of the end for many of works of e-lit, which require very specific, and often very expensive tools, for converting or archiving them, which depends mostly on institutional investment. Although they recognize that this preoccupation with obsolescence is ultimately futile, they do make a case for avoiding what they call Sappho Syndrome, invoking the tenth muse of antiquity whose oeuvre is only known through fragments and secondary sources (231). They define this concept generally, but they are especially worried about how the ever-changing media requirements of the digital age will hasten the erasure of different works of electronic literature and the different voices who participated in literary experiments with myriad digital media (230-232).

electronic literature that so explicitly become destroyed or corrupted in a manner similar to that of *degenerative* and *regenerative*, my brief sub-argument here is that the fundamental issues of precarity, permanence, and ephemerality underlie electronic literature as an artistic practice in a way that has substantially influenced the oeuvre of Tisselli.

The other predominant tendency that I identify in his work – one that is, by contrast, not apparent in *degenerative* and *regenerative* – is the creation of electronic literature that is explicitly political insofar as it directly comments on or critiques the governance of national or supranational organizations. This is in contrast not only with certain works in the artist's own oeuvre, but also with the way in which electronic literature has often been theorized, as a more experimental and less overtly political form of artistic practice. For example, Glazier in his books on digital poetics explicitly links electronic literature to earlier, modernist literary practice, such as the poetry games of the Oulipo group, which experimented with the written word both as material object and as linguistic signifier. Expanding on this and similar arguments, Pressman's *Digital Modernism* argues that works of electronic literature do not only just adopt many of the literary practices and themes typical of modernism (2-3), but that they themselves constitute a "digital modernism" with writers that, "assess the state of electronic literature, and literature in general in our digital age, and they decide to raze and rebuild" (3). Pressman, significantly, recognizes the affinity between digital modernism and the avant-garde (10), but comprehends this as a cultural response – one that is particularly modernist, given the technological changes that accompanied the original period with which such artistic movements are associated (4-5) – to the technological transformations of the digital age. The way in which Pressman describes electronic literature as digital modernism quite clearly demonstrates that it is far from an autotelic aesthetic exercise in linguistic experimentation; understood in this manner, even the most experimental, abstruse works of electronic literature and could be considered political for how they respond to the thoroughgoing changes in communication technology brought about by the digital age. This would be political more in the fashion of Rancière's "distribution of the sensible" than it is in accordance with the definition given earlier in this paragraph of "explicitly political" artistic practice.

While the first half of Tisselli's oeuvre could be considered political in this way, there is nonetheless a clear distinction between those works which are more concerned with formal experimentation and those that are more clearly political – in particular, those made since his decision to pause and reflect on his artistic practice. Conveniently classified on his website as "Algorithmic Politics," these works include the aforementioned *amazon* and *The 27th || El 27*, as well as *institute for the advancement of popular automatisms* (2015) and *himno algorítmico transnacional hiperacelerado de américa del norte* (2018). These heretofore-unmentioned works are formally different from the others insofar as they do not degrade or transform nor do they change completely in response to some input: made in collaboration with Joana Moll, *the institute* is a type of hypertext consisting of a central webpage with various links that lead to other pages that use images, word generators, and other texts to critique the vapid language of neoliberal capitalism; in a similar fashion, *himno* uses an algorithm to randomly intermix words from the constitutions of the three North American members of NAFTA – throwing in the preamble of NAFTA for good measure – and then presents the user with the rapidly-scrolling output upon their visit to the page.

Focusing on this political tendency, in general, the academic scholarship on Tisselli analyzes these works as a critique of neoliberal globalization and the role of digital tools within it. For example, Manuel Portela includes *The 27th // El 27* within his encyclopedic study of digital art that critiques the digital, global network of cognitive capitalism, arguing that “Eugenio Tisselli’s work is a political statement in algorithmic form” (259). The statement, as Portela argues, is not specifically about contemporary relations between the United States and Mexico, but is instead a more broad commentary on how capitalism today operates through the interchangeability and universal compatibility of abstract signs” (259), one in which “English becomes a meta-signifier for the smooth translation of all matter...into the abstract chains of financial and economic value” (259). Offering a similar reading, Huizar sees *The 27th // El 27* as “[alerting] us to the political importance of recognizing and acting upon the proposals to reshape economic globalization” (115), but, in contrast to Portela, she emphasizes how this work reflects the impotent, oppressed experience of individual Mexican citizens stuck in this economic relationship with their imperial neighbor to the north. Somewhere between these two critiques, Claudia Kozak in her article on “Poéticas/Políticas de la materialidad en la poesía digital latinoamericana” looks at the oeuvre of Tisselli in relation to other Latin American practitioners of electronic literature, arguing that he uses the materiality of the digital to critique what she calls the algorithmic necropolitics of neoliberal capitalism. Focusing on *The 27th // El 27* as well as *institute* and *himno*, Kozak writes: “Pero no se trata de denunciar las políticas algorítmicas del necrocapitalismo evadiéndolas, sino de trabajar en contra de ellas desde su mismo sistema algorítmico, exacerbándolo” (87). Broadening her critique to practitioners working outside of Latin America and further politicizing her commentary, Kozak has in a more recent article grouped works such as *The 27th // El 27* into a category she calls “decolonial e-lit” (“Experimental Electronic Literatures”).

The overarching critique shared by these scholars is also the one that underlies my analysis of Tisselli in this chapter: the use of digital tools to critique the globalized capitalist networks of accumulation and expansion in which these digital tools are embedded. As is evident in this quick summary of the existing scholarship, the majority of critical work on Tisselli discusses his more overtly-political works, especially *The 27th // El 27*.⁴⁴ The most exhaustive in her study of Tisselli’s oeuvre, Kozak mentions *degenerativa* and provides a brief reading of the work, but her commentary on this piece is made in relation to her study of his more explicitly-political artistic production. Finally, Heckman and O’Sullivan, serving as an exception to this academic emphasis on Tisselli’s later works, exclusively discuss *degenerative/regenerative* in “‘your visit will leave a permanent mark’: Poetics in the Post-Digital Economy,” an article with which I will engage more thoroughly in a later section, as it serves as a helpful point of departure for my analysis.

Eugenio Tisselli’s Electronic Literature in the Context of Contemporary Spain

Returning to Portela, Huizar, and Kozak, also of note with regards to these three scholars is the different contexts in which their respective articles choose to study Tisselli:

⁴⁴ This tendency is further corroborated by the unmentioned articles of Anna Dot (2020) and Verónica Paula Gómez (2021), which likewise focus on this work from 2014.

specifically, while Kozak and Huizar group Tisselli within a field of Latin American digital production and culture, Portela includes him within a contemporary concept of world literature, one that is predicated on Tabbi's claim that the digital space offers the affordances around which global literary communities can be comprised. Biographically, Eugenio Tisselli, who is originally from and currently resides in Mexico, but has spent most of his professional life in Barcelona as the co-director of the Masters in Digital Arts program at Pompeu Fabra University and has worked on various projects based in Tanzania, presents a difficult case for any absolute claim to his work within a specific regional or national tradition. On one hand, the inclusion of his oeuvre within a Latin American/Mexican tradition makes sense given his country of origin and the fact that his most prominent work is about Mexican politics. On the other hand, Portela's argument, via Tabbi,⁴⁵ that Tisselli participates in an international network of electronic literary creators that "can be regarded as an alternative formation to globalization" (Tabbi 26, qtd. in Portela), is compelling given the international collaboration and reception of his electronic literature, not to mention the fact that very few of his works appear to be specifically placed within any national or local context. Recognizing the validity and the importance of these divergent arguments while offering yet another possibility, I propose that we consider his works as belonging, at least in part, to a Spanish/Iberian context of electronic literature production.

As alluded to earlier, Tisselli has resided in Spain for a considerable portion of his professional, adult life, influencing both the style and content of his electronic literary works. With regards to artistic influence, in addition to his explicit collaboration with Iberian artists (from his work with Catalan digital artist Joana Moll on *institute* to his recurring co-authoring of essays with the Portuguese, fellow electronic literature practitioner Rui Torres), his digital poetics likewise displays the influence of almost a half century of electronic literature on the Iberian Peninsula: from Pedro Barbosa's early reflections on poetics and language in *Cyberliterature* (1977-1993), to the kinetic play of textual characters in Tina Escaja's *VeloCity* (2000), to the humor and societal critique apparent in the work of Isaías Herrero's oeuvre, just to name a few examples. While not precluding the assertions made by Huizar, Kozak, or Portela, these examples of Iberian and, to a large degree, Spanish influences demonstrate the importance of a specific regional tradition of electronic literature for the artistic practice of Tisselli. Thus, I would argue that, even if one maintains that Tisselli is a Mexican or a world artist, the influence of this Spanish and Iberian tradition must be recognized when comprehending his oeuvre. Simply, his participation within artist networks – in Barcelona, in Catalonia, in Spain, in the Iberian Peninsula, and in Europe – has shaped his artistic practice.

Beyond style and aesthetics, my second point is more about infrastructure and politics, and has to do with the fact that the internet of the twenty-first century is significantly conditioned by one's national residence. Counter to early-internet aspirations for the web to be an open-source, borderless network – and, in this way, counter to Portela and Tabbi's hopeful arguments for electronic literature as a potential world literary community –, access to the

⁴⁵ Portela's takes this specific idea of a digital world literature from Joseph Tabbi's article "Electronic Literature as World Literature; or, The Universality of Writing under Constraint," in which he argues for a concept of world literature that is constituted and afforded by contemporary digital networks. This argument, of course, is itself inspired by Damrosch's earlier, print-based concept of world literature, which is in turn inspired by Marx and Goethe's approaches to a "world literature" from centuries prior.

internet today is contingent upon local service providers, national infrastructure (i.e. fiber optic cables, wireless networks, etc.), trackable IP addresses, and geographically-enforced firewalls or other forms of technical regulation. Although certain forms of national control over content and access can be circumvented, all of these factors contribute substantially to the way in which countries today present their internet users with a unique and shared default mode of access; as Wendy Chun argues in *Control and Freedom*, these decisions are not determined by the technological protocols of the internet, but rather the political decisions that determine how those protocols are both operative and visible for each individual user.⁴⁶ In a forthright way, then, I contend that certain pieces by Tisselli should be considered as Spanish works of electronic literature because they were created by an artist whose access to the internet was primarily determined by these national parameters. While I would not say this argument holds for every work of electronic literature or digital art, I think that this point is especially relevant for *degenerative* and *regenerative* since they are about access to the internet and the material infrastructure that sustains the internet.

Thus, although the critique of instrumentalism found in *degenerative* and *regenerative* is general insofar as it operates against a digital neoliberal world, this critique gains a particular, political valence when comprehended within the context of contemporary Spain, which has, since the later decades of its fascist dictatorship and through its post-authoritarian transition to democracy, embraced the global free market in order to position itself as a modern, European country. In this national context, Tisselli's works were created within, and stand in opposition to, what various Spanish theorists have termed the *Cultural de la Transición (CT)* that has prevailed in Spain throughout its long *Transición* period. As Guillem Martínez explains in his edited volume on this concept, *CT* describes a relationship between the state and culture based on the following dynamic: "la cultura no se mete en política – salvo para darle razón al Estado – y el Estado no se mete en la cultura – salvo para subvencionarla, premiarla o darle honores" (16). It is, Martínez explains further, a hegemonic, distinctly Spanish "desactivación de la cultura" (15), one that developed to fulfill a desire for stability following the dictatorship and pervades all forms of cultural production (15-19). In a fundamental way, then, *degenerative* and *regenerative*, by allowing users to reflect on the politically-determined protocols that determine how users interact with the internet in Spain, oppose the unquestioning posture of *CT*. Put differently, within the context of contemporary Spain and its capitalist determination of "freedom" of the internet,⁴⁷ these are political works insofar as they show how the questions of access, agency, and power on the internet are inherently, to repeat Chun's point, rooted in politics, not technology or infrastructure.

⁴⁶ Chun establishes in *Control and Freedom* how the internet as a technology – as well as the constituent infrastructures and technologies that comprise the internet (fiber optic cables, personal computers, etc.) – does not elementally privilege either total control of or total freedom for its users. Instead, she contends, the way in which the internet operates and becomes associated with control or freedom depends substantially, but not entirely, on political decisions. What she describes, in the mid-2000s, as the conceptual reduction of the internet to a binary of control/freedom, results from, "the reduction of political problems into technological ones" (3).

⁴⁷ This globalized, market-friendly understanding of "freedom" is exemplified by the infamous *Ley Sinde*, enacted in Spain in 2011: the law, written in response to economic and legal threats from the United States, aimed to reduce copyright infringement by websites based in Spain, forcing websites accused of hosting such content to remove it within forty-eight hours, without the possibility for judicial intervention, and allowing copyright holders the permission to seek the identity of the copyright infringers.

Instrumentalism, Posthumanism, and Capitalism in *degenerative* and *regenerative*

Before beginning the analysis, I first review Heckman and O’Sullivan’s paper “your visit will leave a permanent mark’: Poetics in the Post-Digital Economy,” which looks at the political potentials and limits of electronic literature, using these paired works of Tisselli as two of their objects. Taking as their point of departure the Silicon Valley buzzwords of “disruption” and “innovation,” the two ask whether electronic literature is capable of offering a different mode of disruption, one which can, following the tradition of artistic defamiliarization, truly and effectively question the hegemony of the digital economy of the contemporary world and imagine a new future apart from this ideology. While they maintain a pessimistic stance towards the possibility of art, at least in the way that it is commonly perceived within this economy, to provide any true form of disruption, calling the “fascination with disruptive innovation” a “fetishized displacement of creativity and difference onto mechanisms of capitalist accumulation” (100), the authors withhold hope for a different form of art practice, one that reimagines its relation to poiesis and techne, seeing certain works of electronic literature as just the candidates for this type of art practice owing to how it, “reflects upon its own constraints” (102). Heckman and O’Sullivan first analyze two pieces of electronic literature made by Andy Campbell and Mez Breeze – works that are, it should be noted, far more immersive and gamic than the two discussed here by Tisselli – and consider how these two works make apparent the oppressive, panopticon nature of digital spaces that, quite ironically, promise individualism and liberation (105); while they applaud these two works for the way in which they present the realities of digital apparatus, they nonetheless question the limits of such a critique, asking if art made with digital tools can truly challenge the hegemonic order of capitalism or whether it simply strengthens this hegemony through its empty, aesthetic “disruption” (105).

Analyzing *degenerative* and *regenerative* through a similar dichotomy of control and disruption, Heckman and O’Sullivan see the works of Tisselli as “[probing] the potential of transmedia poetics through a different route” (106). The authors describe *degenerative* as determined by a “triangle of interactions” between the author, the reader, and the machines, one in which the “reader does not control, but nevertheless is implicated in the singularity of the work” (107) by which each successive visit makes the original webpage’s text less comprehensible. Honing in on how this self-destructing webpage makes apparent the rift between what we see in digital spaces (the webpage) and what we do not see (the proprietary code by which it is constructed), they argue that *degenerative* imparts to its users an allegory on the instrumentalization of language in the digital age, showing us “the process by which culture mutates, slides from carefully considered words toward the end at which the machine no longer has anything to say to us” (107). Reading *regenerative* in a similar fashion, Heckman and O’Sullivan ultimately state that this “sequel,” which destroys its original text with each visit but also reconstructs itself by incorporating text, “offers us a hopeful monstrosity...[in] a world of user-friendliness” (108). If, in their reading, the first work is about the control and visibility in digital spaces, then this second work is about the ease and elegance with which digital interfaces obscure their mechanism: they argue that, instead of offering its users a “workaround” for its mess of information, *regenerative* obliges us to confront this chaotic

instantiation of the digital medium, that is, to face the “the operations of the code,” here made “unavoidably obtrusive” (108).

Bringing these two readings together, Heckman and O’Sullivan remain weary to the idea that even this type of artistic practice, one which is openly critical of the digital spaces with which it is constructed, can sufficiently disrupt what they describe, using Kittler’s famous metaphor, as a “media ecology” (108-9). Ultimately, the two authors end up critiquing the conceptual flattening that occurs when using the term “media ecology,” arguing that analyzing these works for their disruptive potential within such a framework will doubtless end in failure given its lack of consideration for power dynamics; instead, they conclude, making a rather rushed etymological distinction, that we must consider the effect of such works in a “media economics,” and it is in this context of juridical power and finance (the *nomos*) that we can see their “radical potential,” their disruption of the comfort and homeliness that we are meant to feel in our digital *oikos*, the “*milieu* of the digital economy” (110). While Heckman and O’Sullivan use as their framing concept the buzzword of “disruption,” my analysis, which does not revolve around this idea, similarly analyzes how Tisselli’s works critique the instrumentalism of a neoliberal digital ideology, one in which the technology of the digital has become included in the Enframing of the world described by Heidegger in his famous essay on the technological.⁴⁸ However, whereas these two academics understand the artistic practices of Tisselli, Campbell, and Breeze as responding to a contemporary digital milieu in which these instruments are used to create and obscure a panoptic space of violence and surveillance, my interest in these webpages by the Barcelona-based artist is instead concerned more with the relationship between the individual and the collective in a posthuman assemblage. More specifically, I depart from their analysis of *degenerative* and *regenerative* in three, principal ways. First, having access to the code by which these two works operate, my reading commences with a formal, close-reading of how, specifically, these works become corrupted. Second, informed by the concept of the assemblage as used by posthumanist scholars, I go beyond seeing these works as operating exclusively through a traditional interaction between an author and a singular reader mediated by a machine, as Heckman and O’Sullivan assert in their description of the work as a “triangle.” Instead, I consider the many actors, both human and nonhuman, that are included in the work, effecting change in collective and unanticipated ways. Finally, while likewise reading them as critiques of the contemporary economy, I specifically interpret these two pieces of electronic literature as allegories for the national context of contemporary, post-Franco Spain in which they were made.

Instrumentalism and Code

The code of *degenerative*, while unseen to the common viewer of these two works,⁴⁹ whether they access these pages today or did so at some point between now and 2005, echoes the predatory rhetoric of this original text by attacking itself and effecting its own destruction.

⁴⁸ Briefly, “Enframing” could be understood as a large-scale, global process by which technology is only valued for its instrumental role in extracting the resources of the Earth for their indeterminate, future consumption. A more comprehensive review of Heideggerian terminology regarding technology will appear in a later note.

⁴⁹ I would like to thank Tisselli for sharing his code with me for the purpose of this analysis and Mark Marino for, first, suggesting that I look at the code, and then for contacting Tisselli and requesting that he share it.

In fact, there are two levels of code that lead to the work's degeneration: the one (a PHP script) that performs this process and the other (an HTML file) that suffers the changes brought about by the users' interactions with the web page. Specifically, each time the page is visited, a PHP code either deletes a character of the HTML code or replaces it with one of five predetermined typographic options ("*", "_", "-", "'", or ""), rewriting the HTML and thus altering the user's, front-end perspective of the webpage with each successive visit. The fact that it is this interaction between the two levels of code that effects change is especially important, as one could easily imagine a similar work that, instead of altering the code, would simply delete or replace a character of the webpage's text; while such a work would produce similar changes on the user's end and, ultimately, lead to the same end result (i.e. a blank screen), it would nevertheless lack the emphasis on digital tools that I contend is essential to this work. The two levels of code, the PHP and the HTML, together provide a critique of instrumentalism insofar as both stand out as faulty tools: one becomes useless by virtue of not communicating, while the other expressly causes this miscommunication. As I just mentioned, natural language, that which is so important for human communication, is not directly targeted by this process: when the PHP code chooses to replace or delete a character of the HTML, it does not discriminate between those parts of the HTML that have a formal function and those that have a natural language function. Nonetheless, once the page is visited for the first time and the PHP begins destroying the HTML code, the natural language becomes irrelevant: the strings of text written by Tisselli could have just been paragraphs of nonsense and it would have soon become equally incomprehensible.

Functioning in a similar way, the incoherence of *regenerative* is one not of destruction, but of excess, providing further nuance to the critique of instrumentalism seen in *degenerative* by emphasizing the volatility of the interaction between formal language and natural language. Using much of the same code as its associated work, *regenerative* additionally includes a section of its PHP code that extracts random selections of the HTML from any referring pages (i.e. any pages that link to *regenerative*, other than Tisselli's home page, of course) and then randomly places that exiled code into the original text of *regenerative's* webpage. The result is that today, the long scroll that appears when visiting the page for *regenerative* is comprised of a mass of incoherent characters: as is apparent in the screenshot included earlier, text describing font color and page layout predominates, words are cut off halfway, irreproducible data resulting in the "replacement character" (a question mark encased in a black rhombus) abound, and characters in Cyrillic and Standard Chinese script occasionally appear, making about as much sense to a monolingual Anglophone as the rest of the massive text. Facing this, Heckman and O'Sullivan invoke McLuhan, writing that, "the medium is the message. And the message is to make the operations of the code apparent, unavoidably obtrusive" (108). While incontrovertibly making the medium perhaps the only comprehensible message of the work, the incoherence of *regenerative* represents more than a glitch or error repeated ad nauseam. By amassing of all this misplaced HTML code, the PHP script that performs the mechanism of regeneration for this work creates an HTML file that exists in a no man's land of incomprehension: having uprooted segments of code from their original context and brought them to this page, *regenerative* demonstrates the precarious volatility that sustains digital texts. The code works, just not here. Thus, while resisting the fate of *degenerative* and not

becoming a black void of a web page, *regenerative* shows that there is more than one way for digital texts to not make sense.

Albeit in a much more explicit way, these works confirm the conclusion of N. Katherine Hayles in her early theoretical work in the field that all works of electronic literature are bilingual, existing in both formal and natural language ("Print is Flat" 72-3). The difference between these two works and many others that could be defined as electronic literature is that Tisselli does not just provide an example of this digital age bilingualism, but also critiques the manner through which the formal language sustains the natural one. Although they may be bilingual insofar as they require both formal and natural language to make sense, these works show how the precarity and volatility of the former can quite easily preclude the functionality of the latter. That is, more than just making the code apparent, *degenerative* and *regenerative* do so by intentionally programming their code to fail, and then explicitly presenting those failures: they do not simply lead us to a kind, generally-informative error message, but instead force us to inhabit and dwell in the discomfort of a code that becomes increasingly more errant and less functional. This is a point that Heckman and O'Sullivan bring up with regards to digital media ecology, but my interest lies, alternatively, in a more fundamental question of how these works oblige us as users to reflect on the obscured materiality of such digital spaces.

By making code and, more accurately, the failures of code, so readily apparent, Tisselli's paired works of electronic literature reveal the oft-ignored thingness of code, in this way resisting what Chun in *Programmed Visions* describes as a digital instance of the "erasure of word for action" (22). In this quote describing how code has come to displace the divine power of creation that is logos, Chun's larger critique in *Programmed Visions* is against the ways in which software has become the *archimetaphor* of the contemporary world, an abstraction that obscures the material functioning of digital devices: that is, how code, when successfully executed, controls electrical charges that run programs or generally do things that we see through user-friendly interfaces of our digital devices. In Chun's framework then, the instrumentalism of digital code can be directly correlated to its abstraction: it exists exclusively to make or do (digital) things, an act which, if and only if it is executed successfully, conceals its function and the material interactions that sustain it. Coming back to Tisselli, then, far from being, "a magical entity...a source of causality" (Chun 51) that brings forth something from nothing, the code that is made evident in *degenerative* and *regenerative* not only flips this instrumental ethos on its head – making nothing out of something – but it likewise makes users complicit in this breakdown, revealing that chain of causality that brings forth text and images through the mechanism of code. By having code literally erase itself (more accurately, by having the PHP script erase or corrupt the corresponding HTML file) in response to user interaction, Tisselli forestalls this digital erasure of word for action, making code, in its full, material thingness, apparent to its users. Viewing the works today and being presented the narrative of their respective processes of breakdown in this way obliges the viewer to confront obsolescence – the gradual wearing down of each work's instrumental functionality – in a way that does not commonly occur with digital tools. Borrowing the metaphors used by Chun in *Programmed Visions*, we can say that the use of code in *degenerative* and *regenerative* obliges the user to consider its role as more of a specter than a daemon, more of a dirty windowpane than a transparent window through which we can see the world (51).

In the most elemental way, then, these paired works from Tisselli oppose the instrumentalist framework as defined by Heidegger in his essay on technology: instead of becoming mere means to an end, they offer a break in the chain of causality, forestalling the communication they exist to provide. Briefly wading into the morass of Heideggerian terminology, *degenerative* and *regenerative* could be seen as a revealing, but not a challenging: as technology they bring forth, revealing that which was previously concealed, but through their inoperative inertia, they resist the Enframing by which the modern economy transforms the world into Standing Reserve.⁵⁰ Thus, whether we read *degenerative* and *regenerative* through Chun's contemporary writings on software or Heidegger's more general theories on technology, I find that these works oblige us as users to not only reflect on how code mediates and sustains our digital tools, but also to recognize the degree to which these digital tools, although ostensibly immaterial, participate within a much more expansive process of economic relations that seeks to order the world through an instrumentalist teleology.

Posthuman Assemblages

Central to this investigation of what happened to *degenerative* and *regenerative* is an understanding of these works that goes beyond a conventional, dyadic sender-receiver theory of artistic reception. Instead, I argue that these works represent examples of what Espen Aarseth, in his fundamental work on electronic literature, calls a "textual machine: " a text that an "operator" (what I have been calling a "user" or what is conventionally called a reader) accesses and interprets through a process that requires both the reading of linguistic signs and the "non-trivial interaction" with the medium (Aarseth 20-22). Far from hiding this fact, the user/operator of both works is made explicitly aware – "your visit will leave a permanent mark", as *degenerative's* originary text warns us – of how their reading of the text occurs through a process of feedback between this user and the machine. Even if, in these examples

⁵⁰ Heidegger's definition of technology from "The Question Concerning Technology" is in opposition to the common or, in his terminology, the anthropological definition, which is concerned with causes and effects, with instrumentality. He counters that the true essence of technology is its bringing something that formerly was not; in this way, it is a poiesis – a revealing that brings us the truth. However, with modern technology, this truth is never revealed, but rather leads to further revealing, what he calls a challenging forth: a challenging – a forestalling of this revealing of the truth – that continues in a chain, so that we never arrive at truth the way we did with old technology. In his example of the wood cutter, he argues that the act of wood chopping has been unchanged for centuries, but the materials are not used as such today. Instead, they become part of this ordering, they are converted into Standing-Reserve: objects whose only purpose consists in forming part of the ordering. Put into slightly less esoteric, specific terms, technology is used in a way so that it does not immediately produce something, but just forms part of a much larger system. This is the aforementioned concept of Enframing: instead of leading us to a truth, of revealing, technology just allows us to see the world as part of this Standing-Reserve, of instruments and materials ready to be used. This is a logic of instrumentality that can eventually swallow man – technology becomes an end in and for itself, and everything – humans included – just becomes comprehended as a part of this process, while there is no final "revealing" in this process. While this covers most of the important terms used in this essay and explains the basic Heideggerian idea of technology, it is also important to note that Heidegger sees in technology a dangerous power that can, conversely, save man through its capacity to, as it once did, lead to a revealing (an encounter with truth). Additionally, the Heideggerian critique of technology represents only one way of understanding technology; however, it is especially useful for thinking of technology in relation to instrumentalism, hence its use in this chapter.

from Tisselli, the triadic machine proposed by Aarseth is user-hostile and comes to impede the transmission of a coherent text, this framework, with its emphasis on the role of the machine in not only mediating but helping determine how this user/operator experiences the works, offers a simple way of understanding how these transformations are not solely determined by human agency, but rather quite consequentially depend on the actions of a nonhuman. The constraints may be determined by Tisselli's original programming, but the random action of the machine plays a significant role in determining the process and the outcome of either work. For example, even if only one person interacted with *degenerative*, the actions taken in accordance with the program's algorithm in response to this singular user's non-trivial interactions with the text would represent an action that is effected by both a human and a nonhuman machine. Yet, of course, the changes to both *degenerative* and *regenerative* were not the consequence of a lone individual's effort, but instead the result of the interaction between the algorithmic processes and the collective, uncoordinated effort of multiple users connected by the network affordances offered by the Internet. In other words, not only do we need to make room for the machine, but we need to consider multiple machines as well as multiple readers/users acting together, given the parameters established by the author/coder, to make meaning out of these works as they are actively transforming them. To do so, I propose, requires moving beyond the more technical framework provided by Aarseth, bringing together the Norwegian theorist's idea of a "textual machine" with the concept of the posthuman, specifically, the theories of the network and the assemblage found in Latour, Braidotti, and Hayles.

To start, Bruno Latour, in his disquisition on actor-network theory (ANT), provides one of the most convincing arguments for studying the role of the nonhuman and the collective – human and nonhuman – capacity for effecting action in the world. That is, Latour's use of ANT is "posthuman" in the most basic sense of the word insofar as it pushes beyond an anthropocentric framework and includes the nonhuman in addition to the human in its social analysis, basing its understanding of action on performativity instead of agency (35) and thus ensuring that we do not predetermine who or what can do things or can effect action in a certain relation (60). Differentiating ANT from traditional sociological study, Latour establishes a binary of certainty-uncertainty, positing ANT as a way of conceiving social relations that is not based on the certainty of pre-established groups or sets of relations, but instead on the uncertainty of emergent, symmetrical relations enacted by a group of (human) actors and (nonhuman) actants, borrowing a term from theater studies (60). This emphasis on uncertainty and the freedom it offers to move beyond traditional or human-based conceptions of social relations is especially important for reading *degenerative* and *regenerative*, as it allows us to focus precisely on how change occurs in this work without omitting any non-conventional actors (i.e. the code, the networked computers, or the groups of users).

In order to look at these two works by Tisselli through the lens of ANT, it will help to go back to square one, asking what actually happened when these two works were published. In my earlier, formal analysis of *degenerative*, for example, I presented the situation in an oversimplified way, looking at how it changed given the action of one, discrete user's interactions. Yet, while each user who interacts with the work is fundamental for effecting change – that is, their visit is essential to trigger the PHP script to act in its character-by-character destruction of the page's HTML –, what Latour's ANT obliges us to consider is that there are many other actors and actants whose role cannot simply be elided or considered

secondary. For example, it was not just one person who caused these transformations to occur, but rather the group of users whose collective, uncoordinated actions were ultimately responsible for the long-term changes of the webpage. It was also Tisselli, who wrote the code by which these visits enacted such destruction and initiated the entire process by publishing and disseminating the links to the webpages. This, of course, means we must consider those who further shared these links, advancing the destruction even without taking part directly in the act, a group which should include humans (i.e. the author of the *Wired* article about *degenerative*) and nonhumans (perhaps a website that aggregates websites of interest or an RSS feed that scours the web for certain terms like “net art”). Speaking of nonhumans, it was also quite clearly the code, which “chooses” the character in the HTML script to be replaced or deleted, executing this command in response to the stimuli provided by each successive visit. Finally, though far from exhaustively, it was also the networked computers (otherwise known as the internet), whose far-reaching infrastructure makes possible the nearly-instantaneous distribution and transformation of the work.

Providing an inventory of the actors and actants who constitute this network, ANT offers a useful, descriptive method that allows us to have a more complex and distributed understanding of how transformation occurs in these two works. Nonetheless, ANT does not ultimately question the figure of the human nor does it have a robust theory of how to distinguish between the actions of different its actors and actants. Filling these gaps, respectively, are the theories of posthuman assemblages of Braidotti and Hayles. The former, across various writings in her career, has advanced a concept of the posthuman that is neither defined negatively in opposition to an ever-slippery idea of “the nonhuman” nor temporally as an advanced stage of the human, but rather defined as a transformation in how the human is defined, a “recomposition of human interaction...that locates the subject in the flow of relations with multiple others” (51). Owing her theorization of the posthuman to the process-based philosophy of Spinoza and, more recently, Deleuze and Guatarri, Braidotti imagines a conceptual framework that does away entirely with binaries, proposing instead the “assemblage” as a “transversal inter-connection...of human and non-human actors” (41). Thus, more than simply stating and showing that nonhumans can act in meaningful ways, the posthuman assemblage of Braidotti obliges us to consider how discrete actions cannot be so easily classified as being performed by either a human or a nonhuman.

To say, then, that the actions that occurred in *degenerative* and *regenerative* (and for *regenerative*, that are still actively occurring) are posthuman, in a Braidottian assemblage way, is to understand the entire work as one all-encompassing posthuman process, one in which various actors interact with each other in ways that cannot be easily designated in a dualistic fashion. Although similar to ANT, the difference in descriptive metaphor – from “network” to “assemblage” – found in Braidotti is especially helpful in that it focuses less on the actors or actants that constitute the relation, but instead obliges us to look more critically and specifically at the interactions, emphasizing how they are in and of themselves constitutive of the relation formed by the work. However, for as much as Braidotti’s theorization of a posthuman assemblage helps conceive of actions in a way that is not beholden to the very dualisms the term itself is ostensibly meant to subvert, her theory of the posthuman is far more concerned with the biological than the technological, as her overall project seeks to extend our concept of “Life” beyond the limited domains of *anthropos* or *bios* into a more inclusive realm of *zoe*, a

vitalist concept that is, as she writes, “the dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself” (60). Nonetheless, her process-based understanding of the posthuman, captured by her use of the term “assemblage,” is especially helpful for conceptualizing the posthuman and for applying the ideas of N. Katherine Hayles to our analysis of what happened to these two works of Tisselli.

While Hayles has written extensively about the posthuman over the past two decades, most relevant for our current project is her interest in distributed cognition, a concept which appears quite prominently in the conclusion of her famous treatise on the subject, *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), before being delved into more extensively and redefined as “cognitive assemblages” in one of her most recent works, *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Unconscious* (2017). Placing her cognitive assemblages in contradistinction with the networks of Latour’s ANT, Hayles cites Deleuze and Guatarri as she elects to use the metaphor championed by Braidotti, stating that assemblages, “allow for contiguity in a fleshly sense, touching, incorporating, repelling, mutating” (*Unthought* 118). The emphasis on cognition, she explains, comes from her study of Claude Shannon’s theory of information, which was fundamental for the field of cybernetics on which Hayles focused her 1999 investigation of the posthuman; recognizing how Shannon’s famous theory divorced information from meaning, Hayles calls attention to the importance of meaning-making (*Unthought* 22-30), proposing in the place of human/nonhuman the provisional binary of “cognizers versus noncognizers” (30) built off of her definition of “cognition” as “a process that interprets information within contexts that connect it with meaning” (22). Thus, while not denying the ability of nonhuman actants to effect change, Hayles emphasizes the crucial role played by cognizers, a group that includes humans as well as certain nonhumans, whether biological or technical (115), who serve as the “decision makers” who “can and do enlist material forces as their allies, but...are the ones who try to steer in the ship in a particular direction” (115). Supplanting one binary with another in its theoretical formation, the “cognitive assemblage” proffered by Hayles has the benefit of expressing the difference between certain actors and between certain actions in a defined relation; and, perhaps more importantly, it expresses *how* we can make this distinction, using the metric of cognition, which itself cuts across the binary of human and nonhuman. Bringing the explanatory power of Latour’s ANT together with Braidotti’s less rigid, posthuman conceptualization of the assemblage, and emphasizing the importance of meaning-making or “cognition,” Hayles’s cognitive assemblage builds off of the work of these two and provides the most robust framework for comprehending what happened to *degenerative* and *regenerative*.

Quite ironically, then, is the revelation that the more we delve into these theories of the posthuman, the more it becomes evident that it is, for the most part, humans who have the sole capacity to take any sort of meaningful action in *degenerative* and *regenerative*. That is, if we, using Hayles’s framework of cognitive assemblages to comprehend the relations formed by these works, ask who can actually make a decision here (in other words, who is a cognizer?), then the answer brings us back to a point even farther back than where we started: to the author-reader dyad. It is only the individual visitor, the reader-user, and Tisselli, our author-coder, himself who could reasonably be called cognizers. The code written by Tisselli, while it may be an actant and a valued member of the posthuman assemblage, is not a technical system with cognitive capacities, at least in Hayles’s use of this term: while it operates through a process that interprets information within a certain context (it is given an input when a user

visits), one would be hard pressed to say that its random replacement or destruction of a character constitutes “connecting information with meaning” (Hayles, *Unthought* 22). As Tisselli himself would probably be the first to admit, the code by which these works function is not very complicated, even though it is indispensable for moving the work along. It could have been more complex or more responsive to user interaction, which would have perhaps pushed it into “cognizer” territory, but it does not do any of those things.⁵¹ If we wanted to properly classify it using some of the terms brought up above, we could see it as an uncaring, unthinking actant to which is left all but the most aleatory of decisions, with the real decision making having been left to Tisselli and the individual readers. Yet, simply because the code is not a cognizer, it does not mean that the posthuman frameworks summarized above are not apposite or beneficial to the analysis.

The digital machines may not be capable of making any decisions, but it is the conditions provided by these machines (i.e. the ability of the code to instantly change the webpage with each successive visit and the ability of the internet to instantaneously show these changes to the next visitor) that make possible the assemblage itself and, importantly, what allows this assemblage to act in a timely, significant way. Although individual humans are the only actors in this relation who can make sense of the information given to them and make decisions accordingly, as Braidotti’s use of the term “assemblage” should remind us, such relations are not just comprised of a set of discrete actors acting independently of one another, but rather represent a process of constant interaction. That is, for as much as these individual visitors make the decision to visit the webpage and effect another round of degeneration, it is the entire assemblage of actors and actants that leads to the long-term transformations we can see today on the archived page. To use a favorite metaphor of Hayles, the individual humans may each take a turn at steering the ship through their cognitive decisions, but they can only do so given the possibilities offered to them by these conditions or in response to the aleatory, perhaps consequential decisions made by non-cognizers.

Tragically, though, in spite of the cognitive capacity of each individual human, the voyage of our posthuman assemblage ends up drifting, with an ostensibly-unstoppable inertia, towards destruction. Put differently, the respective assemblages formed by *degenerative* and *regenerative* are being transformed by individual cognizers that, as a whole, act as non-cognizers, incapable or unwilling to act coherently as an assemblage to do anything but destroy the webpage. A rather troubling conclusion of this posthuman analysis arises in that humans are the only true cognizers here, yet the assemblage does not appear to cognize in any significant way. As representations of the posthuman, then, both of these works paint quite a bleak picture of the potential of such assemblages. In contrast with the optimistic or, at the very least, hopeful, outlook found in Braidotti and Hayles, *degenerative* and *regenerative* appear as cautionary tales of the destructive capacities inherent in such assemblages and the possible negative outcomes brought about by the unthinking collective action of multiple individual human subjects acting together with a technical, digital process they may not entirely understand.

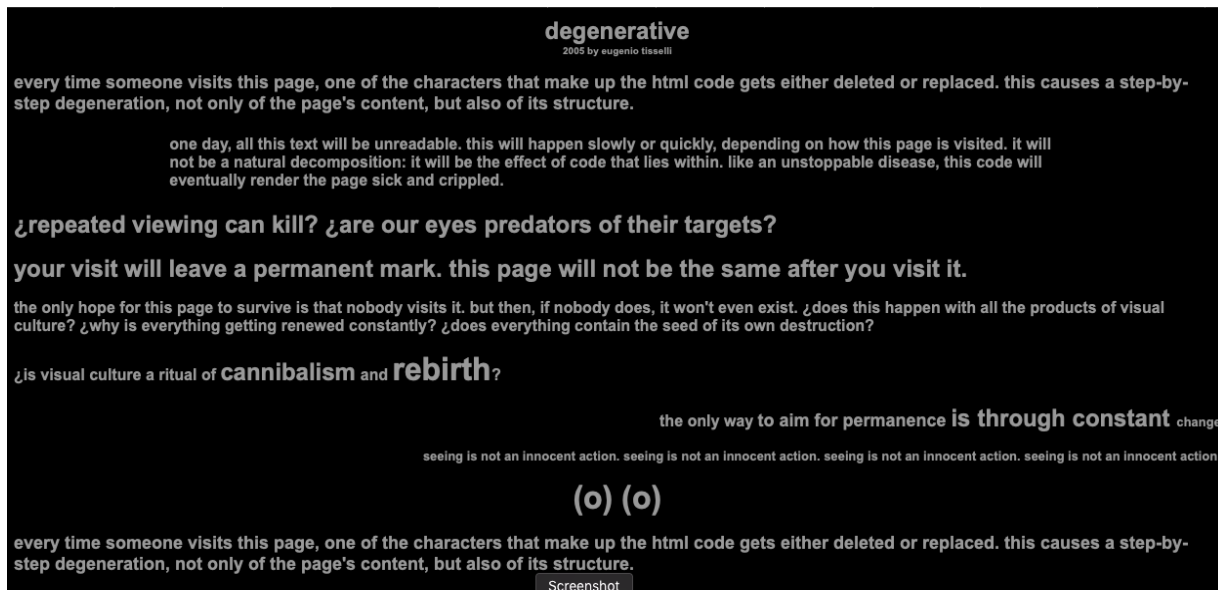
Before transitioning to the next stage of the analysis, it is worthwhile to consider the hypothetical and ask if this posthuman assemblage, given these same parameters, could have

⁵¹ Importantly, though, this was an artistic choice, not a technological one.

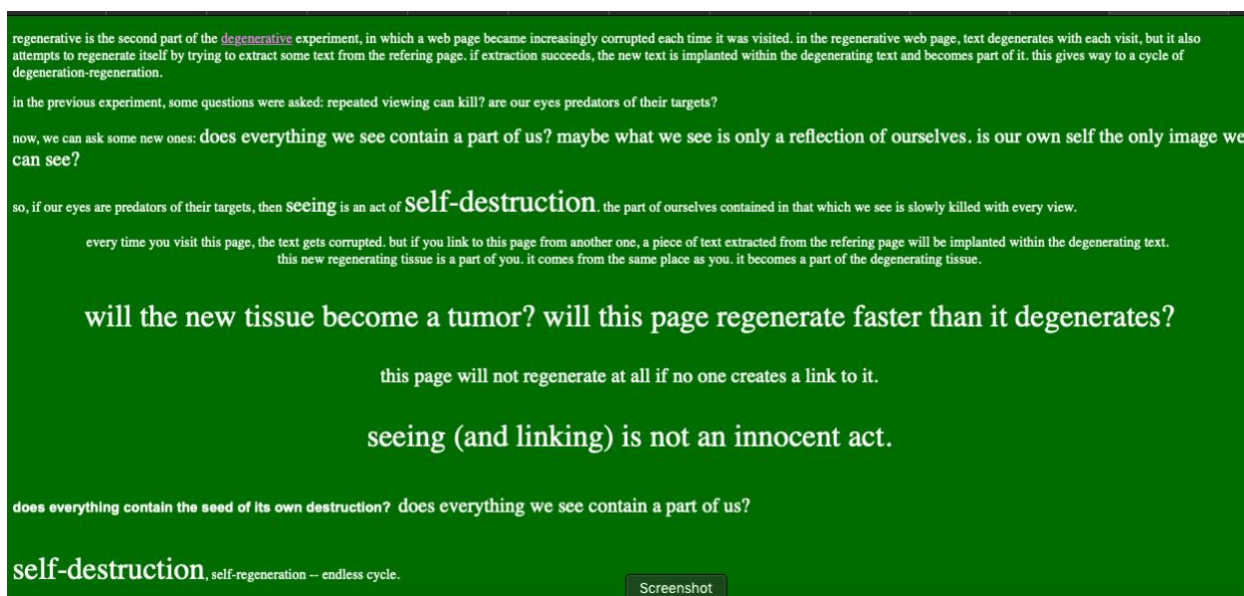
perhaps acted in a different way. Or, to frame the question in a more technical way: were these two works destined to become incoherent given the way in which they were programmed? To quickly answer this second question and to restate a point made earlier, there is nothing in *degenerative* and *regenerative* that make their ultimate state of incomprehension inevitable, but rather they reach this point because of the individual decisions made by a large group of people. To argue otherwise would be an error of, to return to Chun's point from before, misattributing to technology a problem that is political. Tisselli's works definitely had a strong tendency towards destruction, but there was nothing in the way in which they were created that made such an end inevitable: it was instead the actions (or, the inaction) of the multitude of individuals that effected this result. Considering these political decisions then, it is clear that this group of individuals, each one acting in their own self-interest (a curiosity to see the self-destructing website, perhaps), ended up rehearsing what is a classic "tragedy of the commons" scenario. Conversely, then, to prevent this fate would have required solidarity and a common notion of the greater good: each user must be working towards a shared goal, while also recognizing their privileged and powerful position as a cognizer within this posthuman assemblage. Thus, to have effected a different end for *degenerative* and *regenerative* would have required individual users who both were aware of the effects of their respective actions – i.e. they would have needed a basic understanding of the technological mechanism and, perhaps most importantly, of the fact that their collective actions were not prevented by the technical protocols of this mechanism – and comprehended those actions within a common notion of the good. By considering this hypothetical and reviewing the dynamics that eventually led to the incoherence of these webpages, we can begin to see how these two works serve as an allegory for capitalism, in particular, an allegory on neoliberal capitalism's especial emphasis on individual freedom. The posthumanness of these interactions – that is, the use of digital tools to create the conditions for the emergence of these actions – adds further nuance to the allegory by warning of the additional danger of digital technology, which has the capacity to both accelerate these group dynamics and obscure their effects on the material world.

Webpage as Literary Text

This allegorical link is further strengthened by the short texts that originally appeared on the respective webpages for these two works. Before analyzing these two texts (reproduced below), it is important to note that Tisselli has maintained active these two pages, an aesthetic decision that offers those who interact with them today the opportunity to reflect on what occurred and why:



Original page for *degenerative*



Original page for *regenerative*

First, one of the most significant commonalities between these two texts is the inconsistent way in which they address the reader, which I contend reflects the recently-discussed dynamic of individual-collective inherent in the form of the posthuman assemblage. Even though both have a self-evident instructional purpose – i.e. they are, first and foremost, instruction manuals for the eventual users – both are written in a rather personal voice that directly addresses this reader, unabashedly sharing the fact that they were emitted by an individual human. In other words, they are clearly meant to be read as authored by the name found under the title in the page’s header: “eugenio tisselli.” The “appearance” of the author-creator on the original page thus establishes a tension between the sovereignty of this individual and the distributed actions of the page’s readers-users. By virtue of the personal

register that accompanies these original texts, then, the transformation of the work over time can be seen as an exhibition of this struggle between the limited control of the individual, human creator and the collective potential of the entire assemblage for which Tisselli has created the conditions for emergence. This emphasis on the creator obliges the users to ask how much control they as an individual might have and to consider the ways in which the collective capacity to effect greater change has been designed by this creator to be distributed amongst the different actors in this assemblage.

Similarly, by oscillating between different pronouns of address, these texts likewise remind the readers of this tension between individual and collective as it manifests between the actions of each discrete user and those of the entire assemblage of actors. For example, in *degenerative*, Tisselli writes, “¿repeated viewing can kill? ¿are our eyes predators of their targets? // your visit will leave a permanent mark. this page will not be the same after you visit it.” The interchangeability between first and second-person pronouns occurs throughout this text, as well as in the text for *regenerative*, where the fluctuation between the more communal (“if our eyes are predators”) and the more personal (“each time you visit”) forms of address is similarly emphasized between lines. As one reads these instructions, the use of the ambiguous second-person “you” can be understood as individualizing the actions of each user, while the use of the first-person plural (“our”, “us”) obliges those actions to be considered as part of a more communal project, automatically incorporated within a posthuman assemblage: it is *my* visit, but it is *our* degeneration/regeneration of the work. This ambiguity regarding who does what here amongst these three identified actors – the individual author-creator, the individual reader-user, and the collective assemblage – reflects much of the same ambiguity and tension upon which I elaborated in the former section with regards to the posthuman. Although Tisselli is quite clear in terms of what will happen when we visit the page or, in the case of *regenerative*, when we link to the page, by emphasizing this ambiguity with regards to responsibility for what will ultimately happen, he allows his users to realize that identifying their individual complicity is a murky, perhaps impossible endeavor. Adding to the conclusions of the prior section, then, it is not just that the mechanism of these works facilitates one’s individual participation in a collective act of destruction, but also that each individual is made aware from the outset that they occupy a privileged role of anonymity and impunity.

Additionally, the rhetoric of predation and contamination employed in both texts further disabuses any belief in the innocence or the neutrality of the collective force of individual actions by humans and non-humans in these two posthuman assemblages, clearly contextualizing these artistic exercises in collective destruction within the hegemonic ideology of neoliberal capitalism. In *degenerative*, it is a language that warns explicitly of the anthropophagic and predatory consumption of the textual body through the visual medium of the digital screen. Contrasting the webpage’s fate with a “natural decomposition,” Tisselli continues with these animalistic, predator-prey metaphors when he asks, “¿repeated viewing can kill? ¿are our eyes predators of their targets?” Bringing the concept of cannibalism into the fold of all of this predatory and consumptive language, the author then lays out the two possibilities for what may happen to *degenerative*: it will either succumb to an act of collective internet “cannibalism” or it will “survive,” albeit through a paradoxical logic, by being wholly forgotten and neglected, resigned to exist only by being stuck in oblivion, one of the millions of neglected webpages that at any moment populate the internet. Although the point may seem

commonplace some two decades since the text was published, with our endless digital media scrolls filled with a supernumerary slew of advertisements and algorithmically-curated content, Tisselli emphasizes how “creative destruction,” to use the term popularized by Shumpeter, becomes the preeminent, ordering logic of the digital age: that which is no longer useful or profitable will perish and be replaced by that which is. Significantly, though, through this repeated emphasis on predation and consumption, he places this prototypically neoliberal practice within a larger, more comprehensive history of Social Darwinism and its pseudo-scientific defense for the asymmetrical destruction wrought by modern capitalism: it is not just that that which is useless will be replaced, but also that this is a natural process, that this is what *should* happen. By making these very evocative allusions to bodies and survival, he helps further situate the critique of instrumentalism and posthuman assemblages, creating a more explicit link between the ostensibly immaterial actions of the digital world and the material world of humans and nonhumans in which they are contained.⁵²

In *regenerative*, while still making mention of killing, death, and destruction, Tisselli’s rhetoric places much more of an emphasis the idea of webpage as body, with a text that gets “corrupted” with each visit, growing with “this new regenerating tissue” that “is a part of you,” later on asking, “will the new tissue become a tumor? will this page regenerate faster than it degenerates?” Placing such an especial emphasis on bodies, these metaphors turn our attention once more towards materiality and consumption. One major difference with *degenerative*, however, is the degree of certainty with which the authorial voice describes the work: in contrast with the fatalist assurance found in the former text (“one day, all this text will be unreadable”; “your visit will leave a permanent mark”; “this page will not be the same after you visit it”), the *regenerative* text presents this second work truly as an experiment, adopting the inquisitive language of a curious scientist who, in the first two stanzas of text quickly summarizes his earlier experiment before turning our attention to the complementary investigation at hand. Like a researcher evaluating a new treatment on a subject, Tisselli muses over whether the trial will produce something extraordinary or whether a monstrous abnormality will result. Posing these questions regarding what will become of the digital “tissue” of *regenerative*, Tisselli recognizes that the work’s fate is out of his individual control as the coder, yet, unlike a good researcher who has done his due diligence, there are no clear hypotheses regarding who or what might bring about these unforeseen transformations.

In fact, even more so than in *degenerative*, the tension between individual complicity and collective unaccountability is made unavoidably apparent in *regenerative*, with Tisselli asking, “does everything we see contain a part of us? maybe what we see is only a reflection of ourselves. is our own self the only image we can see?” Beyond just describing an individual user’s culpability in this process of destruction, *regenerative* adds a material instantiation of an individual user’s engagement with the webpage, manifesting the traces left behind by our seemingly immaterial – what many once naively thought were untraceable – digital actions. That is, not only are we reminded of this tension between individual and collective in the text, but we are presented with it when we visit the incoherent jumble that occupies the current

⁵² Here, one can also clearly see the way in which *degenerative* and *regenerative* makes us aware of the necropolitical regime of digital capitalism that Kozak argues is apparent in the formal processes of works such as *The 27th* || El 27.

page: each line, each change in the color of the text, each appearance of a heretofore unseen character signals the act of someone who linked to the page, yet, when taken as a whole, this mass of text can only tell us that its current state has been a team effort, to say the least. The result, the aforementioned multi-colored block of incoherent characters repeated ad nauseam down the page, has become cancerous, as abnormal growth multiplies with an uncontrollable inertia, but the work could be considered a success insofar as it persists while its degenerating counterpart faded into oblivion. A success in one sense, however, *regenerative* as it is today likewise fails to communicate in any comprehensible fashion, showing us that that the drive to continue existing can be just as futile as the drive towards oblivion. Analyzing all of this within the thematic emphasis on bodies, on consumption, and on life that weaves its way through both texts, I find that *regenerative* reflects the growth imperative of a capitalist economy, an ideology of growth-for-growth's-sake that makes no distinction regarding the form this growth may take or those responsible for its unforeseeable consequences. This emphasis on individual freedom and unthinking growth and in *regenerative* points to a distinctly capitalist way of conceiving of social relations: it is not, to edit a point made in the prior section, that there is no common goal, but rather that the only goal is this abstract, ultimately destructive concept of growth.

Thus, putting all of these close readings together, the textual component of the work helps more clearly contextualize the allegorical character of its formal aspects. The use of different pronouns and forms of address makes the individual reader/user reflect on their role in relation to both the author/creator and the collective of users. Additionally, the rhetorical focus on bodies and growth (whether doomed or abnormal) produces a visceral sense of discomfort in the reader, evocatively connecting the immaterial, ludic nature of these works of art to a real, material world of economic relations.⁵³

Degenerative and regenerative as Allegories of Transition Spain

Building off the arguments put forth in these three sections of analysis, I understand *degenerative* and *regenerative* as offering various levels of allegory with regards to contemporary Spain. By reading them in allegorical fashion, I propose that these works offer a way of linking the complex web of interactions between three prominent tendencies in Spain during the period of the *Transición*, but especially in the past three decades: the predominance of a neoliberal ideology, the increasing impact of digital technology, and the acquiescent role of culture (i.e. the aforementioned concept of *CT*). This allegorical interpretation is more contextual, based on the author's residence in Barcelona during this period and the influence of Spain's digital infrastructure and wider culture on his artistic practice, as described earlier, than on any direct indication found in the works themselves. Although such a reading, which hermeneutically focuses on the work's place of creation, does have the potential to overlook the global expanse of a project that has an essential participatory element, I nonetheless argue that much can be gained from this exercise in considering the local conditions of a piece of

⁵³ Specifically, and in a way that connects this discussion of the posthuman to the one that is found in the next chapter, this is a capitalist world that is dependent upon the extraction and exploitation of natural resources to sustain this constant cycle of destruction and growth.

electronic literature's production together with the global ambit of its networked public. Specifically, as I posited in an earlier section of this chapter, emphasizing the way in which a particular work converses with local and national contexts is especially important for *degenerative* and *regenerative*, which are clearly about the political decisions that determine the way in which we interact with digital infrastructures.

On the most immediate level, as brought up in the section on posthuman assemblages, it is an allegory about the dangers of capitalism and its fundamental defense of individual freedom: by emphasizing the role of the individual vis-à-vis a larger collective, it demonstrates the aforementioned "tragedy of the commons" scenario in which individual freedom ultimately results in collective ruin. This allegorical critique, while general here, has a particular importance in Spain given the country's uncritical adoption of a neoliberal ideology following the death in 1975 of dictator Francisco Franco and the country's rapid transition to a democratic government: while the liberalization of Spain began in 1959 – as discussed in the preceding chapter with regards to rural depopulation – it continued unabated through Spain's transition to democracy in the late-1970s. During this time, the neoliberal ideal of "individual freedom" was manifested on the state level through, for example, financial deregulation, privatization of social services, weakening of labor rights, and increasing globalization of the national economy.⁵⁴ Published from Spain in 2005, a year that marked the beginning of another phase of rapid development (Banyuls and Recio 200) and some two years prior to the collapse of the Spanish economy as part of the global financial crisis, *degenerative* and *regenerative* thus offer a cautionary tale of where this ideology extolling individual freedom might, and eventually did, lead.

Further establishing the allegorical connection to Spain, the emphasis on creative destruction and growth-for-growth's sake that is apparent in the texts parallels the Spanish economy's drive to continue expanding, most significantly and most visibly through the uninhibited growth of the real estate sector.⁵⁵ In this respect, I see *regenerative* as offering a much more direct link to Spain insofar as it demonstrates an object that, at least in its proposed usage, ironically celebrates the perspective that endless cycles of consumption and destruction are okay, even necessary, so long as they effect more growth. In particular, I see the monstrous, multicolored mass of text that we encounter today when we look at *regenerative* as a metaphorical, net art representation of the post-Franco Spanish economy's predilection to build regardless of need or sustainability of funding, feeding this real estate bubble that went bust in 2007.⁵⁶ Thus, while both could be seen as allegorical critiques of the destructive

⁵⁴ Albarracín and Naron offer a good review of labor rights in Spain from 1959 onwards in "Neoliberal Employment Policies: The Case of Spain." Banyuls and Recio discuss the particularities of the neoliberal model in Spain, emphasizing how this general liberalization of economic regulations eventually led to the Spanish economy's disproportionate dependence on the construction sector (both through increasing financialization, de-industrialization, and relaxed regulation of loans), which ultimately collapsed in 2007, to disastrous effect. The likewise highlight how Spain's fascist past contributed to the historical weakness of its welfare system.

⁵⁵ Helping further connect the allegorical thrust of these works to the texts that originally accompanied the webpages, Banyuls and Recio highlight how this model of economic growth through perpetual expansion of the real estate sector, "has led to serious environmental degradation, accelerating some existing problems (desertification, energy dependence and so forth)" (202).

⁵⁶ Describing the expansionary ethos of the Spanish economy and offering examples of its quixotic, uninhibited growth during the decades (both late-Franco and post-Franco) leading up to 2008, the Spanish economist José

potential of a distinctly capitalist form of selfishness, *regenerative* makes a clear connection to the most visible manifestation of Spain's economic growth throughout the Transition as it shows that collective destruction may ostensibly look like growth.

Although this connection between digital texts and the real estate sector in late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century Spain may seem like a stretch, it is important to remember that, as I have argued throughout this analysis but especially in the first section's close reading of the code, these two works by Tisselli are fundamentally about the inherent connections between an ostensibly immaterial digital world and what I have called the non-digital, material world.⁵⁷ Another level of this allegory thus pertains to how this dynamic of individual-collective exists in a networked digital age: these paired works, given their emphasis on the networked connections that facilitate the creation of posthuman assemblages, function as allegories regarding the implantation of a model of capitalist individualism onto the internet, showing how digital technology can compound the dangers of such an ideology by amplifying, accelerating, and often obscuring its deleterious effects. As Chun argues throughout *Control and Freedom*, the internet has since the late-1990s maintained a very limited, capitalist definition of freedom: essentially, individual actions are free so long as they do not imperil the functioning of the global free market. This is made particularly clear in the Spanish context through the aforementioned Ley Sinde, which gave broad, extrajudicial power to copyright holders around the world to censure and prosecute individuals for the content they posted to the internet from Spain. Although these two particular works predate the Ley Sinde by six years, they nonetheless were created during the decade that followed the internet's privatization and, thus, one of the questions that I see Tisselli confronting in these works is, where does such a vague, apolitical concept of freedom on the internet lead? Following my analysis in the second section here, I argue that the answer is that it leads, like I posited before, to collective ruin, but with the added details that this process is now faster and easier, occurring on a larger scale because of the technological affordances of the stand-alone and networked computer.

However, I do not see this as some Luddite allegory. As brought up with regards to cognitive posthuman assemblages and the tension between author-reader, I contend that these paired works compel us to reflect on our role as human cognizers, capable of both understanding our role within this assemblage and intervening through collective action to avoid an apparently inevitable fate. Conversely, they may not offer very optimistic allegories of capitalism in Spain today, but I nonetheless view the two works as maintaining a hopeful, pedagogical function insofar as they demonstrate how the protocols that make possible the posthuman assemblage here are, to once again return to Chun's binary, determined by politics (i.e. human decisions) and not technology. In other words, for as much as the allegory here

Manuel Naredo writes, "La enorme duración e intensidad de la pasada burbuja inmobiliario-especulativa provocó una sobredosis constructiva que hizo de España el país europeo con más viviendas, kilómetros de autopista, de AVE, puertos y aeropuertos por habitante. Pero el estancamiento demográfico y la ausencia de vivienda social, hizo también de España líder europeo en viviendas vacías o infrautilizadas, manteniendo a la vez viviendas desocupadas y personas sin vivienda" (48).

⁵⁷ A very specific example of such a connection, and one that is of particular relevance to Spain's real estate boom, is the way in which financial algorithms and the larger automation of the financial sector facilitated and accelerated the increase of financial risk in the global economy that helped sustain this boom.

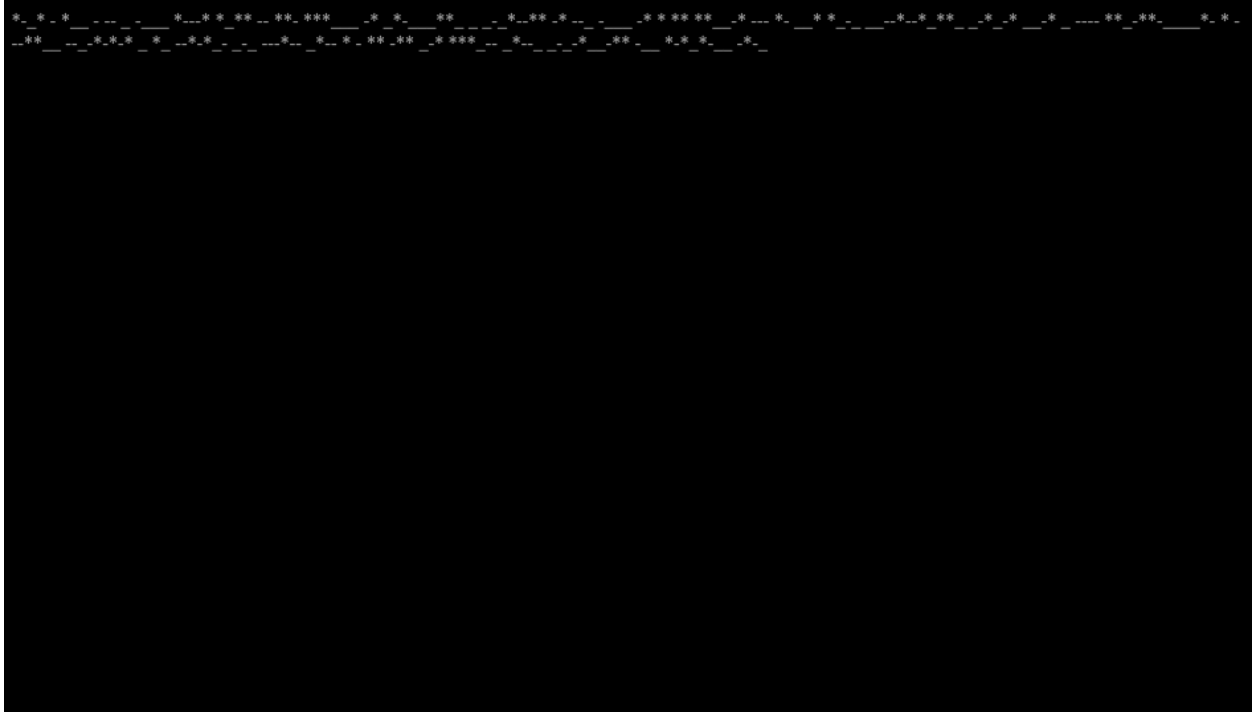
warns of the dangers of a digital, networked capitalism that exists today, it is also one that rejects technological determinism. It is in this way, then, that I see *degenerative* and *regenerative* as refusing to participate in the *Cultura de la Transición*'s uncritical acceptance of capitalism in democratic Spain. They do so, to further qualify a statement made at the beginning of this paper, by obliging users to reflect on the politically-determined protocols of capitalism, of digital technology, and of the posthuman assemblages that increasingly constitute the contemporary world in which we live.

This act of reflection is not just some aesthetic exercise in defamiliarization, but rather confronts the fundamental logic that explains the persistence of CT in Spain and, more universally, the hegemonic ideology of capitalism. Martínez, in explaining why Spanish culture becomes "disactivated" and does not disrupt the normal functioning of the state, posits that it is because, "El estado [es] el único gestor de la estabilidad y de la desestabilidad desde 1978" (15-16). To summarize, CT persists because, to return once more to maritime metaphors, culture refuses to rock the boat in order to preserve a politically-neutral concept of stability in democratic Spain. This notion of stability is, of course, a fabrication: capitalism is inherently an unstable way of structuring society, as the 2008 financial crisis dramatically revealed in Spain and as is theorized, to cite but one instance, by the aforementioned Marxist concept of "creative destruction." Yet, as I have argued throughout this chapter, from the discussion of Tisselli's place within a genealogy of electronic literature practice through the various parts of the analysis and up to this conclusion, *degenerative* and *regenerative* highlight the ways in which instability underlies these ostensibly-stable structures. Tisselli's works thus demonstrate the fallacy of this capitalist promise of stability in Spain that sustains CT and precludes cultural disruption, showing us instead a contemporary, digital world that is predicated on this very same instability it promises to keep at bay.

Conclusion: Degeneration and Regeneration, in Spanish

Generally ignored by my analysis so far, one of the most interesting aspects of these two works is how there were Spanish-language versions published simultaneously with the English ones. Today, one can find both language versions listed beside one another on the webpage hosting all the links to Tisselli's artistic and academic publications. Although most of the scholarship on Tisselli ignores this Spanish version or, as is often the case in the Hispanic articles on the artist, chooses to focus on the version that would be of easier access for the intended audience, it is my argument in this final section of this chapter that these English and Spanish versions should be considered together when approaching this project. Not only do they add an additional, linguistic nuance to the works and their commentary on digital instrumentalism and posthuman assemblages, but they also help further situate the allegorical connections to contemporary Spain.

The Spanish-language version, *degenerativa*, for one, provides a rather interesting experience for those familiar with the Anglo-oriented iteration since it is still an active webpage, with transformations still occurring as of July 2021. Although it is, to adopt the rhetoric of Tisselli, a moribund webpage, hoping for just a few more visits from some merciful users that will ultimately put it out of its incoherent misery:



Screenshot of *degenerativa* from July 2021

Published at roughly the same time as *degenerative*, the information page for the Spanish version shows rapid changes for the first fortnight of its existence. This pace then slows down considerably over the next couple of months, with periodic changes occurring over the course of three years, before being reduced after a thousand days to an almost-static state of existence. Since Day 960, Tisselli has failed to provide updates, presumably given the page’s extremely incremental speed of change. Experiencing a similar fate, *regenerativa* likewise shows signs of neglect in comparison to its English version, with its regenerated mass of text hardly extending beyond a single browser screen. In comparison to the multi-colored, multilingual mess that one finds today on *regenerative*, this lesser-visited work is much less intimidating or intriguing:

dominance on the web. Offering an easy mathematical description of the situation: more users, together with more possibilities for interaction, leads to a greater likelihood of interaction and thus transformation of the two English-language works. The lingering characters we still see today on *degenerativa* thus should be read as reminders of this reality of the network. The code persists not because of a certain, Hispanic compassion for doomed webpages, but rather because not enough users cared to visit this link or were even aware of its existence.

Beyond manifesting the digital divide, my second argument in this concluding section is that the presence of these two Spanish-language versions of the works speaks to an even more elemental question regarding the concept of digital instrumentalism, as brought up in the first part of the prior section's analysis. As asserted earlier, by having the HTML code be the target of the works' transformation, Tisselli demonstrates not only the crucial importance of code, but also its precarious volatility. It may have taken many days and many visits for *degenerativa* to become completely destroyed or for *regenerativa* to become a monolithic digital mess, but it took very few changes for these works to go from complete coherency to incoherency, as the archived pages show. The failure of the code, owing of course to its self-destructive mechanism, makes it so that it really does not matter what language it was that these works were originally written in once this process begins: although both works still mostly communicated on Day 1/Día 1, it takes just a few more days for either version to become an incomprehensible mass of text. Put differently, once the code stops functioning as it was intended, the difference between English and Spanish becomes irrelevant.

Nonetheless, even if the language of the texts is more or less arbitrary, the importance of English – and thus the lesser importance of Spanish – is tacitly demonstrated through the very appearance of this code. This is because the major coding languages are all based on English syntax and vocabulary. One may not have to fluently speak English to code well, but it certainly helps, and this fundamental, structural aspect of coding languages further cements the linguistic dominance of English in the digital age. Any past user of *degenerativa* was obliged to confront this fact when they visited the webpage, just as users today are obliged to do when they peruse the archived pages of this work: even as the Spanish words start to become corrupted beyond comprehension, English shines through, as words such as “font”, “color”, “size”, or “Sans Serif” begin to appear randomly within the text. These may seem like insignificant linguistic infiltrations, but through the appearance of these rather boring words, we are reminded of a structural inequality that disadvantages the majority of the world's population. Expanding on a comment made earlier then in reference to Chun's writings on the instrumentalism of code, by making us dwell in the failures of code when using *degenerativa* and *regenerativa*, Tisselli not only obliges us to see the concealed “thingness” of code, but also obliges us to see how code is an English thing, a product of the United States' persistent military and economic dominance in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries.

There is then a countervailing tendency that is conveyed through these distinct linguistic iterations of the two works: on one hand, they compel users of the English versions to recognize the existence and importance of linguistic difference, while on the other hand, they expose the instrumentalist tendency towards homogenization-as-optimization, which ultimately seeks to reduce language itself to the most useful and efficient form of communication (first English, but then code, the language of pure logos, as Chun argues). These Spanish-language versions clearly offer their users the same critiques found in the English-

language versions, but, more importantly, when considered in tandem with those English-language versions, they rather significantly contextualize these critiques within a world that, in spite of the homogenizing tendencies of the instrumentalist ethos that predominates the digital, is constituted by differences, whether linguistic, cultural, or national. While the fact that Tisselli made Spanish-language versions of these rather popular works of electronic literature may initially come across as a symbolically important gesture for the Spanish-speaking world, their presence as part of the overall project, quite cynically, ultimately serves to emphasize the importance of linguistic difference only to demonstrate its precarity within the contemporary economic order.

Bringing these two arguments together, the presence of both English and Spanish versions of *degenerative* and *regenerative* further refines the idea of the posthuman assemblage as it likewise offers another connection to contemporary Spain. Although I still find “assemblage” to be the most apt metaphor for describing the posthuman interrelations between humans and nonhuman technology such as those apparent in these two works by Tisselli, I also see the Spanish-language versions as complicating this metaphor and the comfort or ease it connotes. Whereas Braidotti and Hayles use “assemblage” to, respectively, evoke the “flow” and “contiguity” that characterizes the relationships of which it is comprised, the presence of *degenerativa* and *regenerativa* underscore the fact that the digital world is not a frictionless, globalized world of flows, but instead one of national borders, heterogenous digital infrastructure, and linguistic difference. Put together, the four individual works that comprise the overall *degenerative* project exemplify the difficulties associated with posthuman assemblages made possible by digital technology, not only in terms of their destructive capacities, but also with regards to the political asymmetries inherent in how we as individuals access and understand these assemblages. Access is, to return to a remark I made earlier, one of the principal reasons for which I see these works of electronic literature as belonging to a Spanish national tradition. It is in this sense that I see Tisselli’s project ultimately asking, what does this digital posthuman look like from Spain? The answer, in light of what I see is the more complicated and contentious understanding of the posthuman assemblage established by these works, is that it is a posthuman that is very much determined by rather “human” concerns of citizenship, place of residence, and language.

Chapter 4

Life and Death in the Anthropocene

Various Approximations to the *Prestige* Oil Spill

The only casualty directly linked to the *Prestige* oil spill was someone who was known simply as “Man.” Born in Germany in 1936, the life story of Manfred Gnädinger manifests a quaint and tragic Romanticism that borders on the incredulous, as many of the details have become confounded over the decades, by virtue of his own efforts in self-mythologizing as well as the extraordinary circumstances surrounding his death. Disinterested in pursuing the family business in his hometown of Radolfzell, he spent years working intermittently as a social worker and teacher in Germany, Switzerland, and Italy before ultimately arriving in 1961 to Camelle, a remote fishing village of a little more than a thousand people located at the northwestern extreme of the Iberian Peninsula, in the Costa de Morte region of Galicia (Serodio Domínguez 96). Having befriended a fellow German who offered him a house he could rent, Manfred decided to establish himself in this small town despite neither speaking the local language nor having a clear plan for what he would do there, later moving to a small plot of rocky land located at the end of town, right beside the water’s edge (Serodio Domínguez 97-99). It was here that Manfred gradually became Man, a hermit and an artist who, over time, abandoned his worldly possessions, came to wear nothing but a loincloth, subsided off the land or the generosity of fellow villagers, and dedicated his life to producing art in and around the self-promoted house-museum where he resided until his death – allegedly from a broken heart – in December 2002, as oil, emanating from the ill-begotten tanker *Prestige* that sunk some 130 miles off the coast of Galicia and summarily spilled 50,000 tons of oil that polluted coasts from France to Portugal, covered the coastline of Camelle with a thick, black tar that destroyed many of his art works and contaminated the delicate marine habitat that he called home.

Although Man’s artistic oeuvre, today collected for display in an interpretation center in the village, spans different media and various styles of art, he is best known for a collection of whimsical sculptures that he created in the small plot of land surrounding his residence. Made from the organic matter and other diverse flotsam that washed in from the sea and was then gathered, sometimes painted, and eventually assembled by Man, the sculptures today appear at the water’s edge like the curvilinear ruins of an eccentric, seaside community. As Suárez Marcote suggests, given their non-representational form and use of a natural medium, they could easily be considered as forming part of the movement known as earth or land art. In fact, although Man remained on the fringes of the mainstream art world throughout his life, only coming to international recognition given the circumstances surrounding his death, his sculptures, by making apparent the environment while disrupting easy binary categorizations such as natural and artificial, manifest “the friction between the artists’ attempts to make the

earth visible and its resistance to signification” (18) that Amanda Boetzkes considers central to earth art practice.

Beginning this chapter with an analysis of Man’s work through the frameworks of earth art and the Anthropocene, I use these sculptures as a point of departure for exploring the tensions and connections between the human and the nonhuman in the current moment of environmental emergency, focusing on a series of artistic responses to the *Prestige* oil spill off the coast of Galicia in 2002. Following this, I establish a general theoretical framework for the chapter, discussing the modern concepts of disaster and risk in relation to the *Prestige* spill, evaluating Timothy Morton’s concept of “hyperobjects,” and proposing the concept of a “posthuman disaster” in order to emphasize the feeling of disorientation brought about by our recognition of the scale of anthropogenic climate change. Next, I interpret Lois Patiño’s experimental film *Costa da Morte* as an abstruse response to the *Prestige* disaster, one which presents the complicated situatedness of humans within a larger web of life that comprises other humans as well as a variety of nonhuman actors and human-nonhuman assemblages. Finally, I read Agustín Fernández Mallo’s novel *Nocilla Experience*, focusing on a series of passages about Antón – an eccentric barnacle fisherman who lives in the town of Corcubiión in the very same Costa da Morte region – and commenting on the entangled condition of humans within a globalized, contemporary environmental and digital technologic milieu. Using these three objects and the theoretical discussion to challenge a discrete definition of the human, this chapter ultimately intends to decenter narratives of techno-capitalistic progress within modern Spain, underscoring the importance of the geographically and economically peripheral region of Galicia as the common point of enunciation from which these artists contest the development of a modern, national subject.



Man working on his sculptures (Serodio Domínguez 100)



Museum house and gardens in 1990 (Suárez Marcote 7)

Located in a liminal space that contradicts the strict binary between land and water, the sculptures made by Man over the years testify to the sea's predisposition to transgress its categorical delineation by humans. In particular, these works, both in terms of form and media (constructed as they are with a combination of stones and a varied assortment of organic and nonorganic detritus that washed ashore), bring the ocean into our visual apparatus at the same time that they reveal the impossibility of conceiving of the ocean as such. The ocean, as alluded to in this artistic configuration, in this way brings to mind Timothy Morton's "hyperobjects," which he defines succinctly as "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (Morton 1). Insofar as the idea of "hyperobjects" gives a name to those entities that exceed our comprehension in an age of recognized anthropogenic climate emergency, "hyperobjects" are a useful concept throughout this chapter in which I focus on three artistic works that address how humans relate to an event (the *Prestige* oil spill) and a geologic entity (the ocean) whose respective scales are inconceivably massive. Specifically, returning to the most famous artist of Camelle, the concept of the "hyperobject" is especially helpful for elucidating the tension between the local and the global that is manifest in Man's sculptures. Although they gain meaning from their hyper-local, site-based existence at the edge of this small village, they are likewise encompassed within an entity of immeasurable, global scale – a fact that became tragically apparent in the closing months of 2002, as the works and their surrounding habitat were devastated by pollutants carried by ocean currents from an oil spill that occurred more than a hundred miles from the town.

In addition to expressing the conflict in scale that is central to Morton's idea of hyperobjects, Man's whimsical sculptures similarly demonstrate the myriad tensions that characterize the practice of earth art as theorized by Boetzkes. Specifically, made of stone and residing on land, these works of art – assembled using only materials collected in a specific site and constructed over an indeterminate period of time without a teleological purpose – recall the poesis and precarity of the nonhuman world. Most clearly, the sculptures bespeak the ill-defined divide between the human and nonhuman, as they imperil exclusionary, dualistic conceptions of nature. Approaching the works critically reveals a countervailing tension in this

respect: the more one considers their resemblance to a “natural” or nonhuman world, the more it becomes apparent the ways in which they evince their human construction. Similarly, the relation between the sculptures and their site demonstrates the aforementioned friction inherent in this complicated objective of representing the earth, which is a discursive object like any other, yet is also the sustaining force of human life and the locus of all human social relations (Boetzkes 14-15).

More than just aesthetically interrogating the human-nonhuman binary, the oeuvre of Man likewise demonstrates what Boetzkes sees as the general ethical commitment of the earth art movement, which, by articulating a “withdrawal from representation and an exposure of the fundamental differentiation between the human world and earth” (21), is capable of developing “new ways of perceiving and addressing the natural environment” (24). Differing from the analogous movement of environmental art, earth art is distinguished by its interest in a more fundamental question about how the earth “exceeds the limits of [human] perception” (Boetzkes 21), with its ethical intervention coming from the representational tension inherent in its aesthetic practice. Employing an ethical framework based in the theories of Luce Irigaray, for whom the fundamental condition of ethics is not our identification through an encounter with the Other but rather our dissimilarity from the Other based in the elemental difference between the male and female sex (Irigaray 167), Boetzkes argues that earth art seeks not to “subsume” the earth-as-Other into representation (12), but instead “reinforces the parameters of difference” (21). Man’s sculptures, by offering a tangible representation of the earth that complicates the distinction between the human and the nonhuman, thus align with the ethics of earth art as defined here by Boetzkes: the earth is still an Other in the works of Man, separate from humans and irreducible to human signification, but these works nonetheless demonstrate the importance of encountering and attempting to know this Other.

Nonetheless, the peculiar life and death of Man – a mononym born of linguistic convenience, but sparking a myriad of evocative connotations – has come to overshadow the possible merits of his works, elevating this figure beyond the worldly concerns of art and into the realm of the legendary or the mythical. Yet, a desire to canonize, whether in a sacred or profane sense, Man as a martyr tends to abstract his actual existence, dangerously ignoring the material conditions that affected his life and effected his death. Man’s death is a tragedy: one in which a human, in spite of his best intentions to be a worthy custodian of the world, succumbs to forces beyond both his individual comprehension and control. Importantly, though, these forces were set forth and are continuously perpetuated by humans. That is, for as much as his life may approximate a modern folktale, it is also quite firmly situated in and cannot be considered as existing apart from the neoliberal, globalized world of the late twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries.

Specifically, Man provides a case, albeit a rather eccentric one, of what it means to be human in an age of anthropogenic environmental emergency. Far from providing a straightforward parable of life in what has become popularly-referred to as the Anthropocene, however, the life of Manfred Gnädinger is open to a diverse set of interpretations depending on the framework by which we critically approach it. If, for instance, we consider Man within the common narrative of the Anthropocene, then Man’s poetic idealism, in spite of its benevolent intention, will be seen as nothing more than an escapist fantasy within a contemporary world whose complex interconnectedness contradicts any possibility of innocent escape. Within this

framework, the consequences surrounding his death demonstrate what is, at once, the vulnerability and culpability of being human in an age in which humanity as a collective, comprehensive actor has become a geological force. Not only does this line of thinking provide a cynical, fatalist view of Man's life, but, as Jason W. Moore explains in his critique of the Anthropocene as the name for this time period, it precludes any serious discussion of why or how a disaster such as the *Prestige* is seen as an inevitable externality of a globalized "risk society," to use Beck's term. For Moore, who proposes instead the term "Capitalocene," the "elevation of *Anthropos* as a collective actor" constitutes an "erasure" of human difference (82), sustaining the dualistic separations of humans from the nonhuman world and "assigning responsibility for global change to humanity as a whole, rather than to the forces of capital and empire that have given modern world history its coherence" (83). Whereas the logic of the Anthropocene, by assigning collective human culpability through a reliance on a general concept of "Man," forestalls a critical assessment of causes and effects of anthropogenic climate change, alternative theorizations such as that provided by Moore offer a way to move past the self-aggrandizing fatalism of this discourse and promote ways humans can live as part of Earth with nonhuman others.

As Donna Haraway details in a companion essay to Moore's, the Anthropocene discourse, far from serving as a rebuke to the grand anthropocentric narrative of History, reinscribes and extends the modernizing myth of this figure she refers to as "Species Man" (51). By moving away from the totalizing and universalizing of humanity that is implied by the Anthropocene, we can see how the Man of Camelle, the hermit and artist who lived the majority of his years at the farthest reaches of the European continent, is not equivalent to the Man of Western History, the exclusionary construction that has been historically synonymous with the human species or *Anthropos*. In fact, the two stand in contradistinction with one another. Countering the dualism and anthropocentrism that the Western idea of Man has helped construct and continues to sustain, the life of Man provides an example of what it means to be living on Earth during what Haraway describes as "times of multispecies, including human, urgency" (39). Departing from the theoretical limitations of anthropocentrism, then, allows us to see Man not as the martyr of the Anthropocene, but instead as the embodiment of a post-anthropocentric ethics of living on the Earth and living with nonhuman others. The solitary human to die as a direct result of the oil spill, albeit one of an uncountable number of nonhumans for whom the immediate impacts of the contamination were fatal, the sentimental connection that caused Man's death epitomizes the interconnections that sustain the complex web of life in which humans form a crucial part.

However, even as his death appears to symbolically reject the anthropocentric dualism that sets humans apart from other forms of life, this interpretation of Man's death overlooks the details, which risk reestablishing human-nonhuman difference: unlike the various organisms poisoned by the oil spill, the death of Man was not directly caused by the immediate contamination and the destruction of a sustaining ecosystem, but, rather, by heartbreak. Thus, just as we approach seeing Man's life and death as an exemplar of multispecies interdependence, hints of human exceptionalism return once more. Instead of seeing this as another contradiction or an ethical aporia for humans living in an era of environmental emergency, what I propose here, as a way to begin this chapter about the complex interrelations between the diverse forms of life on Earth, is to consider these complications as a

necessary and important facet of understanding the conceptual category of the posthuman, especially with regards to anthropogenic climate change. That is, rejecting a facile romanticizing of this unique figure, even though it may lead to a more complex and difficult interpretation, provides a template for a concept of the human that is not defined by the exclusions and generalizations found in the concept of *Anthropos*. Specifically, echoing the ideas proposed in the above discussion of his sculptures and the ethics of earth art, this critical approach to Man's death reveals the impossibility of fully becoming the nonhuman Other, but demonstrates in its approximation, through the attempt to know the nonhuman Other, how we can develop novel ways of comprehending the Other that go beyond the simplistic dualism of anthropocentric discourse. Considered in this way, the death of Man does not have to become an example of human exceptionalism, but can rather be understood as a realization of an Irigarayan ethics of difference in relation to the nonhuman.

As Haraway develops over the course of her book *Staying with the Trouble*, living through the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, or Chthulucene (as she denominates it) requires making meaningful connections with these human and nonhuman others that comprise life on the Earth. Her idea of "making kin" proposes moving beyond the limits of familial relations to consider unknown and unknowable others (102-3), to "[get] on together" with them (10), to grieve with them (39) – it requires, in summary, a recognition that "we are at stake to each other...human beings are with and of the earth" (55). By empathizing with the injuries suffered by others and recognizing the common vulnerability that intertwines and binds together all forms of life on Earth, the life and work of Manfred Gnädinger serves as an exemplar of what "making kin" means in an era of contingency and loss. It is not insignificant then that Man's art works recall in their unconventional and perilous arrangements of found materials the beauty of the Earth's coral reefs, the delicate ecosystems whose particularly-intense vulnerability has functioned as a canary in the coal mine for worldwide recognition of the destruction caused by seemingly-negligible changes in temperature and, as Haraway points out, initially prompted the advancement of the term "Anthropocene" (72). Primarily comprised of stones but nonetheless evoking the delicate beauty of these marine ecosystems, these whimsical sculptures of upturned curves and porous construction survive today as an unexpected monument to the common vulnerability of life in this contemporary moment of climate emergency.

Significantly, however, these sculptures exhibit this contemporary condition of precarity from a peripheral point of enunciation. Not only do they exist on the threshold between the land and the sea, but they are also at the edge of a town located at the northwestern extreme of the Iberian Peninsula in a region that has historically been characterized as a periphery within both Spain and, more broadly, Europe – regardless, as the *Prestige* oil spill and its consequences for these sculptures made evident, this peripheral exclusion from the progress of modernity has not likewise excluded Galicia from the deleterious effects of globalized capitalism. The peripheral relation of Galicia to the industrialization and development of Spain – itself a peripheral country within the context of Europe's industrialization and development beginning in the late modern period – will become increasingly important as I move into the following sections of this chapter, introducing a theoretical framework for comprehending the *Prestige* oil spill and interpreting the other two artistic responses to this disaster.

The *Prestige* as Posthuman Disaster

Considered today the worst environmental disaster in the modern history of both Spain and Portugal, the *Prestige* oil spill began on November 13, 2002 when the now-infamous boat first burst a tank in a winter storm roughly two hundred kilometers west of the Galician town of Fisterra, sinking six days later and ultimately spilling 17.8 million gallons of heavy crude oil. One of the most notable and immediate responses to this catastrophe was the grassroots political movement *Nunca Más* – “Never Again” in English – that sprang up in the aftermath of the spill. This informal coalition, as Trevathan contends in his review of the movement, anticipates “future forms of identity” through its explicit recognition of the disaster’s consequences for human and nonhuman life (50), especially its insistence – as seen in the protests’ use of symbols, both natural and cultural, of Galician identity – on the regional relation to the sea (46). Similarly, the circumstances surrounding the shipwreck of the *Prestige* and the ensuing spill clearly demonstrate the importance of such a framework that is not based discretely on the human: representative of the Byzantine, globalized network of entities that operate and regulate commercial shipping in the twenty-first century (traveling from Russia and Latvia to Singapore but ultimately sinking in Spanish waters, the ship was built in Japan, registered in the Bahamas, owned by a Liberian corporation, managed by a Greek company, transported oil owned by a Russian company with headquarters in Switzerland, insured by a British company, and staffed with a Greek captain and mostly Filipino crew), the ship ultimately wrecked because its human crew, working with the navigational technologies of their vessel, encountered a powerful winter storm. No small factor in this catastrophic demise was the age of the ship, its lack of proper maintenance, and the easily-bypassed regulatory standards, which demonstrates how the environment and the greater public pay for the negative externalities produced by a capitalist logic of cost-optimization.

One of the most remarkable facts of the *Prestige* disaster, however, is that it was, in the context of Galicia’s recent history, not very remarkable: over the past sixty-five years, the region’s coast has experienced eight major oil spills, two of them spilling more tons of crude oil than the one in 2002, with that most recent spill only accounting for some 18 percent of the 360,000 tons that have contaminated the coast since the mid-1950s (González). Although there were other factors that made the *Prestige* particularly catastrophic in terms of its environmental impact – specifically, the heavy crude oil the boat was carrying has more severe, persistent environmental impacts than light crude oil (Díez, Jover, Bayona, and Albaigés), which was only exacerbated by the fact that the oil spread over a much larger geographic area due to the ship’s distance from shore and the Spanish and Galician governments’ initial response of denial and indifference (Jiménez-Aleixandre and García Mira) –, the contemporary regularity with which these disasters have occurred evinces the mundanity of environmental disaster in this region. The expectation of frequent environmental disaster is so strong, in fact, that the regional newspaper published an article in 2018 remarking on the lack of any major oil spills in the fifteen years since the *Prestige* (González). In addition to having become inured to these repeated disasters, Otero and González comment in their review of the *Nunca Más* movement that many Galicians believe that this situation of recurrent emergency is far from coincidental, and that “being Galician” implies, for reasons both historical and political, being submitted to certain hazards “that would be prevented or better mitigated” in other regions of Spain (264).

Working from this brief review of the *Prestige* oil spill and its most prominent social response, in this section I use theoretical approaches to the concept of risk to understand what disaster has signified in a modern period in which its etymological connotations diverge from the material causes of the events it categorizes. I ultimately propose the phrase “posthuman disaster” as a thought experiment, exploring how this slight change in terminology helps reconsider disaster from a perspective that is not beholden to the binary divisions of human-nonhuman, nature-culture, or modern-premodern. While focusing on more general theoretical approaches to disaster throughout this section, I also consider the modern histories of Spain and Galicia in order to concretize this discussion within a context that is particularly relevant in this chapter for my analysis of these three cultural responses to the *Prestige* oil spill.

To begin, as the preceding paragraphs suggest, the term itself, *disaster*, as well as its Spanish cognate *desastre*, appears ill-suited to accurately describe this situation: not only does the idea of a “frequent disaster” present an unmistakable contradiction, but the pre-modern connotations of the word itself belie the true causes of such occurrences in the contemporary world. As Rigby explains in her book-length interrogation of the concept of disaster – with an especial interest in the theoretically-knotty phrase “natural disaster” – in a modern world coming to terms with anthropogenic climate change, the etymological origins of the word, today literally translated as “ill-starred,” express “a matter of astrologically determined misfortune” (16). Even though, she continues, “In modernity, the astrological referent might have become discredited and forgotten...the connotation of bad luck lingers,” which tends to “[mask] the realities of human (ir)responsibility” (16). The thoroughgoing idea of Rigby’s *Dancing with Disaster*, borne out of a playful interpretation of the original meaning of disaster, is that the realities of climate change oblige us to become personally and collectively more comfortable with situations in which we have been entirely disowned by the guiding stars of our life (20). While this feeling of instability and unpredictability recurs throughout the theoretical and aesthetic objects detailed in this chapter, the premodern semantic hangover that she highlights is especially important for the way in which it resonates with other theoretical approaches to risk – a conceptual framework based in the expectation of inevitable disaster – in modernity.

In particular, Rigby’s discussion of the origins of “disaster,” with its remnants of premodern, religio-astrological connotations, calls to mind Giddens’s definition of modernity as “modes of social life or organization” (1) that have “swept us away from traditional types of social order” (4) by means of various “disembedding mechanisms” based on trust that temporally and spatially disorient individuals (26). Risk, in Giddens’s model, is borne out of the imperative of trust in conditions where modernity prevails: as we become less dependent on traditional, contained institutions to determine our relations to others (what were, in general, localized relations), we must trust in abstract, non-local systems, customarily based in systems of “established expertise” (83-4, 101), thus opening up the possibilities for the distinctly modern concept of risk, which is distinguished from its pre-modern predecessor, *fortuna*, insofar as it supplants “religious cosmologies” for “human moral imperatives, natural causes, and chance” in the “perception of determination and contingency” (34). In the place of *fortuna*’s religious hermeneutic for explaining and avoiding such calamities, risk proposes a scientific idea of chance and regulated inevitability, recognizing not just the “possibility that things might go wrong, but that this possibility cannot be eliminated” (111).

Ulrich Beck, a contemporary of Giddens who coined the term of “risk society” to describe modernity in the late-twentieth century, sees the difference between modernity and that which came before it as a transformation in our concept of risk: replacing the former concept of “bravery and adventure,” risk becomes “the threat of self-destruction of all life on Earth” (Beck 21). Like Giddens, Beck posits that risk, as a global and inevitable facet of modernity, is emblematic of the reflexivity of modernization. As the German sociologist writes, “Risk may be defined as a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself. Risks, as opposed to older dangers, are consequences which relate to the threatening force of modernization and to its globalization of doubt” (21). The “risk society” that gives his most recognized work its title, then, describes a situation in which society is defined by a global “distribution of techno-scientifically produced risks” (19). In the context of disaster and, more specifically, the *Prestige* disaster, the most relevant commonality between these two thinkers is their mutual recognition that living with this modern concept of risk necessitates an idea of trust that exceeds the individual or the local. The concept of modernity based in risk that is put forth by Giddens and Beck thus proposes that the exposure to and social prevalence of such a techno-scientific concept of risk in and of itself entails “being modern.” Such an approximation of modernity, of what it means to designate a certain place or people as being modern, in this way conceived as a passive quality (though not without the inconsistencies that plague other approaches to defining this term), is especially significant for a country such as Spain, which has been considered an exceptional case within the context of Europe for what is commonly seen as its failure to realize the capitalist development necessary to properly achieve being modern (Labanyi 90-91). Countering the notion that “achieving modernity” is based solely on a country’s ability to achieve a sufficient level of industrial development, Labanyi instead suggests that modernity is defined “in terms of attitudes toward the relation of present to past” (91), an approach that is particularly helpful for conceiving of modernity in terms of the modern project of the nation state without relying on comparative and teleological expectations of industrial development. By conceiving of modernity as exposure to a global, techno-scientific form of risk, thus, we are capable of providing another way of contesting this narrative of Spain’s inadequate modernization, albeit by using a concept of modernity that is inherently tied to the *longue durée* of global capitalist industrialization

Risk figures so prominently in the respective approaches to modernity put forth by Beck and Giddens because of its comprehensive, all-inclusive nature – undesirable by definition, it is inevitable product of techno-scientific progress; produced by no individual in particular, it affects a heterogeneous collective; felt locally, what distinguishes it from pre-modern risk or *fortuna* is its global scale. For Giddens, the ubiquity of risk is an integral part of what he proposes is the juggernaut character of modernity, a metaphor for this historical condition based on the image of a “runaway engine of enormous power which, collectively as human beings, we can drive to some extent but which also threatens to rush out of our control and which could rend itself asunder” (139). At times “exhilarating and charged with hopeful anticipation” (139), the image of modernity as juggernaut places the individual as a passenger, however willing or unwilling, on a ride set forth by humans, but controlled by no one and ever-susceptible to “[veering] erratically in directions we cannot foresee” (139). Disasters, then, are those moments when, as individuals, we become helplessly aware of this juggernaut character of contemporary life. While, according to Giddens, the particularity of modernity implies that

“History’ is not on our side, has no teleology, and supplies us with no guarantees” (154), and, similarly, that “no providential forces will inevitably intervene to save us” (173), there is a sense of togetherness inherent in this image of a juggernaut, one that emerges in response to the collective vulnerability made distinctly apparent by risk society’s culmination in the moment of disaster.

This connection between risk and emergent forms of collective organization is more directly and fully developed in Beck’s analogous theorization of a global risk society. In particular, Beck proposes that, in opposition to the monadization fostered by class society, the “intangible, universal afflictions” that typify our risk society have the capacity to foster a precarious form of ethical and political organization (49). Although Beck recognizes that forms of collective identification based in anxiety can be easily imperiled by disinformation, becoming instead the basis for further fragmentation and scapegoating (49-50), his proposal is significant insofar as it proposes risk as a new form of belonging in a globalized world marked by a deterritorialized loss of place, an idea of which *Nunca Más* serves as an exemplary instantiation. Forged in ad-hoc fashion by Galicians who were, as the name suggests, quite simply fed up with the frequency of such catastrophes and the government’s willful disregard for the human and nonhuman life affected by the oil spill (Otero and González 258-263), the movement was capable of bringing together disparate groups and creating a space of “pluralistic participation” capable of “disrupting the traditional dynamics of the Galician political system” (278-9). Additionally, Trevathan argues that this particular social formation led to a recognition by Galicians of the common fragility shared by humans and nonhumans given the precarity of risk society, in this way helping forge a “culturally transformative” paradigm of Galician identity based on a “new politics” of human-nonhuman interconnection and interdependence (50).

Considered in this manner, *Nunca Más* responds to the question posited by Heise in her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* regarding what social formations and cultural responses can emerge given the countervailing pull of the local and the global that is apparent in this modern risk society. Following on the work of Beck in particular, Heise proposes that shared risk has become “an important theoretical lens with which to envision the emergence of new social movements and structures...foregrounding cosmopolitan forms of awareness and inhabitation” (121), later providing the caveat that it “remains only a stepping stone so long as it is not accompanied by a more comprehensive cultural literacy that allows the members of one community to grasp what sociocultural significance the risk scenario has for the members of another” (158). What Heise contends in this section on risk, which is representative of the thoroughgoing argument of her book, is that, as much as risk is by definition a global, non-localized concept, it requires novel cultural forms that establish a link between our inherently local experience of the world and the contemporary global scope of that world.

Disaster, to return to the topic and term in which I am interested in this section, maintains a significant role in Heise’s study and this specific negotiation between local and global, particularly in her analysis of the objects studied in her section on risk (the most famous of which is Don DeLillo’s postmodern classic *White Noise* and its “airborne toxic event”); as she writes, “The moment of crisis...starkly foregrounds what ordinary rhythms might conceal: namely, that attachments to both places and people in an age of global connectedness are, for

better or for worse, increasingly shaped by forces far outside the bounds of the local and familial" (190). Disaster, then, is not the culmination of risk society, but rather its most apparent expression. As both Heise and Beck explicitly state, for as much as disasters may represent moments of collective anagnorisis leading to new forms of organization, they can just as easily result in errant biases, indiscriminate rejections of the global, or fantasies of a return to a pre-risk state in relation to nature. Although *Nunca Más* as an organization resisted indulging in any of these reactions in the immediate aftermath of the oil spill, one can easily see the temptation of such an escapist rejection of the global and flight to a pre-modern state of unspoiled communion with nature, of which the previously-discussed life of Man could be considered a perfect, albeit cautionary, example. In fact, the final of these three reactions, this quixotic yearning for an idyllic pre-modern state unharmed by ever-present global risks, most clearly brings us back to Rigby's commentary on the origins and contemporary significance of the term "disaster." Far from signaling an absolute return to a pre-modern cosmology, one in which unfortunate events had astronomical origins and *fortuna* had never been supplanted by empirical determinations of risk, I contend that the contemporary use of this term reveals instead the fissures in the techno-scientific certitude that underlies modernity. Invoking Latour's critique in *We Have Never Been Modern*, this analysis of "disaster" contends that the term itself reveals the illusion of the "Great Divide" through which the moderns divorced themselves from the nonhuman world and separated themselves from those countries and peoples they deemed premodern.

Moreover, if the concept of a "human disaster" itself manifests a contradiction between a modern concept of the human and a premodern cosmology, what can the phrase "posthuman disaster" actually express and how can it alter our understanding of an event such as the *Prestige* oil spill? As the foregoing review of risk makes clear, contemporary disasters reveal humans as not entirely in control, but instead of bringing us back to the original denotation of "disaster", which relies on religious cosmologies to explain misfortune, the undesirable events of today manifest a complex, global scale of interconnection from which the human subject cannot be easily extricated. Building off the critique of anthropocentric dualism in the prior section, the definition of the posthuman offered here understands the term in a discursive fashion, rejecting the exclusionary, dualistic construct of the human (Haraway, Braidotti) and offering instead an idea of the human based on a "positive integration into larger networks of being" (Taylor 5), inextricably entangled and dependent upon nonhuman forms of life as well as agentic assemblages of humans and nonhumans (Braidotti, Hodder, Latour). Therefore, just as affixing the preposition "post" to "human" does not reflect any material change in the human, but rather a discursive reconsideration of the human (Hayles), labelling the *Prestige* a posthuman disaster does not proclaim a new type of disaster, but instead challenges the concept of disaster to move beyond a dualistic division between human and nonhuman in understanding the causes and effects of such events.

In this way, the concept here referred to as a "posthuman disaster" comes to resemble an instantiation of what Timothy Morton has dubbed "hyperobjects," which is, as mentioned in the prior section, a term he coined to "refer to things that are massively distributed in space and time relative to humans" (1), which, by virtue of their size and scope, "cause us to reflect on our very place on Earth" (15). In particular, while recognizing that "humans have been aware of enormous entities...for as long as they have existed" (15), Morton posits that hyperobjects

have become urgently pertinent in a world in which humans are reluctantly coming to terms with the long-term, anthropogenic effects on climate, itself a hyperobject of recent discovery. Offering further contextualization, Morton places his term within a *longue durée* of discoveries that have decentered the human subject beginning with the Copernican Revolution; in particular, Morton sees an emerging consciousness of hyperobjects as part of “the great humiliation of the human” (16-17), making us aware of our now-seemingly-insignificant place in the universe precisely at the moment in which that place in the universe is imperiled. To offer perhaps the most convenient example, the *Prestige* oil spill, given the individually incomprehensible scale of its effects in both space and time, could clearly be considered a hyperobject according to the criteria outlined by Morton in his book-length dissertation on the neologism.

Not explicitly calling itself posthuman and, eventually, rejecting outright the term “posthuman,” Morton’s theorization of this concept is heavily indebted to Harman’s object-oriented ontology (OOO), a realist philosophy positing that objects can both exist and act independent of human awareness, which itself quite clearly intersects with the posthuman awareness of nonhuman forms of life and agency. The difference for Morton is that, while the posthuman comprises a recognition and “ennobling” of the nonhuman, hyperobjects present a world no longer in human control, one in which “nonhuman beings are responsible for the next moment in human history and thinking” (201). As this line, one of the last in his book-length study on the hyperobject, makes clear, Morton’s theory ends in a fatalistic, cynical perspective of human existence in a world of anthropogenic climate change. Predicated on the lack of human agency, whether individual or collective, vis-à-vis hyperobjects, Morton’s theory tends to echo the apocalyptic despair and facile narratives of the Anthropocene discourse, positioning the human as impotent while ignoring and abstracting the material causes of climate change.

Regardless, if we accept the deficiencies of Morton’s theory and disagree with his dismissal of posthumanism, the concept of hyperobjects distinctly expresses something significant with regards to this chapter’s interest in disaster and the posthuman. In particular, the emphasis on scale in Morton’s neologism highlights the myriad tensions – between local and global, individual and collective, short and long term – made urgently apparent by climate change. Although these tensions were established clearly in Giddens, Beck, and Heise as indicative of a modern concept of risk, what Morton’s hyperobjects theory specifically offers is an expression of this sense of disorientation as humans attempt to grasp temporal and spatial scales that exceed their individual capacity of comprehension. While not precluding comprehension, absent religious cosmologies and human notions of control over nature, the sense of disorientation typifies what this section has termed a posthuman disaster.

***Costa da Morte* as Experimental Meditation on the Posthuman**

Eschewing a direct commentary on the Anthropocene or the *Prestige* oil spill, Lois Patiño’s 2013 film *Costa da Morte* employs the conventions of experimental film to provide a mysterious and haunting impression of life in the coastal region of Spain most affected by the *Prestige*. Lacking any discernible narrative or theme, much is left for the audience to intuit throughout the roughly ninety minutes of the work. Mostly comprised of long and extremely long shots that remain on the screen for an uncomfortably-prolonged amount of time, the film

proceeds from one shot to the next with little connecting these adjacent shots besides their presentation of a scene of life in the littoral region. Although various people appear in these shots, the distance and lack of focus on individual subjects means that none of them can be distinguished by anything but their voices.

What the film does show, in general, are scenes of the Spanish autonomous region of Galicia – its natural as well as its man-made features – and the people who reside there, living and making a living. The verdant northwest corner of Spain, Galicia's peripheral location and laggard economic development have made it a backwater region whose identity in modern Spain has been defined as much by its cultural distinction as by its emigrant diaspora (Romero xi-xx). The toponym that gives the film its title, in fact, says quite a bit about modern Galicia, most apparently in the fact that it is written in the regional language of Galician, around which a spectrum of nationalist and regionalist sentiments have been constructed over the past two centuries: having been forbidden throughout the four decades of Francisco Franco's dictatorship, its teaching and usage have expanded in the decades since, having been officially recognized in the Constitution of 1978, a document that celebrates Spain's linguistic diversity as a "patrimonio cultural que será objeto de especial respeto y protección" (Artículo 3 CE). In addition to exemplifying this regional linguistic distinction, the macabre connotations of "The Coast of Death" reference both the environmental specificity of a littoral region known for its unforgiving seas as well as a history of poverty given its peripheral relation to the economic progress of Europe: bringing together both of these interpretations, alternative readings of the name assign responsibility for those shipwrecks to cunning locals who would deceive ships, causing them to wreck and washing their goods ashore, as is brought up in one of the many conversations we hear over the course of the film. Regardless of which myth of identity this name nurtures, as Nieves Herrero explains in her study of tourism in this imprecisely-defined region, the denomination is today useful almost exclusively as a way to capitalize on tourism as a contemporary lifeblood in a globalized economy, sensationalizing this remote locale in order to differentiate it from others nearby (165).

Yet the region is not a mere backdrop for the film's aesthetic response to this disaster, even as it presents many postcard-worthy, stereotypically-Galician visuals; instead, Galicia – in particular, the Costa da Morte – serves as Patiño's locus for investigating the conflicts between the individual and the collective, the local and the global, and the environmental and the technological that typify the posthuman. For example, while many of scenes offer a pastoral aesthetic of a coastal region that appears to have been passed over by the deleterious effects of modernity (one scene quite literally shows an old man herding a flock of sheep on a misty hillside), the film does not simply perpetuate idyllic visions of Galicia as an innocent, premodern corner of the Iberian Peninsula: for example, we see at different moments the modern wind turbines that today dot the green hills, the large-scale quarries that participate in mineral extraction, and the activities of a lumber industry that has been transforming the region for centuries. Nonetheless, even as it presents an honest image of the region's inclusion within modern networks of globalization, absent from the film are some of the more prominent manifestations of its industrial modernization, including the hydroelectric dam of Ézaro – one of many such dams that, as discussed in chapter 2, were constructed during the rapid modernization undertaken during the second half of Franco's dictatorship – that powers a steel mill situated on the coast of the administrative region of Cee within the Costa da Morte. Thus,

both in form and content, *Costa da Morte* presents an oblique and abstruse vision of Galicia that resists facile attempts at classification or explanation.



Still from *Costa da Morte* showing the use of long, fixed shots

When we do hear human voices in the film, then, their conversations – about daily life on the coast, the history and mythologies of the region, and various other unexceptional topics – ostensibly offer some of the most apparent clues to the film’s meaning. A few of these conversations represent the most direct reference to the *Prestige* that occurs over the course of the film, as the visually-anonymous subjects discuss offhandedly and without prompting the immediate effects of the disaster and the absurdity and repudiation that characterized the Spanish and Galician governments’ response to it. Not shown, nonetheless, are any of the more visible signifiers of the oil spill. Filmed some ten years after it occurred, there are no images of the dirty coastlines, the poisoned marine life, or the aforementioned community-based response to the disaster, *Nunca Más*: although we see images of men fishing off the breakwaters of Camelle, we do not see the remains of Man’s home and his sculptures, nor do we see any of the monuments, official or unofficial, made to commemorate the event. In fact, if this is a disaster film, it is most apparently one about the forest fires, shown directly at various moments throughout the film, that have become emblematic of Galicia and northern Portugal during the dry, late summer months. Nonetheless, even in these scenes, which more directly show the occurrence of a disaster, the director resists making the film into a voyeuristic observation of calamity or a clear-cut indictment of the forces that cause such events.

Thus, far from the theme which gives the film its unity, disaster instead serves as the catalyst for more general reflections on life, as seen from a remote stretch of coastline in Galicia in 2013. Even though I do not go so far in this chapter as to argue that Patiño’s film is explicitly or directly about the *Prestige* oil spill, the suggestion that this work is in some way a response to this disaster is not particularly emphasized within the limited scholarship on *Costa*

da Morte. While mentioning this work, his most celebrated and first feature film, much of the scholarship on Patiño is primarily interested in contextualizing his work within the industry dynamics and stylistic concerns of contemporary Galician cinema, connecting the experimental aesthetics and the prominence of Galicia that is apparent throughout his oeuvre with the *Novo Cinema Galego* (NCG) movement as is done in the respective articles by Colmeiro and Amago. In an article dedicated specifically to interpreting *Costa da Morte*, Patricia Keller does bring up the question of the environment, mentioning how the film recurrently shows the struggle of humans against a dominant nature (110), but, nonetheless, she concentrates her analysis on the tension between the photographic and the moving image that is apparent in the film's idiosyncratic aesthetic. Interested generally in the question of photography's relation to time and death, Keller ultimately argues that the landscape shots in Patiño's film eschew representation to instead present "constantly shifting, ever-evolving sites of embodiment, transformation, and revelation" (118) that provide the viewers with "ways of seeing that are connected to loss and invisibility" (118). Gonzalo Enríquez Veloso, whose paper does not offer a media analysis such as Keller's but instead provides "una crítica espacial" of *Costa da Morte*, similarly makes no mention of the *Prestige* as he analyzes various scenes from the film through the use of two spatial frameworks – Lefebvre's spatial triad as outlined in *The Production of Space* and Williams's country-city binary – in order to consider the social and economic aspects of the film's spatial aesthetic. Representing the most prominent scholarly work specifically dedicated to *Costa da Morte*, Keller and Veloso's respective articles offer a helpful point of departure for analyzing the film, especially its idiosyncratic cinematography, even though they differ from my analysis insofar as they do not mention any connection with the *Prestige* oil spill or its aftermath.

Building off the conclusions of the prior two sections with regards to the Anthropocene, the posthuman, and disaster, in this current section, I propose that Patiño's film is about the situatedness of the human in the twenty-first century. That is, the film explores the various configurations of interconnection that form untold bonds of dependency between the human and a world that cannot be considered external: interconnections such as those between individual humans, with all forms of life, with the globalized flows of capital that have effected anthropogenic climate change, and with the various objects and technologies that mediate our experience of the world. More importantly though, *Costa da Morte*, as I assert here through an analysis of various scenes and some of the film's distinguishing formal aspects, does not merely recognize the complicated web of interconnections made urgently apparent by our current state of climate emergency, but, additionally, it considers the resultant sense of posthuman disorientation and emphasizes the importance of accountability in response to the urgent global crisis brought about by anthropogenic climate change.

Costa da Morte begins with a black screen that sticks around for somewhere between one or two minutes, during which we hear the sounds of unidentifiable humans panting and chopping wood. More or less at the minute mark, an epigraph appears on the black screen with a quote that is attributed to the early-twentieth-century Galician nationalist Alfonso Daniel Rodríguez Castelao:⁵⁸ "Num entrar do home na paisaxe e da paisaxe no home creouse a vida

⁵⁸ Although I have been unable to find the direct source of this quote, my research points to it being misattributed to Castelao, who seemingly wrote or said these words while himself quoting Ramón Otero Pedrayo, a geographer

eterna de Galiza.” Soon thereafter, visuals appear onscreen and we see what appears to be a clearing in a forest, with some green brush in the foreground, a few groups of pine trees in the middle ground – each group appearing, right to left, farther away from the camera –, and the fog-encased silhouette of a much thicker forest peeking out from the background. Across the bottom of the frame, just in front of the nearest group of pines, a miniscule human figure walks around, clearing brush, breathing heavily and touching the tree. Soon, he revs up a chainsaw and, after a few seconds, fells one of the pines, letting it descend abruptly in the direction of the foggy forest in the background. Gradually, a few other humans enter the frame, more brush is cleared, chainsaws rumble intermittently; eventually, another tree comes down. Representative of the formal techniques seen throughout the film, this first scene consists of a solitary, long shot in which the camera remains fixed throughout its three-to-four minute duration.

Over the next five minutes, we see a disjointed series of eight more shots showing what is, ostensibly, the same forest and other activities related to the clearing of that forest: more trees are felled, chainsaws sound, a logging machine grasps and manipulates freshly-cut trees, and we see neatly-stacked piles of logs laying on the ground next to a path amidst the ambient sounds of a forest during a moment of respite. Although this opening series of related shots is indicative of the film in a myriad of ways, many of which I return to in later sections, there are two aspects – one related to content and one to form – I comment on at this moment to highlight how the film presents the interrelation of humans with the world: first, this prolonged focus on logging activities presents an example of the film’s thoroughgoing interest in showing Galicia’s inclusion within the modern energy infrastructure that is indispensable for the functioning of globalized capitalism and, second, the distance with which we see the human figures in these opening shots is a formal characteristic that recurs over the course of the film, decentering the human subject and giving prominence to the surrounding, nonhuman environment.

Contrasting with the large portion of the film that consists of establishing shots that display the grandeur and self-evident natural beauty of this stretch of coast, there are various moments throughout the work in which the viewer is arrested by the intrusion of this modern energy infrastructure: in addition to the chainsaws and forestry vehicles that abruptly open the film with scenes of felled trees, the viewer likewise sees and hears the explosions of a quarry and watches the operation and maintenance of the modern wind turbines. Obliging the viewer to observe these activities that are customarily and intentionally unseen, the prolonged focus that is typical of all the shots in this film is especially significant in these scenes as it allows the viewer to reflect on the global context in which this resource extraction occurs in the twenty-first century, invoking the Challenging Forth that transforms nature into Standing Reserve as theorized in Heidegger’s famous essay on technology, as mentioned in the prior chapter. In particular, the primary scene brings to mind the German philosopher’s example of a forester who, even though he may “walk the same forest path in the same way as did his grandfather” (18), cutting trees in the same patch of forest, the forester does so today as part of a global

and writer who was also a key member of the *Xeración Nós* movement that culturally and politically championed Galicia in the early-twentieth century. Given Otero Pedrayo’s many essays on the significance of the landscape for Galician identity, I would argue that this conjecture is reasonable.

ordering, a techno-capitalist Enframing from which this local act of felling trees cannot be extricated. The prominence of these various scenes with their extended emphasis on the technical processes of energy extraction not only points to the implication of the local within the global within the context of contemporary capitalism and its natural resource lifeblood, but also evinces the inclusion of discrete individuals and nonhuman nature within the global flows of capital in the twenty-first century.

While scenes of logging in the forest or mineral extraction in the quarry provide local examples of resource exploitation, the oblique connection between the movie and the *Prestige* disaster is distinctly important for understanding how the global networks of capitalism comprise the various scenes of Galician everyday life that constitute the film. In particular, even though the film shows none of the immediate contamination from the costly cargo of the *Prestige* spill, this *sine qua non* of capitalism since the Industrial Revolution is alluded to throughout the work, with various scenes showing objects or activities made possible in their contemporary form by petroleum. For instance, breaking the ambient silence of the film's introduction, the first sound we hear – the revving of a chainsaw that is summarily employed to fell a tree – is that of oil combusted into mechanical power that turns the teeth of the saw. Similarly, in other scenes of the film we watch the life-threatening activity of collecting shellfish and crustaceans on the coastlines of Galicia, a practice that, in spite of its ancient history, is seen in the film employing the aid of, in one scene, plastic buckets and waterproof boots, and in another, neoprene wetsuits. These minute details, made especially apparent by virtue of – respectively – the intensity of the film's sonic elements and the uncomfortable amount of time dedicated to each shot, demonstrate how the quotidian activities of everyday life in Galicia are encompassed within the global reach of capitalism. The all-encompassing scope of this capitalist interconnection is made even more conspicuous given the underlying associations of Galicia – especially the superlatively-remote Costa da Morte – as a backwater region within Europe, a peripheral region within a peripheral country (66), as Armas Diéguez describes it.

Though these scenes either explicitly or more indirectly manifest the human interconnection within the processes of global capitalism, they nonetheless eschew a collective indictment of an abstract “humanity.” In particular, through dialogue that repeatedly calls attention to the long-lasting, negative effects of the *Prestige* on the inhabitants of this region, the film highlights the manner in which such interconnections with the global flows of capital are so commonly detrimental. Going further, however, this dialogue's specific interest in discussing the pernicious, ineffective political response to the disaster makes clear the inequality that is fundamental to this ideological system of global relations. To paraphrase the earlier analysis of Man and his tragic end: even if all individual humans form part of capitalism and are imperiled by its exploitation of the world's resources, it does not mean that each individual is equally culpable for its deleterious effects on the world. Thus, while the film shows the inclusion of the individuals living in this remote littoral region within the complex, global network of twenty-first-century capitalism, it does so while eschewing a facile critique that posits collective human culpability.

Beyond the ominous interconnections of global capitalism, the film likewise offers a perspective of humans that emphasizes their more elemental, global interconnection with nonhumans. This is achieved by what is perhaps the most conspicuous formal characteristic of the film: its exclusive use of long and extremely long establishing shots. Visually, the effect of

this technique is self-evident. Whether the human figures in the frame are easily identifiable or whether the distance is such that it is all but impossible to distinguish them from their surroundings, this cinematographic style anonymizes the individual humans, in some instances quite literally blurring until it becomes indistinct the discrete boundaries of the human. Even when the distance of the shot is not so extreme, the film labors to ensure that, visually, the individual humans we see on the screen are unidentifiable, made anonymous by showing them in profile, with their backs turned, or, in many cases, through their inclusion within a collective group from which individuals cannot be distinguished.

The sense that *Costa da Morte* appears to be critiquing an anthropocentric separation of the human from the nonhuman is evident not only through this visual technique by which humans tend to fade into the background, but also when considered together with another distinguishing aspect of the film: the ostensibly autonomous agency of the nonhuman world as presented in various scenes. Throughout the work, Patiño displays various machines that operate with no apparent human control as well as scenes in which the nonhuman world acts and affects humans. From the aforementioned early scene that shows the mechanical arm of the forestry vehicle manipulate logs, to the scenes in the quarry showing dynamite explosions, an excavator moving boulders, and a conveyor belt that transports smaller rocks, to the various scenes that show, from myriad perspectives and distances, the spinning blades of the region's many wind turbines, the film repeatedly calls attention to a world of objects with varying capacities to move and act in coordination with or independent of direct human control. In a similar way, there are various scenes over the course of the film that focus on the force of the physical, nonhuman world, especially the sea. Although much of the film is characterized by long, fixed shots lacking any dynamic action, the most notable exceptions to this tendency are the various shots during which the ocean demonstrates its dynamic, unruly natural force. Juxtaposed with the stillness and smallness of human figures or constructions, these shots present the violent crashing of waves on rocks and breakwaters or depict from afar the turbulent chaos of waves rising and falling in every direction of the open ocean during a winter storm.

Together with the anonymizing distance with which the film depicts its human subjects, this especial attention to showing the agentic capacities of the nonhuman indicates the *Costa da Morte's* interest in the multifarious forms of entanglement that connect humans and nonhumans. Significantly, these aesthetic choices do not excise the human out of the frame to present a speculative world without us; instead, as is especially apparent in the shots of the "machine world" and its ostensibly-autonomous motion, the film emphasizes the mutual bond of interdependence that connects the human with the nonhuman. That is, while these apparatus undoubtedly depend upon humans to either directly operate them or to originally construct them to function as such (in one shot, for example, we watch a worker performing maintenance on the tower of one of these wind turbines), the film's choice to generally leave the humans out of the frame or minimize their appearance obliges us as viewers to consider our human dependence on such technologies and processes. Likewise, those scenes presenting the dynamic force of the ocean heighten our awareness of our integration within the natural, nonhuman world: the film rejects the binary distinction between the human and nonhuman world by presenting these physical forces as neither completely unaffected by human intervention nor absolutely controlled or comprehended by humans. Hence the contrasting

perspective between the scenes that present human efforts to control or contain this force – as is evident when we watch waves crash against the man-made breakwaters with their giant boulders that prevent the full force of the sea from reaching shore – and those scenes that present its capacity to exceed such efforts, as manifest in the image showing the chaotic expanse of the stormy sea.



Still from *Costa da Morte* showing two men fishing on the breakwaters of Camelle

This juxtaposition seen throughout the film between the control of nature through technological contrivances and the elemental turbulence of that nature recalls the prior section's discussion of the Anthropocene and the various contestations of this designation. In particular, the commentary of Moore in relation to his coining of the term "Capitalocene" gives coherence to these contrasting images apparent in Patiño's work, explaining how the dualism that separated the human from nature arises contemporaneously with the capitalist exploitation of the earth's resources – a process that he refers to as Capitalism's reliance on "Cheap Nature" (81, 89). As humans recede from their familiar prominence in Patiño's film, what becomes apparent is not a primordial, uncorrupted world, but instead a contemporary world that has been formed for the past half-millennia through the processes of capitalist transformation of the environment: the relative levelling of human, machine, and nature in *Costa da Morte* manifests what is not only an entanglement of the human with the nonhuman, but rather a specific, environment-building entanglement that is the product of a human activity beholden to an ideology based on accumulation and exploitation of an ever-changing concept of nature as its binary other. It is, precisely, this dualistic view of humans and nature – a binary that forestalls any consideration of interconnection while begetting other binaries related to the human – that the film deconstructs through the various techniques mentioned in these preceding paragraphs. In summary, Patiño's work does not show its viewers an abstract nature free of humans, but rather the contemporary, capitalist world in which humans have played a significant, but not absolute, role in forming.

Moving beyond habits of thought based around binaries, the perspective offered by the film can be considered posthuman insofar as it shows the human subject as being included

within the collective networks of contemporary capitalism, forming part of the “non-human vital force of Life” that Braidotti calls *zoe* (60), and extending the limits of embodiment to various forms of technological prosthesis. Although the film provides a rather diverse and balanced view of these interconnections that constitute the discursive leap to the posthuman, showing both the vulnerability and the possibility of these bonds of interdependence, it nonetheless conveys through other formal techniques the sense of disorientation that accompanies the posthuman.

As brought up in the previous section, the choice of disorientation to describe the experience of the posthuman stems from Morton’s posthuman-adjacent theory of hyperobjects, which, as a concept, expresses an incongruity between the individual human capacity for comprehension and the incomprehensible spatial and temporal scales of the enormous entities of which we are today aware. Specifically, distortion results from the fact that, given the temporal and spatial scales of hyperobjects, as individuals we are only offered a partial experience of them at any given time – something Morton refers to as “phasing” (70). Using the metaphor of Expressionist painting, Morton describes the effects of this phasing on humans as an equivalent blurring or abolishment of foreground and background in our subjective experience of the world (76). Using Morton’s especial interest in climate as *the* hyperobject that obliges humans to “reflect on our very place in the Earth and the cosmos” (15) to link what the preceding discussion described as the interconnection of the posthuman with Morton’s concept of hyperobjects, in the subsequent paragraphs I show how *Costa da Morte* offers this aesthetic of distortion to represent the individual human experience of the posthuman. Relying particularly on Morton’s suggestion that this distortion resembles the Expressionist blurring of foreground and background, I argue here that Patiño’s film employs a variety of formal techniques to aesthetically express the disorientation that characterizes the posthuman awareness of interconnection.

Although not as pervasive as other cinematographic techniques found in the film, some of *Costa da Morte*’s most striking visuals employ an extremely long, overhead shot that confounds any intimation of depth and, in this way, the Western representational ideal of perspective. The most notable of these scenes shows an image of two women in bathing suits, standing on a dark brown beach at the edge of a dark, sapphire blue sea; shot from an indirect angle from above, the hazy distinction between land and water cuts the frame in half from the left to the right. During the first few moments of the shot, this partition, which quite obviously from this distance comes to resemble the horizon’s division of land and sky, appears to present the viewer with a conventional notion of perspective; however, gradually, the details of the image begin to upend this initial perception: the thin, moving strips of waves advancing in the water and the position of the women (who are, not surprisingly, so miniscule that they could have easily gone unnoticed) orient the viewer to the camera’s point of view. In terms of audio, though, we hear the two women’s conversation from an almost-uncomfortably intimate proximity, listening to them talk about the shipwrecks that gave the coast its toponym and the current, unpleasant weather. At one point, describing the unfortunate geographical location of the beach they have chosen, they liken their current feeling of being blown by wind on all sides to that of being on the prow of a boat during a storm.



Still from *Costa da Morte* showing women talking on the beach

This comment is particularly intriguing given the fact that the other memorable usage of this overhead shot in the work is of a boat amongst the all-encompassing expanse of the ocean. The similarities between these two circumstances – between that of vertical perspective and that of a ship on open ocean during a storm – allows us to draw a comparison and consider the prevailing sense of disorientation and insecurity common in both. Even if, as mentioned prior, these shots are not paradigmatic of the film’s cinematographic aesthetic, by exploding the illusions of horizontal perspective, they affect the viewer’s concept of foreground and background throughout the entirety of the work. That is, it is not just that these images momentarily disorient the viewer, but rather that this technique disabuses the viewer of the illusions of horizontal perspective, including its assumption of a stable, objective point of view.

As Hito Steyerl contends in her essay on the subject, vertical perspective has the capacity to undermine the sense of individuality and subjectivity offered by the visual paradigm of horizontal, linear perspective (19) with its establishment of a “stable observer and horizon” (24). The “God’s eye view” of vertical perspective, as the name may suggest, does not provide in and of itself a liberation or democratization, instead establishing “an imaginary floating observer and an imaginary stable ground” (24). Nonetheless, returning to the initial sense of “free fall” that characterizes a viewer’s encounter with images in this new visual paradigm, Steyerl maintains hope that if we “accept the multiplication and delinearization of horizons and perspectives, the new tools of vision may also serve to express, and even alter, the contemporary conditions of disruption and disorientation” (26). Thus, the hesitant hopefulness that characterizes Steyerl’s interrogation of vertical perspective affirms the possibility that, for example, the long, overhead shots found in Patiño’s film are capable of upending the expectation of order found in conventional, horizontal perspective and expressing a contemporary sense of disorientation. Lacking a horizon, the distinction between foreground and background becomes irrelevant, imperiling our sense of depth as well as our sense of self.

Significantly, in both Steyerl's image of "free fall" and the film's metaphor of a being on a ship lost at sea during a storm, this disorientation is borne out of the indeterminate position of the subject in relation to their external environment. As she states, this lack of stability that characterizes vertical perspective's sensation of free fall produces a "freedom that is terrifying, utterly deterritorializing and always unknown" (28). Although I would not go so far as to claim that the overhead shots in *Costa de morte* induce feelings of terror or liberation, by placing these shots within a film that otherwise relies on the Western convention of perspective to offer images of particularly-striking cinematographic depth, Patiño upsets the sense of stability provided by this conventional visual paradigm and challenges the limits of the discrete individual through a sense of disorientation.

While the limited use of vertical perspective, as argued here, serves an instructive (or, perhaps more accurately, deconstructive) purpose insofar as it affects how we see the other scenes in the film, there are other, more thoroughgoing formal idiosyncrasies of the work that further establish the sense of disorientation by, in particular, eliciting in the viewer a sense of caution towards the illusion of an omnipotent, all-encompassing perspective. Specifically, the tension in the film between diegetic and extradiegetic space and time obliges the viewer to confront the incomplete, fragmented perspective of the individual in relation to the incomprehensive scale of interconnection that typifies the posthuman (a point expressed poignantly by Morton's concept of the hyperobject). Essential for understanding this tension, either spatially or temporally, requires a brief explanation of how the film is structured: rather simply, absent any intelligible narrative, the film consists instead of a series of vignettes comprised of various shots of the same scene (a boat on the water, two farmers out hunting with their dog, two men hiking on the hills by the coast, etc.). Over the course of the film's ninety-minute duration, only one of these vignettes can be recognized as repeating.

Temporally, the tension is between the individual time scales of these vignettes and the overall timescale in which the film occurs. Time passes over the course of the film and as viewers we are made almost uncomfortably aware of this passage of time as most scenes move uncomfortably slowly, with very little dynamic action occurring anywhere in the frame. Yet, when considered as a comprehensive whole, there is no definite passage of time; as a result, as viewers, we have no concept of a coherent diegetic time of the film. For example, at the midpoint of the work, there are series of shots showing the progressive transformations of a stream by the ocean over the course of the rainy winter season. After an initial black screen, for roughly twenty seconds we see a dry beach intersected by this stream; maintaining this same shot with the stream in the middle ground and some hills in the background, the film then cuts to black four more times, with each black screen followed by this same shot but showing a beach that is increasingly flooded until it becomes part of the *ría*⁵⁹ into which it empties. Put differently, the director in this series of shots shows the seasonal changes in a particular ecosystem so that, within two or three minutes, we witness months of change – or, as Keller writes, commenting on this same series of shots: "Here we see the co-presence or intertwining of photography and cinema, through a kind of reversal of temporal expansion and duration by weaving in a kind of interlude dependent on temporal compression, to artificially simulate

⁵⁹ The Galician word for the drowned river valleys that typify the region's western coast and which lends its name to the English geographic term.

time's lapse" (114). Paradigmatic of the enclosed, individual temporalities found in the vignettes of Galician life that comprise the film, I argue that the intentionality and the length of time portrayed in this series of shots emphasizes a tension in the film between converging timescales.

Not only do these vignettes have a closed temporality that is separate from the other vignettes seen in the film, but they likewise present a fragmented view of the particular object or scene that they portray. Each vignette depicts a particular scene and consists of various shots, typically lasting somewhere between ten or thirty seconds, but each one is from a different, and at times seemingly-arbitrary, angle or distance. During the vignette in which we see the two men hiking, for example, over the course of five minutes there are somewhere between ten and twenty distinct shots of varying length and distance, each one showing a different perspective of this particular hill and its neighboring terrain. In a related way, in addition to the director's aforementioned penchant for long and extremely long establishing shots, the film exclusively employs fixed shots in which the camera abstains from any movement, either zooming or panning. Not only, then, does this disjointed series of vignettes provide the viewer with a fragmented vision of the Costa da Morte region as a whole, but, by denying the viewer the impression, albeit illusory, of being able to more comprehensively explore or contextualize the images that appear on the screen, the film's rigidly-controlled perspective also prevents one from having a complete, unitary conception of any specific object seen over the course of the work.

Returning to the aesthetic of disorientation in which this section is particularly interested, I propose then that the formal decision to eschew a linear narrative and order the film through these vignettes of life in the Costa da Morte expresses disorientation in response to the scale of posthuman interconnection. Analogous to the disorientation occasioned by the use of vertical perspective, which quite literally blurs and confounds the distinction between foreground and background, the tension between the film's temporal and spatial framing and extra-diegetic time and space similarly reveals a confusion with regards to perspective. As explained above, temporally, this occurs through the eschewing of a unitary temporal narrative for an abundance of divergent, individual timescales; spatially, this is evident in the restriction and incompleteness that characterize each vignette. In other words, what is referred to here as a tension between the extra-diegetic and the diegetic is another way of describing the reflexivity of the work, that is, how the formal techniques of the film's vignettes oblige the viewer to consider the limits of the filmic medium. More specifically, it constitutes a reflection on how the work's filmic time and the framing of the world only approximates the unenclosed temporality and visual plenitude of the extra-diegetic world that it represents. The sense of disorientation, thus, is not simply a matter of the film having a fragmented temporal and visual perspective, but rather that it emphasizes this diegetic fragmentation and limitation of the extra-diegetic world.

In general, whether it is through the destabilizing effects of vertical perspective or the fragmentation apparent in the film's reflexivity, the aesthetic of disorientation proffered by *Costa da Morte* is borne out of the uncertainty and ambivalence that typify the posthuman decentering of the human. Just like Morton's concept of "phasing," this disorientation is the product of two interrelated factors: a divergence of scales and the limits of individual perspective. In fact, one of the clearest points of contact between Patiño's film and Morton's

theory – in addition to what I propose is a shared, albeit unspoken, interest in the posthuman – is an interest in the issue of scale in the contemporary world. Whereas for the Spanish director this is evident in the aforementioned formal techniques, in Morton’s theory this is most clearly developed through the recently-discussed idea of phasing. As Morton explains over the course of his chapter on this characteristic, it is not that hyperobjects are themselves incomplete or fragmented, but instead that there is an unresolvable tension between the totality of the hyperobject and the limits of our ability as individuals to fully see or conceive of this totality, as exemplified by our earth-bound, human experience of the phases of the moon (70).

Although Morton has four other hyperobject criteria,⁶⁰ phasing, with its emphasis on scale and accompanying sense of disorientation, stands out as particularly relevant to this discussion because of its implicit interest in another tension – between the individual and the collective – that is as important for what Morton calls hyperobjects as it is for what I am describing here as a posthuman bond of interconnection. The recognition of phasing, like the recognition of hyperobjects in general, requires moving beyond the limits of the individual (Morton 47-8). Hyperobjects – or, following on the language employed in this discussion of Patiño’s film, the posthuman bond of interconnection – require confronting scales that are unknowable from the perspective of a singular perspective, that can only be recognized when we move beyond the limits of the individual. Similarly, in relation to the posthuman bond of interconnection, what Patiño achieves through these formal techniques that produce disorientation is a recognition that there exists a more comprehensive, other perspective, one that we are made aware of but that we cannot access individually. Regardless, simply recognizing a posthuman bond of interconnection and its resultant sense of disorientation, while significant, does not itself constitute a critical posture towards this interconnection – an exigency on artistic works that cannot be disregarded in a world facing the urgent crisis of climate change. Thus, as I now argue as a way of concluding this section of the chapter, *Costa da Morte* emphasizes the importance of human accountability in response to the urgency of anthropogenic climate change through its dialogic allusions to the *Prestige* oil spill.

To echo the opening lines of this section, *Costa da Morte* is not explicitly about the *Prestige* disaster. Nonetheless, between the many images of ships and seafaring infrastructure, the prominence of the marine life and the fishing industry, the interest in the region’s natural resource extraction, the recounting of the history of shipwrecks that gave the coast its nickname, and the repeated mentions of this oil spill, the film quite apparently approaches this event, albeit in an asymptotic fashion. This unprompted commentary about the *Prestige* – often indirectly concerned with this event and at times rambling – stands out insofar as it directly names the disaster and recognizes its specific effects on the region. That is, while an argument could be made for how all these other characteristics of the film are alluding to and in some way commenting on this event and the collective trauma it provoked in this locale, none of them make this allusion quite so unequivocally. This direct, repetitive naming of the *Prestige*

⁶⁰ The five criteria of hyperobjects, in Morton’s definition, are: 1) Viscosity: they are viscous insofar as they are capable of enveloping things to the point where all becomes touched by them and, for this reason, a part of them; 2) Nonlocality describes how they cannot be wholly experienced from a local perspective; 3) Temporal Undulation describes how they must be dealt with in the present, even though they operate on inconceivably-large time scales; 4) Phasing describes how we can never experience a hyperobject in full, yet instead in one of its phases; 5) Interobjectivity describes how our experience of hyperobjects is always mediated by other objects.

over the course of the film obliges us to recognize how the vision of life shown in Patiño's film is a life that has been enveloped by this disaster, in this way evincing the importance of the earlier provocation to consider the term "posthuman disaster." By showing how even the most quotidian, traditional acts have become in some way implicated in the complex web of causes and effects of the *Prestige* oil spill, the film demonstrates the importance of moving beyond the binaries of human-nature or modern-premodern that plague the term "disaster" as it is used today.

The importance of interpreting disasters such as the *Prestige* oil spill through the framework of the posthuman is especially evident in the recurrence of a particular scene that appears near the beginning and then at the end of the film. Although there are slight differences in the shots – the dialogue is distinct and they appear to be shot on different days – both of these scenes show, at a distance, a group of woman collecting clams in the shallow waters of one of Galicia's many *rías*. Coming directly after the aforementioned shots of trees being felled and then mechanically altered for the lumber industry that open the film, this scene first appears rather innocuous and tranquil in comparison. While the women may chat quite unabashedly about the fatal perils of what, at least from this distance, appears to be a rather repetitive and easy task, there is an innocence in this activity as it is shown in the film: we hear the women share laughs and gossip in Galician as we see them partake in a primeval form of fishing in which the only modern accoutrements apparent are those plastic buckets and waterproof boots. Yet the scene at the end of the film is received differently than the scene at the beginning because the *Prestige* disaster, which has been brought to the viewer's attention over the course of the film thanks to its explicit mention in different conversations, is now an undeniable part of this rather innocent activity. The waters in which these women are wading have long since become clear, but the uncertainty regarding the persistent effects of the marine ecosystem's contamination implicates this activity in the disaster: the fact that these women are participating in an activity that constitutes part of the human alimentary chain only makes clearer the ways in which the disaster quite literally becomes a part of humans, even those who spatially or temporally were not "there" for the immediate effects of the spill. Similarly, the fact that they are wearing petroleum-based accoutrements to facilitate their task risks compelling us to see these local women as willful, culpable participants in an economic system sustained by the global flows of hazardous resources made ignominiously-apparent by disasters such as the *Prestige*.



Still from *Costa da Morte* showing the scene of women collecting clams

However, as was belabored earlier on in this chapter, the *Prestige* was a disaster of modern capitalism, and to uniformly assign culpability to an abstract, collective concept of the human would thus ignore the inequalities and exclusions that define a distinctly capitalist modernity. Facing the urgency of climate change requires abstaining from such absolute generalizations in order to develop a more critical and useful concept of accountability that is capable of distinguishing between the individual, the collective, and the numerous possibilities in between. Taking this into account, my final contention in this section is that the film's most idiosyncratic formal technique, the countervailing tension between the visual and the aural during these long, fixed shots, helps elucidate the complicated role of the human in an age of anthropogenic climate change, both throughout the film and in these two scenes that bookend the work. Specifically, by presenting this tension between the anonymity of the visual distance and the distinguishing effect of the individual voice, the film points to how humans are, at once, embedded in the world and exceed it, how they both pertain to a species with a uniquely-destructive capacity to effect change to the earth and maintain an individuality that makes them unevenly and unfairly affected by the consequences of these changes.

Antón, or Profesor Bacterio, and the Limits of Things in *Nocilla Experience*

One of the many striking scenes in Patiño's film shows a group of people collecting goose barnacles on a particularly craggy protrusion on the coast. In contrast with the convivial chatter and serene tranquility that characterizes the scene of women collecting clams and cockles, this scene is marked by the violent crashing of waves as these wetsuit-clad fishers risk their lives to quickly grab a few goose barnacles on these slippery, wave-beaten environs. Known as *percebes* in Spanish and Galician, these crustaceans are a uniquely weird creature: living in clusters on solid surfaces in the intermediate space between land and ocean, they both

look like an alien life form and strangely resemble the birds from which they derive their English name. In spite, or possibly because, of their distinctive sea taste, phallic shape, and mucilaginous consistency, they are an especially-sought-after culinary delicacy. As a result, like other crustaceans, *percebes* can fetch an impressive price at the market, thus making their collection a rather worthwhile pursuit, with those coming from Galicia, for which the Iberian palate has a particular fondness, selling for the highest prices.

Perhaps owing to their strangeness and notoriety, they appear prominently in one of the loosely-connected narrative threads of *Nocilla Experience*, the second entry in Agustín Fernández Mallo's *Nocilla Trilogy*, a series of experimented novels published in Spanish between 2006 and 2009 by the Galician author. The second entry in the trilogy, published in 2008, *Nocilla Experience* resembles the original work, *Nocilla Dream*, in that it is comprised of over a hundred short chapters of one-to-three pages,⁶¹ each one either being a section of one of the work's various narratives about the solitude of contemporary life, a pop culture quote, or an excerpt from a scientific theorem. In one of these narratives in *Nocilla Experience*, over five passages (numbers 10, 42, 65, 73, and 91), we meet Antón, a *percebeiro* (one who collects *percebes*) from Corcubión, a coastal village in the Costa da Morte region. Also known as Profesor Bacterio⁶² due to his physical appearance (specifically, his alopecia, dark beard, and misaligned nose) and long history in the village of performing experiments on the local barnacles (20), Antón's more ordinary habits include frequenting the local flea market in search of old computers and vainly attempting to download *The Omega Man* (20-21), a 1971 science fiction film in which Charlton Heston plays a man fighting for his life in a post-apocalyptic world beset by a zombie-like plague. Otherwise, Antón passes the time formulating and testing his theory that he can, similar to how the oil from the *Prestige* spill contaminated and altered on a molecular level those forms of life residing in the sea, enhance the DNA of the *percebes* by tossing the second-hand computer parts he buys at the market with their memories full of abandoned digital information into the ocean.

Percebes are, for Antón, particularly capable of absorbing this digital information and transforming through this hypothesized process owing to their existence on myriad frontiers of matter: in particular, according to Antón, they live in an indeterminate space between the water, the sky, and the land, "en esa frontera de lo líquido-sólido-gas" (20). Central to Antón's theory is the existence of what he has dubbed *informatina*, the eventual state of the information contained on our various digital memory devices that, after years of disuse, becomes this dense, bluish substance: "toda la información allí escondida y digitalizada en ceros y unos jamás se pierde por mucho que se formatee el disco, sino que por un proceso espontáneo que con los años de desuso del disco convierte lo digital en analógico, puede verse físicamente materializada en una sustancia derivada, espesa y de color azul amarillento, llamada *informatina*" (111). Considering that the *informatina* has its own DNA and that *percebes* grow on this border of various states of being (111), Antón surmises (the word Mallo uses is actually "dreams") that throwing these old computers directly into the ocean will

⁶¹ The third entry in the trilogy, *Nocilla Lab*, has a second section that resembles these two works, but also contains a first section with an autobiographical, stream-of-consciousness narrative and a third section that begins with fragments of the author's writings and ends as a graphic story protagonized by the author himself.

⁶² The reference here is to a character, known for outré experiments that usually fail, from the Spanish comic series *Mortadelo y Filemón*

eventually lead to them transferring their *informatina* to the *percebes*, augmenting their flavor and increasing their size, all while maintaining their distinctive ocean taste (111) – whether this is for the benefit of Antón’s fishing haul or for the cause of science is never completely explained. In the final section in which this curious Galician appears, the book describes his trips to the water’s edge to offer the *informatina*-bearing devices to the sea, an activity he has been doing for years now, which has resulted in an extremely precise ritual during which he stands in the same spot, extends his arm at a “perfect” ninety-degree angle with his body, and empties the bags carrying the hard drives, letting them fall vertically into the water some meters below (138). Befitting of the inexhaustible digital refuse that becomes this *informatina*, Antón employs a couple of old Zara bags to transport the hard drives from his house on the hill down to the ocean (138).

After detailing how he executes this operation in this final section centered around Profesor Bacterio, the book’s narration describes how he plans on heading back to his house to see if *The Omega Man* has finally finished downloading, first stopping by the ant colony near his house to see how it is doing (138). Engrossed in his strange, solitary pursuits, during the eight pages in the book in which we read about Antón, he interacts with few others and seems intent on preserving his mostly solitary lifestyle. During his most sustained interaction, at the local weekend market where he procures his old computers, he declines his friend Anxo’s invitation to grab a drink even though his only commitment is returning home to see if the aforementioned cult science fiction film has finally downloaded (67). Which is to say that, similar to the other figures who protagonize the multiple, divided sections of the book, he is a predominately solitary person with some rather eccentric beliefs and habits, whose principal interaction with the outside world occurs either via his computer and with the sea. Like the other two books in Mallo’s *Nocilla* trilogy, *Nocilla Experience* eschews a unitary, linear narrative to present an assemblage of disjointed but intersecting individual narratives centered around characters such as Antón who live in an early twenty-first-century world that is dominated by the internet and US culture; often, these characters live in Spain or the United States, but *Experience* also includes narratives occurring in Russia, Iraq, and the United Kingdom. As discussed earlier, interspersed amongst these individual narratives are quotes or statements related to modern science, quotes from *El pop después del pop*, a book containing interviews with various important musicians and cultural icons of the past half century, and, in the case of this second entry in the *Nocilla* trilogy, the recurrence and gradual extension of one of the most famous quotes from *Apocalypse Now*. Although Mallo makes evident some unexpected links connecting one character to another – for example, in section 42 Antón buys a thick sweater patterned with green and red rhombuses that is identical to one worn on a first date in section 31 by Mihály, a hospital worker in the remote Russian city of Ulan Erge – the book is typified by the lonesome lives of its recurring characters.

Generally, the fictional lives of Antón and the other personages that reappear in a seemingly-haphazard fashion over the course of the novel’s 112 sections and its epilogue characterize in varying degrees of exaggeration a contemporary existence that is being fundamentally restructured by the myriad, complex networks that give order to the world today, of which the internet is perhaps the most conspicuous example (Mallo, *Teoría General* 25-26). As Mallo elaborates in an essay on the topic, the structure of the *Nocilla* trilogy reflects the manner by which, in networks such as the internet, the structuring logic is one in which

space prevails over time (*Teoría General* 155); thus, instead of a teleologic, coherent narrative that develops over the time of the book, we as readers must organize and create links between the book's diffuse and disconnected sections. While "fragmentation" is the most apparent word to describe both the structure of these works and the lives of the characters found within them, Mallo rejects the implicit conservatism of this term, instead seeing that which is hastily labelled "fragmented" as representing a new, non-linear structuring logic more proper to the network form of the internet, of whose mechanisms we are currently attempting to develop an understanding (*Teoría General* 195-6).

Moreover, although Mallo rejects a perspective that describes as "fragmented" that which has a logic that may be unperceived, his essayistic texts are especially concerned with the "fragments" and "trash" of our world. Instead of seeing these objects as evidence of a fragmented, incomprehensible contemporary condition, Mallo implores in his *Teoría general de la basura* to consider instead the complex networks that give coherence to these material objects: in particular, Mallo is especially interested in the network-science concept of a "scale-free network" (*red libre de escala* in Spanish), which is used to describe complex networks such as the internet in which there are multitudinous nodes and connections, but in which there are a few, select nodes with above-average connections (25). In this way, the characters in *Nocilla Experience* commonly share an at-times obsessive interest in recovering and reappropriating for various ends the trash of the modern world. Beyond this, however, they are themselves representative of the fragments of this world, living on the peripheries of society, often in far-off locations such as the Costa da Morte. Although they may have few relations with others, they often possess some especially-significant points of contact (an obsession with a film, a connection to a far-off town, an interest in an obscure theory, etc.) that connect them to others through a web of links that at first glance may have been either unperceived or unknown.

Resident of Corcubión, collector of castoff hard drives, fan of a campy 70s science fiction film about the sole survivor of an apocalyptic epidemic, and – most importantly – experimenter of barnacles, Antón is paradigmatic of these *Nocilla* characters. In relation to the *Prestige* disaster, about which this chapter and its objects are interested, Antón is, however, much more of an aberration: although his profession was seriously affected by the *marea negra* of oil coming to shore from the spill, he breaks into a rant during which he declares his wish for another such disaster (67) as soon as the event is mentioned, offhandedly, by one of the few people he talks to directly throughout his sections of the book. In many ways in utter contradiction with the other approximations to the *Prestige* that I have discussed so far in this chapter, Antón appears far less anguished by the oil spill so much as he seems inspired by such environmental catastrophes and the unforeseen biology experiments that are occasioned in their wake. Just as the oil contaminates and alters coastal life on an imperceptible, molecular scale with indeterminate long-term consequences, the experiments performed by Antón regarding *informatina* and *percebes* investigate the limits that separate distinct states of being, ultimately hoping to confuse these thresholds by effecting heretofore unseen combinations and mutations.

Despite the possible imprudence of his actions – that is, his ritualistic discarding of e-waste into the ocean –, Antón is quite obviously fascinated by *percebes*, a form of life that he sincerely admires for its existence in a liminal state of being and resultant capacity to transform. In fact, beyond admiration, he seems to envy the unique state of existence in which

the barnacles dwell: recalling the hermetic life of Man, it is described in section 42 how this *percebeiro* aspires to live on the water's edge in a "cubo de cemento" instead of in his current residence on the hill, an "ilusión" which is at this moment prevented by the 2003 Ley de Costas which forbids any new construction on Spain's coasts (68). However, the principal dream of Antón – that is, the end result he imagines for his experiments – is the realization of an enhanced form of life, a symbiotic relationship between these unique coastal creatures and the material manifestation of our digital junk; as detailed in section 91, while standing at the ocean's edge, upon having completely emptied his Zara bags, he hopes to one day see emerge from the water "una masa compacta hecha de discos duros, piedras y percebes ultramusculados con la *informatina* transferida a su código genético; una red de líquenes dará solidez a esa nueva naturaleza" (138).

What begins in this line as the Romantic musings of a slightly mad scientist quite suddenly comes to resemble the manifestoes of posthumanism. Albeit ominous and ambiguous, this final clause immediately recalls Haraway, particularly her interest in the lichen as the archetypal figure of a non-binary concept of life that contradicts a scientific defense of individualism (Haraway, *Staying with* 72). In fact, even if it has not been heretofore written by Haraway, the phrase "network of lichens" or "web of lichens" sounds uncannily like her descriptions of a more inclusive, posthuman concept of life on Earth. Nonetheless, the point of enunciation is not a famed feminist scholar of science nor is it one of the other many theorists of the posthuman, but, rather, it presumably comes from the thoughts of a fictional character in Mallo's novel, from the mind of a solitary, eccentric barnacle fisher known locally as Profesor Bacterio.

Interpreted in the most literal fashion, this line seems to be conveying, via the book's omniscient narrator, Antón's aspiration that his *informatina*-nourished barnacles will provide the material evidence of a new form of being that unites the organic with the technological in what will be a reconfiguration of the "natural." Yet, far from the prosaic description that characterizes the rest of this page-long section, the language employed here by Mallo is obscure and poetic. First off, the verb phrase "dar solidez" is not an especially common way to express "to give evidence of" and it is, given Antón's earlier musings on the *percebes* existing between the three most common states of matter, plagued by possibly-contradictory connotations. These complications notwithstanding, however, saying that "it will give a solid form" emphasizes the material existence of these new hybrid creatures and asserts, by invoking the scientific definition of a "solid," the molecular reconstitution of these techno-crustacean lichens. Second, the use of the words "nueva naturaleza" is nothing if not dramatic and polemical, immediately placing this statement in relation to long-standing debates regarding the concept of "nature," both how this term forges a division between the human and the nonhuman as well as inspires rhetorical defenses for what is established as the preordained, unchanging order of things (Clark 71). Beyond these external associations, the very syntax of this statement is also of particular significance as the order of the adjective and noun here is not semantically arbitrary: taking advantage of the slight difference in meaning implied by the placement of an adjective such as "new" in relation to the noun it modifies, the syntax here conveys not a "new nature" that heretofore did not exist, that has suddenly come into being (what would be the meaning of "naturaleza nueva"), but instead implies something more along the lines of "another nature," one that is new for us as humans, yet not in an objective sense.

Put together, perhaps a more accurate, albeit prolix reading of this line would be that these lichens (the barnacles), whose being has been transformed on a molecular level to create a symbiotic interaction between the biological and the technological, provide the material evidence for a new interpretation of the ever-anthropocentric concept of nature.

In addition to all of this, there is then the question of who is supposed to be saying these words. Separated by a semi-colon from a sentence that begins with “He [Antón] hopes that...”, it is difficult to distinguish here between the presumed thoughts of Antón and the voice of the narrator, a confusion that is only furthered by the declarative, almost authoritative, use of the future tense, which here sounds like a statement of scientific fact: unlike the impetuous and outré thoughts and statements of Antón, this type of register is more typical of the omniscient-yet-distant narrator who traverses the myriad vignettes of contemporary life found throughout the novel, whose thoughts merge with those of the novel’s diverse characters in a manner reminiscent of free indirect speech that typified nineteenth-century Realist narrative. Evincing a process of narrative symbiosis, the muddling of these two voices has the effect of integrating the commonplace with the strange so that this new form of nature here declared can be understood as radically different but still, in some way, natural.

Although there is, quite significantly, much that is not scientifically viable in the theories of Profesor Bacterio, his speculative musings on the interconnections between humans, nonhuman forms of life, and digital technology conclude by presenting a rather evocative image of the posthuman in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. In this way, the five sections of *Nocilla Experience* about Antón demonstrate a continuity with the earth art of Man and the experimental meditations of Patiño’s film: not only do all three oblige us to confront those moments when binary divisions become untenable, but they likewise provide an unnerving representation of the world in a moment of capitalogenic crisis. Which is not to mention outright, of course, the fact that all three intersect through their relation to the *Prestige* oil spill. The example of Antón, as mentioned earlier, is especially intriguing given that it presents an unforeseen take on this disaster insofar as he seems inspired by the radical potential catalyzed by such an unnatural state of events.

Reminiscent of how the *Prestige* oil spill presented a defamiliarized image of the earth in which the natural and the unnatural became indistinguishable, the aforementioned quote describing the emergence of *informatina*-infused *percebes* is extremely similar to the initial accounts of oil arriving on the shores of the very same Costa da Morte in November 2002. Considering this, the dream of Antón appears then as a distorted translation of the *Prestige* in which the foreign resource here intermixing with the environment is not heavy crude, but rather the materialization of the most valuable of digital resources: a fictional, bluish ooze that gives material form to our unwanted data, to those “ceros y unos de una foto de familia retocada con Photoshop, o de un mal verso esbozado con Word, o de una contabilidad gestionada con Excel” (111). Just as Patiño’s *Costa da Morte* shows in an oblique manner the complex web of interconnection by which the oil from the *Prestige* becomes indistinguishable from humans by entering into the alimentary chain, Mallo’s image of beefed-up barnacles, symbiotically transformed by our technological trash, likewise imperils a discrete separation of the human from their environment by presenting these very special *percebes* as a vector for a conjectural realization of a digital technological entanglement. Additionally, by having this technological waste carried in large Zara bags – an entirely realistic but nonetheless significant

detail given the ubiquitous fast fashion retailer's Galician origins and emblematic status in contemporary late capitalism⁶³ – Mallo points to how our trash, whether it is digital like *informatina* or material like a Zara t-shirt or the exhaust from an automobile, represents a significant component of this global network of interconnection between humans and their environments.

However, more than simply presenting a speculative and convoluted chain that suggests the possibility of a bio-technological posthuman, I assert that the experiments of Profesor Bacterio simply reflect a more general posthumanness, of which he is representative. Put differently, the *percebes* are less Antón's experimental specimens and more a crustacean metaphor for his own posthuman condition: not only do they epitomize, through their celebrated existence on the threshold of various states of matter, the entanglement between various forms of life, they are also linked to and affected by global processes whose scale far exceeds that of their localized ecosystem, stuck to rocks as they are on the periphery of the human world. What Mallo adds to this possible metaphor, by virtue of Antón and his experiments, is the importance of digital technology, especially the internet, in defining a contemporary state of being posthuman. Although his experiments seem unlikely to yield any verifiable results, their purpose is already redundant: as Antón also quite clearly demonstrates in his vain pursuit to download a 1971 film about a post-apocalyptic Los Angeles, his life is very much embedded in this contemporary instantiation of entanglement. His obsession with the film's drawn-out progress in downloading – that he uses the download as his defense for declining his friend's offer to grab a drink and that many of his sections end with the narration telling us how he heads home to check on its progress – reveals a distinctly twenty-first-century form of interconnection in which humans have become perpetually and palpably connected to the global via our compulsory inclusion in this digital network society (Jarzombek 29).

In other words, Antón does not have to look to his experiments, as he is already one of the “network of lichens” existing in a “new nature.” Brought up earlier in this section in relation to Haraway, this invocation of the lichen as a symbol of a new conception of the relation between humans and their world is intrinsically associated with the scientific concept of “symbiosis,” whose resurgence and rearticulation in Western science over the past half century has challenged the theoretical validity of our understanding of the individual, whether human or otherwise (Margulis; Gilbert, Sapp, Tauber). For Lynn Margulis, it is not that we simply understand the importance of symbiosis for evolutionary processes and everyday life, but, more importantly, that we avoid imbuing this phenomenon with anthropocentric – in fact, she goes so far as to suggest capitalocentric – denotations such as “benefit” or “exchange” (673); instead, she states that “*symbiosis* refers to protracted physical associations among organisms of different species, without respect to outcome” (673). With this in mind then, the vision of life proposed by Antón's experiments, which were themselves inspired by the far-from-beneficial symbiosis of life with the heavy crude oil spilled off the coast of Galicia in November 2002, represent a more expansive concept of the symbiotic that is not limited to biological organisms, but also includes our digital and material trash. The pessimism and iconoclastic anti-

⁶³ Amancio Ortega, the founder and owner of Inditex – the parent company of Zara and other fast-fashion brands, which is headquartered in A Coruña, just up the coast from the *Costa da morte* – is currently the sixth-richest person in the world and the richest person in Spain.

environmentalism of Profesor Bacterio reminds us that the *Prestige* did not just offer a reminder of our entanglement with the other living organisms with which we coexist, but also with all the discarded objects, the refuse that we as humans produce.

Considered in relation to the other two objects discussed prior and my general suggestion throughout this chapter regarding the emergent recognition of the posthuman as a conceptual category in response to the *Prestige* oil spill, what Mallo's narrative particularly advances is this comprehensive conception of the symbiotic. Although Antón appears at most moments to oppose the custodial ethos of Manfred Gnädinger and, to a lesser but no less significant degree, the ecologically-conscious subjects seen throughout Patiño's film, the idea of symbiosis, understood as representing a spectrum of associations between humans and nonhumans, living or otherwise, allows us to understand the nuances and seeming contradictions that characterize these heterogeneous representations of the posthuman.

Conclusion: The Human from Galicia

Although all three of the works discussed in this chapter are in some significant way about Galicia and, more specifically, the Costa da Morte region, the three represent a rather unconventional cross section of the contemporary life and art of these regions. Artistically, however, they are all slightly aberrant objects of Galician cultural production insofar as they make very little, if any, mention of regional politics or emigration – the two most common topics of Galician studies today. Nonetheless, they are representative Galician cultural objects in a different vein in that they are all particularly concerned with the geographical specificity of this region: in particular, they are all interested in a highly-specific land-sea interface that lies at the extremes of the European continent.

Through their distinct modes of representation, all three of these objects belabor the geological fact that the coast of northwestern Galicia is quite literally the edge of the Iberian peninsula and, therefore, the greater European continent. In doing so, they all attest to the literal, material conditions of this marginal space in that they faithfully represent the coast as a rocky, slippery boundary that serves as an indeterminate threshold between different states of matter: principally, between land and water, but also, as seen in these three works, between human and nonhuman and between life and death. Yet, most significantly, by portraying this coast as liminal space from which we can interrogate the limits of the human, they also present this geological and geographical frontier as a locus for questioning the interrelated narratives of techno-capitalist modernization and nation-state in Spain.

Writing about the place of Galicia in the twenty-first century, Colmeiro advances the idea that the periphery has, quite paradoxically, become in a globalized, deterritorialized modern world a vantage point from which we have “a fuller perceptive experience” precisely because it is “beyond the limiting perspective of the center” (3). Far from contesting this idea, I would like to add, in light of the objects that we have seen throughout this chapter, that an additional, beneficial characteristic of the periphery in the contemporary world is that it is, almost by definition, a place that is forgotten and neglected by the center or centers. While, as the *Prestige* clearly shows, there are many disadvantages to what would be more-accurately described as selective and often unfavorable neglect by the center, I find that these three objects exemplify the advantages of marginal, forgotten spaces and the critical postures that

can be articulated there within. Specifically, by being defined by its exclusion or marginality from the centers of modernization and of nation, the periphery is uniquely capable of offering a contestation of those encompassing narratives and proposing a different path forward.

Conclusion

Seeing the Posthuman at the End of the World

One of the tendencies that emerges over the course of this dissertation is the significance of formal experimentation in the cultural objects interpreted across these four chapters. Between genres, media, and time periods, the most notable commonality is the aesthetic reflexivity by which these objects experiment with their respective forms. Even in the first chapter, whose object of analysis was by far the most traditional, canonical work discussed in this dissertation, it should not be overlooked how *Los Pazos de Ulloa* is experimental insofar as it not only adopts a radical form of literary practice for the time, but also reflexively critiques that very same method of Naturalism as a way of evaluating the worldviews that sustain it. From the second chapter, Llamazares's *La lluvia amarilla* uses the form of an extended inner-monologue of its protagonist-narrator – almost entirely devoid of dialogue – to reflect on questions of perspective in the abandoned villages of rural Spain. Offering a much more explicit example of formal experimentation, Tisselli's *degenerative* and *regenerative* use the affordances of digital texts and the internet as a way to explore how assemblages formed by humans and nonhumans can effect change today, ultimately offering various layers of allegories on contemporary, digital capitalism. Finally, the three objects studied in the last chapter reflect on the discursive capacities of their respective artistic media to assess how humans understand and situate themselves in relation to a nonhuman world in a contemporary moment of climate emergency.

Overall, this point bespeaks an underlying argument regarding the importance of considering form when interpreting works of art in terms of both the posthuman and the critical methodology of ecocriticism. The preceding chapters have all brought up the formal properties of these works in one way or another, often mentioning explicitly their experimental characteristics – the materials, the formal choices, or the formal styles chosen by the respective artists that critique the genre or medium in which they work – as part of the analysis. At the same time, this dissertation has employed the critical strategy of close reading throughout as a way of moving beyond the general themes of a text and understanding the subtle details that betray much larger structures of thought. Additionally, throughout these analyses of form and content I have emphasized the political and historical contexts in which these various works were made, employing a study of content, themes, and allusions that is indebted to the critical practice of cultural studies. In this way then, my interpretation of these objects has made sure to consider the larger context to which such formal choices respond. I bring all of this up here in the conclusion not to be pedantic, but rather to belabor this point regarding critical methodology when studying cultural objects in the context of a contemporary state of global climate crisis and questioning of the fundamental modern figure of the human: while it is incumbent on critics to study the content and to connect a work to its larger social context, it is likewise necessary to interpret and evaluate the artist's use of a chosen form of representation.

In specific, this emphasis on form is in response to what I see as a tendency amongst Iberianist scholars within an ecocritical practice who, in their celebration of content and context, nonetheless minimize or otherwise dismiss the role of form and, especially, formal

experimentation. For example, Prádanos, in the impressive, encyclopedic review of counter-hegemonic cultural objects in post-2008 Spain that comprises his *Postgrowth Imaginaries*, argues that the role of “ecologically oriented cultural studies” and the environmental humanities at large is to, “pay close attention to...the counter narratives challenging hegemonic reason and exposing the fallacies of the dominant imaginary,” as well as to, “become a creative force that contributes to the dissemination and promotion of postgrowth imaginaries that are socially desirable and ecologically sustainable” (9).⁶⁴ Although I am amenable to this goal of imagining alternative, sustainable futures, I nonetheless find this focus on narrative – that is, on telling new or better stories – to be self-limiting, ignoring the ever-important axis of *how* we tell those stories. Not only do I personally, as a formalist, oppose such an appropriation of what is, essentially, Lukácsian Socialist Realism for the environmental movement, but I also find that this argument for better narratives likewise falls into the fallacy that compelling, factual narratives will somehow transform public opinion towards, and thus effect collective action to combat, climate change.⁶⁵

Thus, while I certainly encourage the proliferation of more narratives that warn against the destructive effects of climate change, my contention here is that formal experimentation can similarly provide avenues for imagining different futures. It is, to return to the introduction’s discussion of limits, a call to consider and to question the way in which we understand the world in which we reside. In this way, my argument aligns with those of Bergthaller and Mortensen or the cinematic ecocritic Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, who in different contexts highlight the way in which works of art, through their formal choices, unavoidably “frame” and thus condition the way in which we see the larger environment that they represent. The study of content and meaning, I argue, can only go so far at this moment in which humans find themselves “at the end of the world.” Just as a more accurate recognition of where, geographically, the end of the world actually was⁶⁶ required a different, more comprehensive perspective of the world itself, I posit that to understand the limits of the human today demands that we see the world and our place within it differently.

As I showed in my analysis of Pardo Bazán and her challenge to Naturalism, the method of experimentation championed by Zola was central to modern understandings of the human, indebted to the mechanist, binary logic of the Scientific Revolution. It was thus through a questioning of this method, by means of experimentation with the genre of Naturalism, that she could ultimately trouble the limits of the human-nonhuman binary at a critical moment for Spain’s modernization. A century later and at another moment of considerable transformation in Spain, Julio Llamazares responded to this same question regarding the limits of the human in *La lluvia amarilla*, offering a variety of ways to approach and critique the binary separating human culture from nonhuman nature. At the turn of the twenty-first century and making use of the digital technologies that provided new ways to reevaluate the human, Eugenio Tisselli

⁶⁴ Prádanos not only emphasizes the role of narrative content, as revealed by this quote, but also critiques the more experimental works of authors such as Fernández Mallo, arguing that they, “replicate the neoliberal fascination with technology, speed, and cyberspace” (81).

⁶⁵ It should not be forgotten that this same logic of “we just need more facts” was, as Heise remarks in “The Environmental Humanities and the Futures of the Human,” the logic by which the Humanities were originally excluded from earlier discussion of climate change.

⁶⁶ This is of course, if we are to presume that this toponym even makes sense from a global perspective.

exposed how form could both illuminate the possibilities for humans to act collectively with nonhuman actants in posthuman assemblages and caution against the destructive capacities of these assemblages for humans and nonhumans alike. Finally, looking at three works of art – earth art sculptures, an experimental film, and passages from an experimental novel – that are linked by their common connection to a recent natural disaster off the coast of Galicia, I demonstrated the ways in which art can help reconfigure the limits of the human and the nonhuman in a moment of climate emergency in which such a rhetorical exercise is particularly urgent.

All in all, across these chapters, I have argued that to adequately comprehend these works, we need to engage with new vocabularies and consider new forms of representation. In particular, the examples brought forth in these four chapters have proposed that the human is the fundamental category of thought for which we must trace new limits today. We must experiment, drawing new faces in the sand.

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