

**The Poetics of Relationship:
Ecopoetic Designs from Japan and Mexico**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Tsukuba
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Humanities**

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*To my earthly Mother,
to my heavenly Father.*

Solomon composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke of trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop growing in the wall, and he taught about animals, birds, reptiles, and fish. So men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom.

1 Kings 32-34

こことは
歌が 君と出会う ところ

ナナオ サカキ

Lo que entra a la cabeza
de la cabeza se va
lo que entra al corazón
del corazón no se va más

Y tú quieres saber por qué
y tú quieres saber por qué
al corazón solo entra
la pura verdad

Atahualpa Yupanqui

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this dissertation was my own original creation and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Parts of this dissertation were based on the following works published in academic journals which were significantly edited and revised.

“Anthropocene, Open your Heart! Tying Biodiverse Eco-poetics during COVID-19,” *Bunka kōryū kenkyū* 『文化交流研究』, no. 16, 2021, 41-61.

“Fulang-Chang and Frida Kahlo: An Animalist Vision on Self-identity.” *The Annual Review of Cultural Studies* (*Nenpō karuchuraru sutadiizu*) 『年報カルチュラル・スタディーズ』, no.9, 2021, 96-113.

“The Ancestors of a New Society: The Tribes (Buzoku) and their Journey through the Misunderstandings of the Japanese Countercultural Scene,” *IAFOR Journal of Cultural Studies*, volume 6, issue 1, 2021, 69-87.

Notes on Style and Translation

The present dissertation was written following the 17th edition of the Chicago Manual of Style (2017).

Non-English words and phrases from Spanish, Japanese and other languages are written in italics and following the capitalization conventions of their respective languages. Titles of books, paintings and essays appear italicized while poems, songs, proper names, places, awards, and events are not italicized. Theoretical concepts developed by the author in this dissertation such as Ecopoetic Design are capitalized.

In-text titles in Japanese when appearing for the first time are followed by their writing in Japanese characters and a parenthetical gloss with the translation. For example: *Animizumu to iu kibō* 『アニミズムという希望』 [*A Hope Called Animism*] (2000). Modified Hepburn system of romanization has been employed to phonetically transcribe the Japanese language.

In-text translated nouns, titles, concepts, and phrases, when appearing for the first time, are followed by a parenthetical gloss with the original-language word. For example: “mutual negotiation with objects” (*monogoto to no kōshō* 物事との交渉), and “feel-thinking attuned to the Earth” (*sentipensar con la Tierra*).

In-text quotations are enclosed with double quotation marks. When quoting long quotes, the original-language texts are placed as footnotes.

Names of Japanese nationals and non-nationals are written in the order of the first name followed by the surname. Japanese names, when appearing for the first time, are followed by a parenthetical gloss with their writing in the Japanese characters. In such cases, names are written following the Japanese convention of family name first. For example: Sansei Yamao (山尾三省).

Unless otherwise noted, all the other translations are my own.

PART I

Chapter 1

Introduction to an Eco-poetics of Relationship

1.1. Eco-poetic Design

Artistic creation has a significant role to play in the way we address environmental concerns. Since ancient times, artistic language has articulated a relational ontology between human beings and other beings.¹ Through artistic and poetic language, we have created bonds with other living beings and shaped what it means *to be* human. These meanings are deeply rooted in our mesh of relationship to the places we live, for example by understanding their cycles, preserving their memory, or through scientific and technological understanding. However, as wise teachers from Indigenous nations have noted, a significant portion of people living in our modern civilization have lost an awareness of an ontological relationship that binds us to all living beings in a vast and sacred web of life. As it has been argued within the Environmental Humanities, this oblivion is deeply rooted in modern cultures, and is a direct heritage of a Western philosophical and cultural paradigm of humanity which separates nature and culture and supports our modern trajectories and colonial practices. This forgetting, which has globalized and spread along with modernization, colonization, and the consumerist culture

¹ The word ontology is used to refer to “a philosophical investigation of existence or being” that asks, for example, what exists or what it means for something to exist. In Western thought, one of its main investigations has been asking about the “general sort of things that are there” or the kind of things that exist. In other words, the kind of entities that comprise reality. Craig, “Ontology.” Contemporary Ontology studies, for example, how we commit to the existence of some entities (O1, ontological commitment), “what there is” (O2), the most general kinds and features of what exists (O3) and the task of ontology itself and its aims (O4, meta-ontology). Hofweber, “Logic and Ontology.” The term relational ontology that I’m employing in this approach is sustained in the argument that beings *exist in relationship* with other beings. Therefore, existing beings cannot be isolated or “extracted” ontologically from their relational meshes because they would cease to *exist* as real. Broadly speaking, I’m referring to ontologies committed to relationships between living beings. These relational ontologies will be discussed in chapter 3.

around the Earth, has proved to be leading human civilization into a serious environmental crisis. In this context, it has become urgent to once again raise the question of how ontologies are crafted and the roles of our creative abilities for guiding civilizations toward a path of habitability. Although scientific fields such as biology are contributing to a shift in the conceptual frameworks by focusing on relational thinking,² some global ecological trajectories have tended to privilege exclusively scientific and rational abilities for leading the cultural and ecological transition of their societies.³ As a response to this small-mindedness, many critical voices have emerged among Indigenous thinkers, scholars, activists, artists, and religious leaders calling for other, equally relevant focuses for guiding ecological transitions. Many of these voices share a common call for healing our communicative connections with other beings, territories, and the whole Earth first in our hearts. According to a common perspective shared by many of these voices, one major role of the arts is to help in this transition by healing and restoring the relationship between humans and other living beings through creativity, awareness, and abilities of expression, emphatic understanding, and care. In addition to this sensitive and emotional concern, many of these voices also propose that the modern trajectory must be complemented with the ancient wisdom still rooted in communities, spiritualities, and traditions. Especially among Indigenous thinkers, artistic creation is perceived as a cultural bridge for reshaping the way in which modern humans can be ecologically responsible while overcoming the ontological, epistemic, and affective shortcomings of the Western paradigm.

² Arne Naess summarizes this contribution of systems theory within biological thinking as follows: “1) A human is not a thing in an environment, but a juncture in a relational system without determined boundaries in time and space. 2) The relational system connects humans, as organic systems, with animals, plants, and ecosystems conventionally said to be within or outside the human organism. 3) Our statements concerning things and qualities, fractions and wholes cannot be made more precise without a transition to field and relational thinking.” Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 79.

³ In cultural anthropology, the notion of “ecological transition,” articulated by John W. Bennett in 1976, refers to an ongoing enterprise of adaptation and transformation that began in Western civilization but extended to all nations, and is characterized by an anthropocentric “progressive incorporation of Nature into human frames of purpose and action.” Bennett, *The Ecological Transition*, 3. According to the author, the modern civilization’s ecological transition requires a fundamental cultural change to incorporate respect for the environment and to tackle many environmental issues that modern civilization faces.

This work is a radical attempt to consider the kind of heart needed to hear the lessons of wisdom from Indigenous people defending their territories as well the lessons from communities who, from different cultural and spiritual backgrounds, are building alternative ecological worlds. Nowadays, thinking about this alternative environmental paradigm is an academic labor addressed within the environmental humanities and other research fields investigating the skills necessary for a civilizational dialogue with the Earth. This is a dialogue which unfolds in the present in all its complexity, and despite this complexity, or precisely because of it, it becomes necessary to search out alternative directions of thought. A radical direction invites us to consider a transformation of our views of nature and our ontological assumptions and commitments. For example, Abadio Green, a Guna scholar, has been calling for several years now to position Mother Earth at the center of our notion of being and develop a new educational model.⁴ In my view, these radical directions face the challenge of changing not only our minds, but the existential core in which modern lifestyles are rooted, the heart. In other words, the radical shifts we need involve a patient practice of healing and giving birth to a new heart.

This healing and rebirth process resembles crafting a kind of affective and ontological cocoon in which the dichotomic aspects of our civilizational trajectories could be slowly dissolved while a new trajectory of humanity is created and matured. The cocoon metaphor highlights an ethics of transformation: just like the cocoon built by the caterpillar, a new way of life must be created little by little from the innermost parts of ourselves. It also suggests an ethics of radical openness to Modernity: an old form of feeling and being modern must die in

⁴ Green's educational model is called "Pedagogía de la Madre Tierra" [Pedagogy of Mother Earth]. Together with Sabine Yuliet Sinigüí Rodríguez and Alba Lucía Rojas Pimienta from The University of Antioquia, they state: "The Bachelor in Education of Mother Earth is a proposal with a political, cultural and academic claim of the Indigenous peoples who have always believed that the earth is our mother and teacher." Green Stócel, Sinigüí Ramírez, and Rojas Pimienta, "Licenciatura En Pedagogía de La Madre Tierra," 85.

order for a new one to be born. This means exploring a process of transformation which involves something consciously “planned” to be modern, yet in resonance with the major mystery of creation. This work argues that this transformation can be guided with the poetic and artistic senses. Just as cocoons are created from within insects by following a precise schedule transmitted in their genes, in the same way, this labor of crafting an ecological heart (Ecopoetic Cardiogenesis) is a practice of life emerging from within. However, we humans, like insects, also share diverse cultures which can guide us with their wisdom for minimizing the risks of destroying our humanity in this age of ecological crises.

Some people may ask why we need such a radical transformation. The answer I can offer is that we have arrived at a definite diagnosis, arising from many fields of understanding, including the sciences, warning us of serious ecological risk. This diagnosis warns us about the profundity of our environmental problems and points to our current extractive practices, consumerist behaviors, and egoistic values that are incompatible with any human inhabitation in a world worth living. One way to approach the gravity of the ongoing environmental problem is by looking into the emergence of the Anthropocene.

The discussion around the Anthropocene began as a scientific revision of Earth geological strata when Nobel Prize-awarded chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer proposed assigning the name “Anthropocene” to our “in many ways human-dominated, geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene” in an article published in 2000. The discussion around the Anthropocene soon permeated popular culture as well as cultural criticism and increased the awareness of the scales and impact of modern humans’ toxic ways of life on Earth. From within the Humanities, Lynn Keller coined the term “Self-conscious Anthropocene” to refer to the “pervasive cultural awareness of anthropogenic planetary

transformation.”⁵ The Anthropocene studies have shed light on the toxic scales of the ongoing alteration of our planet, while the self-conscious Anthropocene perspective has shed light on an ongoing cultural phenomenon of awareness that has resulted in an interdisciplinary discourse. In fact, both theoretical frameworks complement each other in increasing our awareness and understanding of how we have inhabited for the past centuries while stimulating discussion on how we can root the “ecological” in a sustainable, equitable, and healthy way of life as individuals and societies.

In my opinion, the Anthropocene debates, while accurate in their criticism and cultural approaches, still overlook one fundamental ethical dimensions of ecological habitation: the toxic alteration of the human heart. Given this background, this work positions the **heart** along with the **Earth** at the center of its ethics and argues that in order to achieve a world that is ecologically balanced and worth inhabiting, we must address the issue of shifting egoistic and unrestrained desires toward a sense of fullness in life by living with simplicity and staying attuned with the Earth. Nevertheless, this ethical position also faces two major challenges: one is changing someone’s desires to consume and possess goods, and the other one is transforming the mechanistic conception of the Earth into a conception of the Earth as a vibrant and spirit-filled *being*. This work tackles this issue by approaching the arts and poetic language as part of the creativity we need for crafting the cocoon of a new heart. Here I aim to show that artistic and poetic lives can challenge, what Ingrid Toro and Omar Felipe call, the toxic “Regimes of Affectivity” which govern Modernity and sustain modes of life rooted in solitude, injustice, and cruelty.⁶

⁵ Keller, “Introduction: Beyond Nature Poetry” in *Recomposing Ecopoetics*.

⁶ To answer why this toxic, anti-ecological heart, continues its growth despite the emergency alarms, I want to retrieve Ingrid Toro and Omar Felipe Giraldo’s concept of “regime of affectivity” (*régimen de la afectividad*). They say: “Con esta noción queremos nombrar aquel sistema de poder por medio del cual se crea el esquema de referencia que nos orienta ante qué reaccionar sensiblemente y ante qué ser indiferentes; cuáles elementos se nos permite amar y ante qué otros se debe permanecer anestesiado” [With this notion we want to name the system of power through which the reference scheme is created that guides us to what to react sensibly and to what to be

This dissertation defends the Ecopoetics perspective that art and poetry must be incorporated into environmental strategies and pedagogies in order to shed light on their world-making and life-making abilities for a reconnection with the Earth. According to positivist visions, environmental issues become primarily a question of how to adjust the relationship between humanity and nature by shaping our activities according to scientific and technologic arguments. This dissertation claims that, along with those arguments, it is crucial to consider the arguments calling for a transformation of the intimate and profound meaning of a satisfying life by including the Earth and other living beings in a fundamental relationship. In his poem “This is enough,” poet and activist Nanao Sakaki stated that just nine things on Earth are necessary for a full life, stressing that from a poetic perspective, it doesn’t take too much sophistication to find a genuine sense of fullness. The poem itself is a testimony to the congruence between Nanao’s life and message. In sum, this investigation aims to contribute to a self-conscious Anthropocene by attending to the territories of the artistic and poetic heart oriented toward a reconnection with the Earth. Here I suggest adopting the traditional conception of the heart in Japan, which can be translated as simultaneously mind, heart, and inner nature. The word *kokoro* (心) refers to a heart-mind in which human beings’ emotions and rational faculties converge.⁷ In my view, this comprehensive conception of an integrated heart resonates with Indigenous concepts of the heart in the Americas, enabling a channel of communication between different heart philosophies. Thus, the term “Ecopoetic Heart” employed in this dissertation refers to an ecologically aware and poetically sensitive heart-mind and inner nature.

indifferent; which elements we are allowed to love and to which others we must remain anesthetized]. Giraldo and Toro, “Prefacio” in *Afectividad Ambiental. Sensibilidad, Empatía, Estéticas Del Habitar* [Environmental Affectivity. Sensitivity, Empathy, and Inhabitation Aesthetics]. In their work they examine various “Ecologies of Cruelty” woven by the capitalist “Regime of Affectivity.” Many of these “Ecologies” are characterized by offering pleasure, while untying our affective bonds with others and the Earth, and are based on a self-perception of freedom. The extreme hesitation toward a fundamental transformation can be explained in this way.

⁷ See Viswanathan, “Kokoro.”

This dissertation answers the broad question regarding the role of the arts and poetry in the ecological change or transition by stating that the arts and poetry have a profound role in shaping our ecological relationships by transforming our hearts. It argues that the arts and poetry compose patterns of love to help us attain a heart in connection with Earth. Moreover, this composition eventually contributes to giving birth to an Eco-poetic Heart through which a relational ontological framework is fully embodied. Therefore, the recentering of heart in ecological discourse, as an affective and ontological epistemic core that designs ecological worlds, or “environments for life,” as Tim Ingold puts it,⁸ is key to this eco-poetic approach.

According to my definition, Eco-poetic Design is the artistic and poetic practice of composing affective patterns of relationship which seeks a reconnection between human life and the Earth. Eco-poetic Design can be characterized as heart-based, spiritually rooted, and carried *within* a relationship. I developed this notion of Eco-poetic Design while researching how ontological and affective dimensions are re-composed when bodies incorporate artistic practices while pursuing a reconnection with the Earth which becomes a vibrant and spirit-filled Earth.

This dissertation exemplifies Eco-poetic Design by focusing on *how* these reconnections were achieved and expressed in five case studies from Japan and Mexico. The five case studies presented in this dissertation draw upon various spiritual and artistic traditions from which they assembled their own artistic life enterprises. Therefore, my research was grounded in their capacities for assembling cultural diversity and proposes a modern ecological and artistic heart. In my view, they demonstrate possibilities for reconnection with a living Earth which are feasible in this intercultural age. It is also worth noting that these reconnections can be

⁸ In his essay *Designing Environments for Life* (2014), Ingold explores a notion of design understood as the continual creation of the types of environments (the world we experience around us) in which inhabitation can occur. Ingold, *Ambientes para la vida. Conversaciones sobre humanidad, conocimiento y antropología* [Environments for Life. Conversations about Humanity, Knowledge, and Anthropology].

expressed through patterns that can be visually appreciated, and which foster the idea that the arts can help people compose an organic, beautiful, and coherent order of life. In other words, they reveal inspiring models for designing our own eco-poetic lives.

1.2. Objectives

This work aims to offer the reader:

1. An eco-poetic theoretical approach based on the idea of Eco-poetic Design to interpret arts of reconnection with the Earth.
2. An eco-poetic methodological approach to achieve qualitative academic eco-poetic research. This approach is similar to methodological approaches such as art-based research (ABR) and poetic inquiry. This particular methodological approach advocates raising spiritual consciousness and a heart-based dialogue with the Earth through analysis of artistic works, creative writing, and place-based immersion.
3. A collection of “Eco-poems” written during the course of this research. These poems are neither explanations nor summaries, but rather visionary complements which aim to inspire a desire for reconnection with the Earth by cultivating an Eco-poetic Heart in the reader.

1.3. Corpus and Justification

The notion of Eco-poetic Design was built on the eco-poetic exploration of five episodes of human-earth reconnection of artistic lives in Mexico and Japan. The eco-poetic exploration also includes the analysis of some of their works that are representative of these reconnection

episodes and my own ecopoems (see the section discussing ecopoetic methodology). These five episodes of reconnection are:

1. Mexican painter Frida Kahlo's (1907-1954) self-portraits and writings inspired by her companion animals, particularly by the spider monkey named Fulang-Chang and the xoloitzcuintli dog named Mr. Xolotl.
2. The Tribes' (Buzoku 部族 1967-1980) origins in the countercultural scene in Shinjuku, and their practice of cultivating an alternative communal way of life for building a new society in the Japanese islands.
3. Nanao Sakaki's (サカキ・ナナオ 1923-2008) walking poetics of the Earth. Particularly his relationship with the walking spirit of Kokopelli.
4. Sansei Yamao's (山尾三省 1938-2001) transmission of Yakushima Island wisdom, and its connection with the Japanese animist philosophy.
5. El Xastle loving community's (2016-2018) origin in Mexico City and Merida's "independent" scene and their way of carrying out an agroecological and artistic life project in the Mexican Plateau.

Each of these artistic and poetic lives show us different dimensions of the process of reconnecting the heart to the Earth. It is worth noting that these artists, through their art and lives, contested hegemonic discourses about society and civilization, and were perceived, to some degree, as eccentric and provocative in the eyes of the cultural mainstream. In this sense, they were sometimes labeled by media and those around them as outsiders, hippies, or countercultural. Despite these labels which can have positive or negative connotations, their artistic and poetic lives were pervaded by originality and a force to embody alternative ways of living as modern artists. Also, in the realization of their artistic and poetic lives, these artists recovered ancient beliefs and gave birth to ways of thinking, feeling, and living in connection

with ancient, Indigenous, and spiritual wisdom. Thus, ancient, Indigenous, and spiritual worlds have stamped their marks onto their ontological and artistic compositions. In summary, these exemplary cases of “artistic eccentricity” in fact tell us stories of more ordered artistic lives which follow patterns. These are lives that matter because, discarding modern dynamics of isolation, suffering, and resignation, they nurtured a way of reconnecting themselves with a more spiritual and ecological world.⁹

This research also has a transnational (transpacific) dimension by looking into Japanese and Mexican modern and contemporary arts in order to learn from these artists and shed light on possible cultural linkages of eco-poetic thought. By choosing to research poetic lives, events, and art from the East and South of the modern “civilized globe,” I attempt to offer an image of an alternative transpacific dialogue: an East-South corridor of ecological and poetic wisdom which can be depicted as a rich current of ideas, concepts, and emotions. I suggest that Eco-poetics can foster a powerful current of embodied experiences and languages of beauty stemming from a dialogue between artists and a spirit-filled Earth. The vision of a world made not only of civilizational hemispheres but crossed and traversed by transoceanic currents of poetry, thought, and spirit involves me personally as a Mexican-born poet and scholar with Peruvian and Quechua heritage studying and writing in Japan.

Regarding the vision of a hemispherical world, it is worth mentioning that the modern globalized society is still impregnated with hemispherical conceptions of cultures with ideological and political implications: West and East, North and South. Moreover, within academia, this hemispherical conception cannot be denied. North and West still conserve a colonial ideology considering themselves to be the epistemic poles of a global modernism. This

⁹ Their lives are usually perceived as exemplary lives that contest the established and hegemonic borders (or boundaries) of their time such as the nation-state, gender, and socially-determined gazes. However, this dissertation does not approach their lives through the lenses of “counterculture” or “subalternity,” but from the lens of environmental poetics.

ideological globalism with clearly defined epistemic poles is still a barrier for accepting other practices of thinking within academia. To reduce those barriers, this work aims to situate itself in an alternative route from the channels of discussion between East and West, North and South, by shaping a possible East-South epistemic corridor (東 Este-Sur 南) characterized by a shared aesthetic and ecosophic language. This corridor may contribute to strengthening an ecosophy based on the recognition of the ecological wisdom coming from the heart, the capacity of living in a dialogic relationship with the Earth, and the significant role of the arts and poetry for incorporating this ecological wisdom into our ways of life by transforming our hearts.¹⁰

Last but not least, by offering this vision of an eco-poetic East-South corridor while using the English language, I hope to broaden the opportunities of communication inside this environmental transpacific dialogue, and to foster the decolonial shift within the Environmental Humanities.¹¹ I hope that this eco-poetic vision might contribute to promoting peace and dialogue, in a spirit that echoes Bruno Latour's "diplomatic assembly of the peoples struggling for the Earth."¹²

1.4. The Eco-poetics Lens

This dissertation's framework was developed at the three-way intersection of arts and poetry, ecological consciousness, and worldview. In the course of my research, I adopted the

¹⁰ The notion of "ecological wisdom," sometimes called "ecosophy" or "environmental wisdom" (*saberes ambientales*), has gained popularity within environmental philosophy and cultural studies across different continents. According to Wei-Ning Xiang: "Ecological wisdom is the master skill par excellence of moral improvisation for and from ecological practice; it enables a person, a community or an organization to make ethical judgement and take circumspect actions in particular circumstances of ecological practice; it is a cohesive whole of the ecosophic belief in the relationship of human-nature reciprocity and the ecophronetic ability to make, and act well upon, contextually and ethically right choices." Yang and Young, *Ecological Wisdom*, xvii.

¹¹ Regarding academic practices, I believe that opening communication vessels for cross-culturally pollinated ideas and currents of ecological arts and thought offers a possibility to connect/combine Mexican and Japanese cultural studies into a decolonial field of exchange I envision as "eco-poetic currents." See Melchy, "Poetry and Nature in the Kuroshio Current: Eco-poetic Flows in the Mexico-Japan Transpacific."

¹² Latour, *Facing Gaia*, 235.

lens of Eco-poetics and proceeded to develop a particular lens (Poetics of Relationship) from which emerges the idea of Eco-poetic Design, as shown in diagram 1. Unlike the conceptions of ecological consciousness¹³ and worldview¹⁴ that are common in mainstream culture and the humanities, Eco-poetics is still an emerging field of exploration and discourse, and the term itself has recently been evolving beyond the English-speaking world. Also, it is a channel of communication between worlds. Therefore, it is worth defining this important lens.

1.5. Eco-poetics

Literature reviews on Eco-poetics show that the term began to spread in English-speaking countries during the nineties and early two-thousands in discourses at the intersection of an increasing interest in ecology and poetry, and the poetic criticism that began to adopt the term “eco” to delineate an ecologically oriented approach to poetry.¹⁵ Among the first definitions of eco-poetics to gain popularity were Jonathan Skinner’s definition of eco-poetics as “house

¹³ We can understand ecological consciousness or awareness as a set of knowledge, activities, and perspectives concerning the relationships between human beings and the physical environment based on the notion of ecology. The concept of ecological awareness has several characteristics: it is self-reflective, it is ethical, it is procedural (it follows a cognitive process), and it is sustainable (it is seen as contributing to the survival of humanity). In a central work for Ecocritical Studies, the *Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), a collection of articles and essays from 1972 to 1996, a varied semantic field can be observed around the idea of the awakening of consciousness given the environmental crisis. Ecological consciousness is expressed with different terms such as ecological vision, ecological wisdom, ecological thinking, ecological sensitivity, and ecological thought. These are terms usually employed to face a list of ecological issues that began to be discussed within the humanities, such as the formation of a planetary consciousness of our ecological disaster, the consciousness of the necessity of a civilizational transition (a shift of consciousness), the promotion of alternative anthropological visions that can contribute to the survival of our and other species, the creation of common emotional places regarding nature, and the critique of the symbols of success on which the dominant Western consumerist culture is based, see Melchy Ramos, “Cómo habitar en el planeta tierra” [How to Live on the Planet Earth: The Ecological Vision in Nanao Sakaki’s Poetry], 74–80.

¹⁴ The notion of worldviews will be discussed in chapter 3 when introducing the ontological perspective, which argues that rather than many worldviews coexisting in one world, there are different ontologies of the world, which results in a pluriverse.

¹⁵ See for example the following reviews: Fiedorczuk and Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Eco-poética / Eco-poetics. Ekologiczna Obrona Poezji/ Una Defensa Ecológica de La Poesía/ An Ecological “Defence of Poetry,”* sec. Ecological Themes in Contemporary Poetry. (In Spanish, Polish and English). Tarlo, “Women and Eco-poetics: An Introduction in Context,” sec. Eco-poetics; Keller, *Recomposing Eco-poetics*, sec. Nature Poetry and evolving Eco-poetics. (In English). And Sasaki (佐々木), 「環境詩学 [eco-poetics]」. (In Japanese).

making”¹⁶ and Jonathan Bate’s “making of the dwelling-place,”¹⁷ both of which base their definition on the prefix “eco” derived from Greek *oikos* which means “the home” and *poiesis* meaning “making.” However, as discussed in chapter 2, some characterizations of Ecopoetics faced a range of critiques. More recent definitions tend to characterize “Ecopoetics” as an interdisciplinary and intercultural field. For example, in 2008 Skinner published in “Small Fish Big Pond” a different definition of Ecopoetics as an “open field for arts” that “practices no singular science, nor a particularly Western one.”¹⁸ Furthermore, Skinner characterizes Ecopoetics as “holistic,” “responsible,” “empirical,” and “connected with spiritual dimensions.” Refusing any particular definition or aesthetic delineation, Forrest Gander has characterized Ecopoetics as “a variable set of technical and conceptual strategies for writing during a time of ecological crisis.”¹⁹ Gander also treats Ecopoetics as a strategy that problematizes the relationship between languages, poetic traditions, and our conceptions of nature and humanity while taking into consideration the diversity of forms of life and cultures.

The Poetry Foundation, a reference page for poetry in the English-speaking world, has recognized Ecopoetics as a multidisciplinary approach to thinking and writing that goes beyond the traditional approach of nature poetry. It defines Ecopoetics as:

Similar to ethnopoetics in its emphasis on drawing connections between human activity—specifically the making of poems—and the environment that produces it, ecopoetics rose out of the late 20th-century awareness of ecology and concerns over environmental disaster. A multidisciplinary approach that includes thinking and writing on poetics, science, and theory as well as emphasizing innovative approaches common to conceptual poetry, ecopoetics is not quite nature poetry.²⁰

¹⁶ Skinner, “Editor’s Statement.”

¹⁷ Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 75.

¹⁸ Skinner, “Small Fish Big Pond: Lines on Some Ecopoetics,” 112.

¹⁹ Gander, “The Future of the Past: The Carboniferous & Ecopoetics,” 217.

²⁰ Poetry Foundation, “Ecopoetics.”

It is worth noting that the term is still evolving, as Lynn Keller has pointed out in her book *Recomposing Ecopoetics* (2017). Looking within and beyond the English-speaking sphere, Ecopoetics has been characterized as “what addresses the unique potential of poetry to reveal the complexities of the environment in which we are embedded,”²¹ as a “relational practice of meaning (“transpersonal,” in deep-ecology terms, spanning the human and non-human) that integrates cultural performative practices of nature with an ecosemiotic focus on symbolism as an ecological web,”²² a “dynamic medium that conducts an exchange of energy with the material world,”²³ a particular “poetics of environmental sensitivity” (*kankyō kanjusei no shigaku* 環境感受性の詩学),²⁴ a “reflection on life” made from the heart,²⁵ as part of the relationship between “the ecological reproduction of nature and the communicative production of human society” (*eko-komyunikeshon* エコ・コミュニケーション),²⁶ and “the imaginative and symbolic creative forms that language adopts for addressing ecological topics.”²⁷ In this dissertation Ecopoetics will be understood, echoing many of these views, as:

1. A field that explores from different angles, disciplines, and perspectives how poetic and artistic creations work for an ecological and meaningful experience of living connected to the Earth. Ecopoetics is not a conventional academic field. Paraphrasing Kentigern, it is a field that invites us to treat our experience of life in the cosmic word as a form of both habitation and relationship.²⁸

²¹ Sobral Campos, “Introduction: Transnational Ecopoetics,” x.

²² Siewers, “The Ecopoetics of Creation: Genesis LXX 1-3.”

²³ This would be the view of poet Marcella Durand, paraphrased by Sarah Giragosian in Giragosian, “To a Nation Out of Its Mind,” 53.

²⁴ Koguchi, 「序章」 [Preface].

²⁵ Melchy Ramos Yupari, “La reflexión ecopoética” [Ecopoetic Reflection].

²⁶ Kato (加藤), 「環境文学入門：自然とのコミュニケーションを回復する」 [Introduction to Ecocriticism: Restoring Nature and Communication], 105.

²⁷ Gala, “Ecopoéticas” [Ecopoetics], 12.

²⁸ Siewers, “The Ecopoetics of Creation: Genesis LXX 1-3.”

2. An integrated way of thinking that questions the relationships between human beings and other beings while simultaneously focusing on artistic and poetic forms.

1.6. Looking for an Eco poetic Methodology

Marilyn Strathern is an ethnographer of thinking practices. She defines anthropology as studying relations with relations—a hugely consequential, mind- and body-altering sort of commitment. Nourished by her lifelong work in highland Papua New Guinea (Mt. Hagen), Strathern writes about accepting the risk of relentless contingency, of putting relations at risk with other relations, from unexpected worlds. Embodying the practice of feminist speculative fabulation in the scholarly mode, Strathern taught me—taught us—a simple but game-changing thing: “It matters what ideas we use to think other ideas.”²⁹

Donna Haraway

Haraway’s quoted passage highlights Marilyn Strathern attitude of taking the risk of “studying relations with relations.” Following this committed attitude, it is worth asking how scholarly cultural studies can take the risk of being altered by placing themselves inside a relationship with others’ lives, places, and the Earth’s web of interrelationship itself. In my view, this risk can be naturally addressed by practicing a kind of environmental and artistic commitment to carry with us the emotional language, the sensual, and poetic impulses born from the contact between our lives and the lives and works we study. This commitment can take the form of practicing a type of poetic, phenomenological and ethnographic immersion into communities, landscapes, and territories, which fosters an encounter with the Earth’s voice. In other words, by bringing poetic and artistic language into our ways of articulating our knowledge, we can successfully craft an eco poetic methodology. Of course, from an objective/subjective scientificist stance, this is a risk which implies a methodological turn toward the acceptance of subjectivity and sensual language for including our own bodies and

²⁹ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 34.

experience as participant in researchers' "way of discovery."³⁰ It could be quite surprising to discover that introducing poetic and artistic language is not devoid of discipline. In fact, eco-poetic methodology implies that we assume the responsibility of nourishing and crafting our own eco-poetic sensibility for finding the ways in which poetic writing, reading, and sharing can become a practice for revealing a knowledge of relationship.

This dissertation's methodological shift toward looking for an "Eco-poetic Methodology" was rooted in my own personal exercise of building awareness while visiting places. It also echoes Brian Wattchow's notion of a "Practice of Eco-poetics," which invites us to reflect on the characteristics of poetic experience, poetic composition, and poetic language. According to Wattchow's review of these characteristics, poetic language can reveal meshes of relationship. For example, Kate Rigby says that poetic language can reveal "the matrix of dwelling." Also, it can become a language for promoting reconciliation with our landscapes, for example through the power of "prayer" and "offering." Within ethnographic research, poetic languages can be seen as doors to aspects of human experience that would otherwise be impossible to access following positivist frameworks of thought. Moreover, Wattchow's personal reflection on the "Practice of Eco-poetics" was grounded in his canoe journeys through the Murray River in Australia and practicing poetic writing as a method for immersion and reflection on "the webwork of interconnection between an observation and its surroundings." Wattchow observes that poetic writing as a method also brings a sense of reconnection with the visited places and reveals aspects of relationships that were not "clearly understood before."³¹

Similar to Wattchow's "Practice of Eco-poetics," this research methodology was crafted accompanying my research activities with journeys of immersion and poetic writing. From this

³⁰ For example, Brian Wattchow argues that the poetic method "offers enormous potential to access and represent aspects of human experience that would otherwise be impossible to realize in the research process." Wattchow, "Eco-poetic Practice," 20.

³¹ Wattchow, 21.

experience I have found that poetic immersion and writing can function as part of an Eco-poetic methodology for weaving an Eco-poetic Heart. As a result, the limitations of understanding linked to rationalist (positivist) methods and languages can be overcome when new dimensions and relations between the human experience and the territories are made visible.

1.7. The writing of eco-poems

Ecologically speaking, poetic writing can be a practice that makes visible for me, the researcher, what was invisible to my prior ecological understanding. Accompanying my research with poetic writing revealed the issues of environmental interconnectedness which involved myself (and my way of living) as a participant in the ecological drama of our age. It also motivated me to articulate an emotional and spiritual response to this issue, and to establish bonds “from heart to heart” when analyzing works, visiting places, or meeting people. To illustrate these points, I will briefly list and comment on the eco-poems presented here in relation to this dissertation’s methodology:

The eco-poem “Kokopelli’s Prayer” (section 1.8) is a prayer to God asking a good research journey. This poem also asks for seeds of beneficial knowledge. Therefore, this methodological eco-poetic approach is grounded in a heart that incorporates spiritual asking as part of its methodology.

The eco-poem “Constellations of the Anthropocene” (sec. 2.10) is a long poem which interweaves the keywords explored in chapter 2, a literature review chapter, trying to connect the theoretical exploration with an all-encompassing awareness of what is occurring in the Anthropocene (as the state of the world as it appears to me). Therefore, this methodological approach is grounded in a heart that incorporates interweaving ideas and awareness of the place and time in which ideas are woven as part of its methodology.

The ecopoems “Haiku” (sec. 2.4) and “The Living Wind” (sec. 2.11) are two brief poems, inspired by haiku’s aesthetics, which capture an instant of being alive in the so-called Anthropocene. Therefore, this methodological approach is grounded in a heart that incorporates haiku-inspired contemplation as part of its methodology.

The ecopoem “Christ and the Chickens of the Next Transgenic Generation” (sec.4.6) is a long poem that discusses the theme of human-animal relationships by incorporating my experience in an academic exchange held at the Tsukuba-Plant Innovation Research Center (TPIRC). Crafting this poem revealed to the researcher their personal entanglement in a concrete environmental and technological issue which involves human-animal relations. Therefore, this methodological approach is grounded in a heart that incorporates interdisciplinary academic exchange, especially with those areas mediated by industry and technology for gaining awareness of personal commitment as part of its methodology.

The ecopoems “Three Ways to be Native” (sec. 5.9), “Kokopelli in Ōshika mura” (sec. 6.7), and “Preserving a Day in the Heart” (sec. 7.2) are ecopoetic immersion poems. They are based on my experiences visiting the territories in which artists lived. Also, they include the visits to the places and people connected to the preservation of their memory. Crafting these poems revealed to the researcher the traces that art and poetry leave on the territories and people surrounding us. Therefore, this methodological approach is grounded in a heart that incorporates experiences of immersion in landscapes, places, and peoples’ lifestyles in order to gain awareness of the “traces of sensitivity,” as Jhonnatan Curiel calls them, that exist across territories as part of its methodology.³²

³² Besides the similarity with the ethnographic approach, these ecopoems revealed to me an epistemic proximity with Jhonnatan Curiel’s research work studying the traces of sensitivity, based on an Geopoetics and Aesthesis approach to youth artistic projects in the Mexico-US border city of Tijuana, see Curiel, “Geopoéticas del habitar en Tijuana. Huellas de la sensibilidad juvenil” [Geopoetics of Living in Tijuana. Traces of Youthful Sensitivity].

The eco-poem “I go up and down Mount Tsukuba in my Acrylic and Polyester Hat” (sec. 7.7) is based on my experience of climbing Mount Tsukuba and is inspired by Sansei Yamao’s poem number XXIV of the “Under the Palm Leaf Hat” series. Crafting this poem connected the researcher with the ontological truth of a living Earth. Therefore, this methodological approach is grounded in a heart that incorporates experiences of poetical imitation and pilgrimage journeys as part of its methodology.

The eco-poem “My Brother Shinnosuke” (sec. 8.8) is based on the “ecopoetic tour” we made in early spring of 2022 to visit Mexico, read poems, raise environmental consciousness, and look for the ways of life that inspired El Xastle loving community to practice an agropoetic way of life. Crafting this poem revealed to the researcher the importance of highlighting friendship for focusing the attention beyond oneself and speaking about the people we care for when thinking ecologically. Therefore, this methodological approach is grounded in a heart that incorporates a sense of care, love, and friendship as part of its methodology.

Finally, the eco-poem “Mother, Father” (sec. 9.2) is a short poem of hope. Crafting this poem revealed to the researcher the importance of trusting in God as Mother and Father (Heaven and Earth) for attaining insight and seeing beyond the horizons of our dichotomic ontological order. Therefore, this ecopoetic approach is grounded in a heart that incorporates a language of trust and hope as part of its methodology.

1.8. Eco-poem: Kokopelli’s Prayer



God, there are many paths and seeds

help me choose those that
will be my future food
help me choose the ones
that will fill my mouth with sweetness.

June 14, 2017. Casas Grandes, México City

1.9. Resume

This ecopoetic study of poetics of relationship focus on the role of artistic creations in shaping ecological relationships. Specifically, this work introduces and develops the concept of Ecopoetic Design for exploring and interpreting artistic works and lives which maintained a dialogue with other living beings, their territories, and the Earth sensed as a living being. I argue that poetry and arts can design relational ontologies grounded in affectivity that question Western animate-inanimate, objective-subjective, and rational-irrational dichotomies. The reconsideration of these cultural dichotomies by environmental criticism has resulted in a revision of positivist practices of thinking within academic scholarship. Reflecting this background, this research work was completed by developing an alternative methodological approach which incorporated to analysis immersion in places and ecopoetic language in the form of ecopoems. The poetic mode of expression is employed in this dissertation as a complementary weft for what I call an Ecopoetic Heart able to resonate with the artistic and environmental meshes of reconnection in the analyzed lives and works.

These exemplary cases (analyzed in chapters 4 to 9) are the affective, aesthetic, and epistemic ground in which this ecopoetic reflection grew. They are situated in what I call the “South and East hemispheres of civilization”, referring not only to the geopolitical location of Mexico and Japan, which is peripheral to the Western and Eurocentric paradigm of civilization,

but also to a critical “South-East” resisting the hegemonic global culture and its values. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that each of the cases explored here are deeply traversed by “global” Modernity.

This work is structured in two parts. Part I introduces Eco poetic Design as a concept and the constellation of perspectives which inspired this theoretical framework.

Part II analyzes several artists’ poetics of relationship: Frida Kahlo (chapter 4), Buzoku (chapter 5), Nanao Sakaki (chapter 6), Sansei Yamao (chapter 7) and El Xastle loving community (chapter 8). Because this research was completed according to an inductive approach, the nature of Eco poetic Design as well as other concepts such as Eco poetic Heart, Eco poetic Cardiogenesis and the notion of the living and spirit-filled Earth introduced in Part I, was formed by the patterns revealed by the cases studied. In other words, the Eco poetic Design conceptual framework takes its form from the studied patterns underlying these five studies: Identity, Building Society, Embodiment, Wisdom, and Arrangement (see diagram 3). The articulation of these patterns into Arturo Escobar’s framework of ontological design (see diagram 2) and a process of heart-making I named Eco poetic Cardiogenesis is the proposal and argument of this dissertation.

The chapter structure goes as follows:

Part I

Chapter 1. Introduction to an Eco poetics of Relationship

This chapter contextualizes Eco poetic Design, the Eco poetics approach, the definition of Eco poetic Design, and presents the main question addressed in this work, the main objectives, corpus, justification, the eco poetic methodological approach, the writing of eco poems, and the spirit of my research.

Chapter 2. A Constellation of Heart and Earth Poetics during COVID-19

This chapter approaches the Eco-poetics perspective by discussing the notion of “crisis”, “dilemma” and “openness” implied in the discourse of the Anthropocene and presenting an overview of some contemporary threads of criticism and thought regarding poetry, arts, and the environment coming from the United States of America, Japan, Latin and Indigenous America. This overview attempts to demonstrate that the consciousness of being in the “Anthropocene” can become a cultural platform of awareness for fostering the reflection of poetic language and the capabilities of the poetic heart. Therefore, this chapter explores some perspectives, threads of thought, regarding the roles of poetry and the arts in a pluralistic and diverse world. These threads of thought are Masatake Shinohara’s proposal of writing poetry for practicing ontological encounters; Pedro Favaron’s proposal of “poetic reason”, Gary Snyder’s notion of house-holding and poets as decomposers of symbolic structures; the ecofeminist criticism of Romantic and Nature-writing’s biased view of poetry as house-making and a thread of thoughts that surround the notion of Indigenous poetics. All these “threads” have a shared critique of West-centered visions of literature and arts. Because this chapter was written during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-22) it largely reflects on feelings of global catastrophe while looking for a constellation of thoughts answering what the poetic heart can do in the skies of the Anthropocene.

Chapter 3. The Eco-poetic Design Approach: An East-South Approach to the Art of Reconnection with the Living Earth

This chapter introduces the Eco-poetic Design theoretical framework and my conception of Eco-poetic Heart and the process of Eco-poetic Cardiogenesis. It also, discusses the place of “design” and “ontology” in the ecological transitional framework by linking these concepts with Arne Naess philosophic criticism of Ontologies of disconnection and Arturo Escobar’s proposal of Ontologic Design for Transitions and Autonomy.

Part II

Chapter 4. The Animalist Perspective of Self-identity: Fulang-Chang and Frida Kahlo

This chapter explores the patterns of anthropocentrism in self-portraiture by analyzing the “animalist” perspective of Frida Kahlo’s self-portraits *Fulang-Chang and I* (1937) and *Self Portrait with Small Monkey* (1945) and comparing these patterns with Alexandre-François Desportes’ *Self Portrait in Hunting Dress* (1699), an animalier painter contemporary to European Illustration who also portrayed himself surrounded by animal species. This chapter highlights a key aspect of the Western self-portraiture tradition: an anthropocentrism based on a pyramidal gaze of domination. In contrast, it is argued that Frida Kahlo’s perspective of herself is more precisely a fluid “nahualist” perspective, inspired by *nahuales* (or *nahualli*), an Indigenous Mesoamerican notion of persona in which there is in a fluid relationship between the human and the animal. The long ecopoem included in this chapter aims to offer a connection to the issue of human and animal relationship in the Anthropocene, echoing Frida’s gaze of spiritual empathy toward animal suffering and delving into the sensitive and spiritual dimensions attached to food production and the cattle industry.

Chapter 5. Counterculture, Poetry, and Earth: Buzoku (The Tribes) and the Fractal Growth of the Spirit of Reconnection with Earth

This chapter discusses the reductionist depiction of Buzoku as the “Japanese hippies” and aims to introduce an alternate story of the relationship between ecological consciousness and countercultural communities in Japan. It introduces the story of Buzoku 部族 (generally translated as The Tribe), which was a group of artists, poets, activists, and dreamers who between 1967 and 1980 participated in building what they considered to be a new society within the shell of the Japanese national state. This chapter recounts The Tribes’ formative

period beginning with the Fugetsudō Coffeehouse in Shinjuku, the appearance of the “Bum style,” and the connection with American Beat Generation poets. It then recounts the “formal” birth of The Tribes as a network of 5 original tribes and provides a brief overview of the Tribes’ Newspaper published in 1967 and Buzoku’s influence on later generations. In this chapter, it is argued that Buzoku’s spirit of building a new society pursuing a blending of alternative lifestyles and reconnection with a living Earth nurtured a spiral patterned movement of groups, communes, activities, caravans, ecovillages, and alternative projects of life across Japan. Finally, the chapter includes an ecopoem written during my visits to Satsuma Sendai, Suwanose and Yakushima islands, following The Tribes’ network and being hosted by people keeping Buzoku’s spirit alive.

Chapter 6. Walking the Earth: Nanao Sakaki, Kokopelli and the Wandering Ecocosmopolitanism

Chapter 6 explores the relationship between environmental cosmopolitanism and ancient walking spirits by describing Japanese poet and environmental activist Nanao Sakaki’s walking poetics. It is argued that Nanao’s walking poetics can be both connected to ancient Japanese and Native American walking cultural figures. For exploring this connection, this chapter focuses on the figure of North American Kokopelli adopted by Nanao as an emblem of his own way of walking the Earth while connecting people and spreading ecological awareness. This chapter argues that Nanao’s Kokopelli waking poetics has a three-folded dimension. First, a poetics of encounter by being here, second, a poetics of spiritual association and third, a poetics of gifts. This three-folded walking poetics is exemplified in three of Nanao’s poems “Kokoperi” 「ココペリ」 [Kokopelli] (1992), “Mitsuyu ningen” 「密輸人間」 [translated by Nanao as “Me, a Smuggler”] (1996), and “Ōkina fukuro wo kata ni kake Daikoku sama ga kikakaru to” 「大きな袋を肩にかけ 大黒さまが 来かかると」 [translated by Nanao as “Doctor Big

Black Coming”] (1996). In Nanao’s poems walking spirits work to the benefit of humanity, particularly when faced with environmental disasters and social suffering, and were a model for Nanao’s walking. Finally, this chapter includes an Ecopoem written during a visit to Nanao’s last house in the village of Ōshika mura in 2019 and 2022, visits during which I encountered the walking spirit of Kokopelli in Japan.

Chapter 7. Island Wisdom: Sansei Yamao’s Poetic Ecological Philosophy

Chapter 7 explores Japanese contemporary animist visions by examining the poet, farmer, and thinker Sansei Yamao’s (1938-2001) poetic philosophy as it is introduced in his emblematic book *Animizumu to iu kibō* 『アニミズムという希望』 [*A Hope Called Animism*] (2000). The chapter opens with an ecopoem written during my visit to his cabin-studio called Gukaku-an in 2018. It then reads Yamao’s biography and summarizes the main arguments of his book chapter by chapter. Through this succinct summary, I aim to outline Yamao’s key notions of his ecological and poetic philosophy. It is argued that Yamao’s animist philosophy can be described as an ecosophy born and grounded in Yakushima through an Ecopoetic Design that articulates an animist *kami*-world and establishes an ethics for human inhabitation of the Earth. Finally, this chapter includes an ecopoem inspired by Yamao’s poem number XXIV from the “Birōha bōshi no shita de” 「びろう葉帽子の下で」 [Under the Palm Leaf Hat series. This ecopoem brings to life the intense feelings that the animist ontological vision can stir in our hearts.

Chapter 8. The Agroecological Song: El Xastle Loving Community and their *Milpa* Poetics

Chapter 8 examines poetic and environmental affectivity in contemporary agroecological life projects by telling the story of Mexican El Xastle loving community and exploring their calendar of reconnection with “Mother Earth.” El Xastle was the artistic and farming

community that Carlos “Tito” Barraza and Sandra Araujo carried out in the countryside of Puebla, Mexico, in the years between 2017 and 2018.

This chapter opens with an introduction to El Xastle’s urban and creative background linked to the Transdisciplinary Poetry and Journey Center and the Chuleles collective. It continues with a recount of the birth of El Xastle as an agroecological and artistic project in 2016. The following section analyses El Xastle through Carlos’ and Sandra’s posts on Facebook expressing their agroecological and poetic views while practicing the traditional agricultural method called *milpa*. Through their Facebook timeline, I reconstruct an image of their agropoetic cyclical calendar. I argue that this agropoetic calendar reveals an artistic and agricultural arrangement that follows the cyclical temporality of the *milpa* and agave fields. The analysis of the calendar highlights some characteristics of their agropoetic vision as well as some challenging aspects of their alternative projects of life. Finally, the chapter includes an ecopoem, which was written during my ecopoetic journey to Mexico in the early spring of 2022 to spread an ecopoetic message and seek the ways of life that inspired Carlos and Sandra in the rural landscapes of Central and Southern Mexico. This ecopoem offers a window into the meaning of “love,” “care,” and “friendship,” which were keywords for El Xastle.

Chapter 9. Conclusions

Chapter 9 opens with an ecopoem that aims to remind us of the path of simplicity and hope that guided this ecopoetic research. It then includes a summary of the main findings of this research, answering how the reconnection with the Earth was achieved by artists and poets in Japan and Mexico. Table 3 summarizes more concretely the Ecopoetic Design explored in each case study and the conception of Earth itself through the Ecopoetic Heart. It also presents a personal assessment of the learnings from this research and the implementation of this ecopoetic methodological approach. It evaluates its limitations and also identifies problems raised by this research for further exploration. Finally, this chapter concludes by identifying

ten main ideas about the characterization of Modernity's ecological path that are challenged by this study.

Chapter 2

A Constellation of Heart and Earth Poetics during COVID-19

Introduction

This chapter employs an ecopoetic perspective to introduce the Anthropocene, a term which is rapidly gaining popularity in scientific, cultural, artistic, and religious fields and which is commonly associated with the awareness of an ongoing ecological crisis. I reflect on the feelings that the Anthropocene stirs in people's hearts by exploring the notion of crisis, dilemma, and openness. Finally, this chapter gathers some arguments and statements regarding poetic-artistic practices of thinking that serve to complete a reflexive constellation of ecopoetic thinking guided by cultural diversity.

2.1. The Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is both a scientific name for our current geological epoch as well as a cultural phenomenon of awareness regarding the dimensions and seriousness of the human force "affecting planetary systems."³³ Following Lynn Keller's observations, we can say that the Anthropocene is becoming part of the environmental culture in many regions across the world as well as a critical perspective from which to reflect on our modern civilizational paradigms while calling for environmentally-oriented actions. Moreover, the Anthropocene

³³ Lynn Keller names this phenomenon the "self-conscious Anthropocene" to distinguish its cultural reality from the Anthropocene as a possible scientific fact. She argues: "Although the term may or may not be formally adopted by the International Commission on Stratigraphy to designate the current geological epoch, the awareness that humans have come to be the dominant force affecting planetary systems now pervades our culture." Keller, "Introduction. Beyond Nature Poetry" in *Recomposing Ecopoetics*.

has awakened our passion for telling, proclaiming, and prophesizing a range of visions of the future. The twenty-first century has become passionate about something which lies in the core of the Anthropocene.

As a term traversed by globalization, which gathers humans from different backgrounds to discuss our current and common environmental crisis, the Anthropocene has generated passionate accounts about the ideas about the world, time, and place. For example, Dipesh Chakravarty has examined that the Anthropocene's core "scientific" idea is not new in scientific history. However, compared to previous attempts to designate our current epoch, the Anthropocene has moved beyond solely scientific discussion to succeed in becoming a cultural phenomenon of reflexive awareness.³⁴ Moreover, the Anthropocene has also become a passionate wind, a reflexive, ironic, and sometimes fierce current of criticism aiming to dissolve the conceptual grains and concretized practices of a deeply rooted paradigm of civilization. This particularity of the term has turned it into a passionate discourse challenging the porous, though still rigid, structure of *homo sapiens*' egocentric and exclusivist way of thinking.

Among these impassioned approaches, sometimes gathered under the umbrella of Environmental Humanities, the Anthropocene has become a term intimately linked with critiquing Western civilization's theoretical, ethical, and aesthetic foundations which are perceived as responsible for our environmental crises. For example, feminist thinkers such as Donna Haraway and Marisol de la Cadena see in the term a continuation of the anthropocentric and male-centric logos, and they point to the problematic assumptions implicit in coining a geologic epoch as "human." A further aspect criticized by Anne Tsing is how the "human" that designates the Anthropocene is a notion of a capitalist human entangled with a set of aspirations

³⁴ Chakrabarty, "Anthropocene Time," 5.

of progress still spreading “techniques of alienation that turn both humans and other living beings into resources.”³⁵

One among the many streams of criticism questioning the utility of the term Anthropocene is the scholarly criticism taking root in non-Western practices of thinking. This stream of criticism results from the emergence of many theories born within philosophical and creative spaces which are working to highlight histories of alternative world-making, while sharing a rich reservoir of wisdom for dealing with environmental quandaries. These theories employ alternative approaches for constructing knowledge and challenge the civilizational methods of thinking based on positivist and anthropocentric assumptions. Nevertheless, they’re still faced with modern thinking paradigms which dismiss them as simply “opinions” and often contribute to their disappearance by supporting a colonialist logos based on standardization. Consequently, this stream of criticism aims to invigorate logos’ plurality while overcoming figures based on aggression, manipulation, and depredation which inhabit almost all humanistic practices based on scientific paradigms. For instance, Donna Haraway calls for figuring other “figures” and has championed the shift to “tentacular” ways of thinking.³⁶ Nevertheless, these conceptual currents do not come only from the global North’s academic explorations; some also come from poets and researchers in the global South. For example, Patricia Noguera and Jaime Alberto Pineda’s methodology called Aesthetic-Method (*métodoestesis*) is based on “touching” and “contact” for moving beyond the subject-object relational framework.³⁷ This stream of criticism is passionately challenging our own conception of what thinking is and how thinking is crafted for seeing what lies beyond the Anthropocene.

³⁵ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 19.

³⁶ Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking” in *Staying with the Trouble*.

³⁷ Echeverri, Ramírez, and Echeverri, “Métodoestesis”, 47.

The Anthropocene discourse has given birth to other alternative world-terms such as Capitalocene, Plantatiocene, and Chthulucene. Within the passionate discussion activated by these currents it is possible to identify two positions toward the term: the first one is what I call “abandoning” the Anthropocene, and the second one is “staying” with the Anthropocene. On the one hand, Donna Haraway has suggested throwing away this term based on “comic faith in technofixes” and to replace it with other “figures” more capable of illuminating stories of kinship and world-makings (such as the Chthulucene).³⁸ On the other hand, Bruno Latour, in his work *Facing Gaia* (2017), replies to Haraway’s view, calling for us to stay with the term Anthropocene, precisely to “stay with the trouble,”³⁹ while engaging in alternative practices of politics based on the plurality of worlds (cosmopolitics). Nevertheless, as Latour is aware and develops in his book, this would also require new figures of “world” and testing a new natural-cultural diplomacy.

In my view, we can opt for using the Anthropocene just as a door for entering the passionate criticism about our human “age.” As Juan Duchesne has noted based on Indigenous American understandings, what should be questioned is not the configuration of a human-centered “age” in itself, but its exclusivity as pertaining to *homo sapiens* desires. Therefore, the Anthropocene can become a platform for a defense of a non-exclusivist or more open “humanism.” On the other hand, it is also true that our lives are traversed by a global capitalism, rooted in massive extractive industries, supported by technologization, and aiming to reach a transhumanist horizon. Therefore, as Mesoamerican myths clearly describe the ethical question facing our society is if we are living a legitimate self-centeredness as humans who care for their existence by taking care of the sacred web of relationships that connects them with all life

³⁸ Haraway has expressed this ethical and epistemological issue as “it matters which stories tell stories, which concepts think concepts. Mathematically, visually, and narratively, it matters which figures figure figures, which systems systematize systems” Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 101.

³⁹ Latour, *Facing Gaia*, 100.

(including other people and the spiritual world). Paraphrasing the prophet Ezequiel, we can say that ecologically we are living this Anthropocene not as legitimate humans but as diminished humans with a heart of stone unable to notice Earth's sacredness. In sum, the Anthropocene reflection can become a platform for recognizing the ways we have legitimized paths of suffering and forgetting for others while legitimizing an illegitimate existence as humanity.

The Anthropocene demands that we tackle the problems of the human heart in order to open humanity to thinking and feeling poetically intermeshed with non-human otherness. Identifying the core of this Anthropocentric position, we can argue that the Anthropocene can become a critical platform for recognizing how we have forgotten to speak, think, and feel with our hearts and for searching out ways to overcome this shortcoming. Overcoming our problematic bias and condition will certainly require us to “figure” new figures in order to learn new abilities for articulating our thoughts and feelings. But it will also require that we recognize our need for different approaches for gaining a new heart. In short, we will need to humbly recognize that other worlds, beings, and forms of humanity must be involved in the process of our transformation. An eco-poetic Anthropocene vision would require us breathing this world with a heart of flesh for feeling the intimacy that connects us to life and calls us to take care of our home. Those other worlds, beings and forms of humanity are not abstract or speculative things. On the contrary, they pertain to the concrete “here” and “now” which flows alongside a living memory, language of wisdom, and praise to incommensurability. This is where poetry and the arts are most at home. Like a fish swimming in the stream, the arts can tell us what this vast sea is made of without attempting to reduce it to a rational explanation or logical principle. I agree with anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena’s proposition, rooted in Indigenous thought, that we need new openness regarding environmental thinking rather than turns. I understand her claim as a call for new ways to engage in thinking with the head, heart, feet, body, and spirit, rather than calling for new “progressists” directions that redirect our rationalism to the

non-human world. Therefore, poetry, the artistic poesis, which touches the natural world with a living heart, can become a path for transformation. The next section will explore my own heart and the feelings-thoughts stirred when gaining consciousness of being amidst and culturally embodying something called Anthropocene.

2.2. Crisis, Dilemma, and Openness: a body in the self-conscious Anthropocene

Stopping the impulse for “theoretical discourse” may be a path for entering the heart, and entering the heart is the first condition for finding a path leading from the heart itself to somewhere else. The consciousness of pausing is central here: we must see our own voices in slowness, as clouds rising and passing by, until we can clearly see some path revealing itself before us. Seen through an ecopoetic lens, understanding is an activity that requires gaining consciousness of other voices and our own voice as connected to this chorus of existence by the here and now. When stopping the “theoretical discourse” the heart begins to describe its own situation, its own surroundings, and then the fragile body appears.

Hanabatake ward, Tsukuba City, Japan. I am writing in 2020, passing most of my time in my apartment amidst a global pandemic that is simultaneously occurring in Japan and Mexico. Little by little, we, graduate students, are returning to the Campus facilities. April, May, June, and many questions arise, for example, when will this finish? Or do we have to adapt to a new condition that is uncertain, and which underscores our vulnerability? How do researchers feel about the expanding condition of precarity? Anna Tsing gives the following picture in her book from 2015, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*: “Precarity once seemed the fate of the less fortunate. Now it seems that all our lives are precarious—even when, for the moment, our pockets are lined. In contrast to the mid-twentieth century, when poets and philosophers of the global north felt caged by too much stability, now many of us, north and

south, confront the condition of trouble without end.”⁴⁰ This comment illustrates that both poets and philosophers perceive and deal with the expanding condition of “trouble without end.” Being under a recurrent vulnerability and precariousness may be a way to describe my own feeling in this self-conscious Anthropocene, the concept devised by Lynn Keller. This feeling increases with the expanding consciousness of the collapse of areas of stability that historically have benefited from civilizational modernism and capitalist progress and the sensation of an expanding condition of catastrophe characterized by complexity, similar to what philosopher Jean Luc Nancy has described in his book *After Fukushima* (2015).⁴¹

I’m not alone in these feelings. Many scholars perceive that the idea of catastrophe or mess is central when feeling the Anthropocene. For example, Anna Tsing expresses that “without planning or intention, humans have made a mess of our planet.” In contrast to our perception of “natural” catastrophes, the Anthropocene embodies a bizarre sense of catastrophe “without end” which makes it terrifying and paralyzing. The Anthropocene’s terrifying vision, predated by twentieth century disturbing visions of Modernity, characterizes this age as an epoch of endless trouble in which precarity becomes the very condition of human existence. This sense of horror may be even part of the Western literary culture, for example, it echoes Samuel Beckett’s play called *Endgame* (1957) in which the whole world has entered in a post-apocalyptic condition in which even meaning, space, and time becomes unstable.

The instability of reality also resonates in Anthropocene characterizations. For example, Robert McFarlane characterizes the Anthropocene in his recent book *Underland* (2019) as: “We are presently living through the Anthropocene, an epoch of immense and often frightening

⁴⁰ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 2.

⁴¹ Nancy characterizes this complexity as: “The complexity here is singularly characterized by the fact that natural catastrophes are no longer separable from their technological, economic, and political implications or repercussions. Simple accident: The cloud from a volcano blocks aviation over at least a quarter of the planet. Real catastrophe: An earthquake shakes up not just the ground and the buildings on it but also an entire social, political, and moral situation.” Nancy, *After Fukushima*, 4.

change at a planetary scale, in which ‘crisis’ exists not as an ever-deferred future apocalypse but rather as an ongoing occurrence experienced most severely by the most vulnerable. Time is profoundly out of joint, and so is place.”⁴² The time-space dislocation in MacFarland’s quote updates the Beckettian drama *Endgame*’s apocalyptic atmosphere by connecting it to a new state of environmental and cultural awareness: we live amidst an ongoing planetary crisis.

The word “crisis” has become essential in translating the Anthropocene into a human feeling across many languages. According to The Castilian Etymological Dictionary Online:

...The word crisis comes from the Greek κρισις (*krisis*) and this from the verb κρινειν (*krinein*), which means “to separate” or “to decide.” A crisis is something broken, and because it is broken, it must be analyzed. This verb created the term criticism, which means analysis or study of something to make a judgment and criterion that means adequate reasoning. [...] The “crisis” or possible “separation” or “break” is a crucial and decisive point. In Medicine, it refers to a sudden or profound change, which can reach the point that separates life from death.⁴³

Additionally, the Etymological Dictionary lists some meanings of the word in Greek literature, such as “the culminating moment of a disease” (Hippocrates), “struggle” (Herodotus), “choice” (Plutarch) and “judgment” (Sophocles). All these meanings point to a complicated set of feelings awoken by the consciousness of being in an age of environmental and humanitarian crisis. However, we can focus our attention on the central notion which describes a condition of a damage inflicted on something that was previously balanced, with imminent implications for the persistence of something, especially something alive. The immediate feeling that arises is that the brokenness calls for taking “urgent” actions in the name of recovery. Nonetheless, this raises the question of how we situate the condition of being “recovered” and how we plan

⁴² MacFarlane, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey*, 13–14.

⁴³ “La palabra crisis viene del griego κρισις (*krisis*) y este del verbo κρινειν (*krinein*), que significa “separar” o “decidir.” Crisis es algo que se rompe y porque se rompe hay que analizarlo. De allí el término crítica que significa análisis o estudio de algo para emitir un juicio, y de allí también criterio que es razonamiento adecuado. La crisis nos obliga a pensar por tanto produce análisis y reflexión. [...] La crisis o posible separación” o “rotura” es un punto crucial y decisivo. En la medicina es usado para referir a un cambio brusco o profundo, que puede llegar al punto que separa la vida de la muerte.” Anders, “Crisis.”

to recover. It also forces us to examine the kinds of approaches we should consider for overcoming the cultural paradigms in which the crisis is rooted.⁴⁴

Although the Anthropocene may be perceived as a crisis in popular culture, environmental researchers have pointed out the problem of linking environmental concerns to the notion of “emergency” as it tends to obscure the existence of alternative ways of life which inhabit and flourish even amidst those damaged territories. For example, in her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World...* (2015), Anna Tsing proposes shifting the focus towards the “emergence” of new dilemmas that are not easily resolved.⁴⁵ Following this shift in focus, we can notice that the notion of dilemma implies making a decision, specifically a difficult decision, and adhering to certain ethics. In contrast to the notion of crisis, the notion of dilemma puts the individual and social will at the core of dealing with the Anthropocene. However, the consciousness of the Anthropocene as an age of facing dilemmas forces our heart to reckon with the fact that we must make a decision. I would like to draw attention to the definition of dilemma found in the Etymological Dictionary:

The word dilemma expresses a decision point, where you have to choose between two things. [...] the word comes from the Greek δῖλημα (*dilemma*), made up of: δῖς- (*dis* = two) and λημα, (*lemma* = theme, premise). As in Shakespeare’s words “to be or not to be,” a dilemma presents a point of choice between two things. In other words, a critical point where two contradictory premises are evaluated. It is the moment that the cartoons express with a little devil sitting on one shoulder of the character and a little angel on the other shoulder. The two giving contrary arguments.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ According to Arturo Escobar: “The contemporary crisis is the result of deeply entrenched ways of being, knowing and doing.” Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 19.

⁴⁵ The notion of dilemma can also be observed in some ecocritical approaches. For example, the idea of environmental “quandaries” is central in Timothy Clark’s book, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and The Environment*. He notes: “The intellectual pressure exerted by the scope of environmental questions differentiates ecocriticism from other branches of cultural or literary criticism.” Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, 5.

⁴⁶ “La palabra dilema expresa un punto de decisión, donde hay que elegir entre dos cosas. [...] la palabra dilema proviene del griego δῖλημα (*dilemma*), formada de: δῖς- (*dis* = dos) and λημα, (*lemma* = tema, premisa). Como en las palabras de Shakespeare “ser o no ser,” un dilema presenta un punto de elección entre dos cosas. O sea, un punto crítico donde se evalúan dos premisas contradictorias. Es el momento que las caricaturas expresan con un

In addition, the entry includes a quote from Cavafy⁴⁷ which exemplifies the relevance of dilemmas in our lives as individuals:

There comes a day for certain people when they must say the big YES or the big NO. The person who carries the YES inside suddenly appears and, saying it continues their way with honor and conviction. Whoever said NO, has no regrets. If they were asked again, they would repeat NO. Nevertheless, that NO -legitimate for all his life- overwhelms those people.⁴⁸

In contrast to the definition of crisis, the term dilemma shifts our focus toward responsibility and decision making. Dilemmas highlight people's abilities to respond. Moreover, when addressed in community, they highlight the collective work necessary to address what Rafael Mondragón has called "an open question." We can assert that dilemmas convert decision making in an art of being alive and impel us to stay moving with conviction despite overwhelming doubt. Confronted with a sense of "urgency" that can be paralyzing, dilemmas put us on a path that can be walked. However, in my view there is still something missing: a transformational recognition of our interdependence. In other words, how do we confront dilemmas not from our egoistic point of view, but as beings practicing their interconnection to all life. How do we make decisions not solely according to our own criteria, but with a consciousness of being in dialogue with others, in dialogue with creation.

Environmental scholarship has shown us that to effectively navigate the "openness" of environmental dilemmas, biased practices of thinking must undergo critical shifts along the way. These critical shifts have highlighted the euro-centric, scientist, colonialist, patriarchal, and capitalist assumptions undergirding our conceptions of nature. Most of these criticisms

diablito sentado en un hombro de una persona, y un angelito en el otro hombro. Los dos dando argumentos contrarios." Anders, "Dilema."

⁴⁷ Constantine P. Cavafy (Konstantinos Petrou Kavafis). Greek poet (1863-1933).

⁴⁸ "A ciertas personas llega un día en que deben decir el gran SI o el gran No. Pronto aparece quien dentro lleva presto el SI, y diciéndolo prosigue adelante en su honor y propia convicción. Quien dijo NO, no se arrepiente. Si de nuevo le preguntaran diría NO otra vez. Pero ese NO -legítimo para toda su vida lo avasalla." In Anders, "Dilema." (Translated by Pedro Bádenas).

have brought changes into research practices, and concerns within research itself and are in fact visualized as “turns.” In this sense it can be said, for example, that the self-conscious Anthropocene discussion is facing a social, cultural, and humanistic turn questioning the multiple dimensions embedded in notions such as “ecology” and “earth” and insisting on the necessity of including different epistemes and perspectives.

Confronting dilemmas in the Anthropocene requires a more profound change that simply shifting our scholarly directions: we must extend ourselves into otherness in a leap of anthropomorphic kinship. The political conjuncture brought by the different turns have fostered an encounter between worlds, dense tissues of reality, pushing environmental politics and epistemes into a dialogue which recognizes the truthfulness of those worlds as a preexistent condition. Faced with the intellectual (im)possibility of translating and understanding the “worldview” embodied in the other, what emerges is the necessity of certain practice going beyond the linear dynamic of intellectual reification of others’ reality.⁴⁹ Eco-poetically, a practice of opening means letting *the possibility* of others existence enter and *patiently participating* in a process of transformation of our epistemic and ontological grounds to poetically create a communication vessel based in interdependency, the dialogue with earth, and kinship with others as our existential condition as humans. In my view, “openness” can be felt in a negative way, as when it’s seen to be the opening of a dangerous hole, or in a positive way, as when envisioned as an extension of my own being to embrace otherness. Thus, the question posed by Japanese poet Tetsuo Nagasawa’s poem “Do we love the things of Earth as

⁴⁹ This reminds us of Édouard Glissant’s book *Poetics of Relation* when stating in page 215: “If we examine the process of ‘understanding’ people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgements. I have to reduce.” Then later, on page 219: “I thus am able to conceive of the opacity of the other for me, without reproach for my opacity for him. To feel in solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does, it is not necessary for me to grasp him. It is not necessary to try to become the other (to become other) nor to “make” him in my image.” Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.

much as Earth loves us?”⁵⁰ seems not to be a romantic question. Instead, it is one that asks if we can unconditionally love the Earth from a position of reciprocity.

Openness is a condition which shows itself in the field of the heart, love, and creation. In contrast to “turns,” openness suggests a nonlinear, but radiant, movement, which implies a radical transformation of shifting the light of our existence. This may take the form of conceptual openings, as Marisol de la Cadena calls them, based in cultural and ethnographic criticism, but also as creative processes directing the self toward becoming something different. Moreover, openness as a luminous heart-process suggests giving birth to “a new heart” in our practices of creation. Ecologically, this would mean the embodiment of practices for approximating the language of the heart in which others create their worlds. Ecopoetic openness brings the possibility of recomposing what ecology is made of and how ecology can be understood and articulated as knowledge, science, practice, and memory. This is what moves my own heart to awakening from its theoretical discourse in order to approximate the artistic and ecological worldview and world-making. Openness, in this sense, may be the epistemic-emotional condition of an Anthropocene in which human diversity can establish a new relationship.

2.3. Connecting Ecopoetics

Bringing the opening of the heart into the Anthropocene’s epistemic and emotional condition calls for inspiration and fosters a spirit of asking what the poetic heart can do to irradiate its light into these worlds. For example, for Mapuche poet Elicura Chihuailaf and many other Indigenous nations poets, the poet maintains a dialogue with their territories and

⁵⁰ 「ぼくらは地球を愛しているか地球がぼくらを愛しているほどに」 in Nagasawa (長沢), 『足がある』 [To Have Feet], 110.

cultures. Chihuailaf argues that poetry, though it may be a particular creation of an individual poet, receives its strongest influence from the daily practices of life shared by the community and is part of a collective effort to create an inhabitable world for the next generations.⁵¹ Therefore, opening can take the path of learning to poetically engage our hearts while exploring artistic and cultural diversity in the Anthropocene. Rather than visualizing theories as sets of explanations within our rational heads, theories are the voices embodied in our hearts, the voices that guide us as we create an inhabitable world.

2.4. Ecopoem: Haiku

The Anthropocene
Here and there along the roads
leaves left everywhere

July 2, 2020. Tsukuba City.

In the next part of this section, I will draw a constellation guided to answer my stated question of what the poetic heart can do to irradiate its light into these diverse worlds which may have the opportunity, chance, or destiny of encountering each other in my heart during this age of growing consciousness and intercultural exchange called the Anthropocene.

⁵¹ Chihuailaf, “Elicura Chihuailaf: En la oralitura habita una visión de mundo” [Elicura Chihuailaf: In Oraliture Inhabits a Worldview].

2.5. Masatake Shinohara's Perspective on the use of Poetical Language

In the chapter titled “The world of objects and the possibilities of poetic language” of his book *Philosophy of the Anthropocene: “The human condition” after speculative realism* (2018),⁵² Masatake Shinohara (篠原雅武) explores the possibilities of poetic language as a tool for expanding our communication with objects. Mainly based on Fujita Shōzō’s (藤田省三) critique of the decay of Japanese understanding of “mutual negotiation with objects” (*monogoto to no kōshō* 物事との交渉) in the age of rapid economic growth,⁵³ and Timothy Morton’s and Graham Harman’s perspective on object ontologies, Shinohara introduces a Japanese approach to poetry’s possibilities as tool for practicing encounters with objects in ecologically damaged industrial landscapes. Shinohara’s examination starts from a critique of the loss of autonomy experienced by a majority of scientific researchers and their disconnection from the widespread of environmental damages in Japan.⁵⁴ Shinohara’s essay finds a possibility for establishing a connection between science and poetry by illustrating philosopher of science Kenzō Sakamoto’s (坂本賢三) encounter of the poems of poet Tōzaburō Ono (小野十三郎). Shinohara suggests that we see this encounter not only as an anecdotal encounter between science and poetry but rather as an opportunity for focusing on Ono’s poems and their possibilities for starting a practice of negotiation with objects through poetic language.⁵⁵

Based on Roman Jakobson’s theories of poetic language, Shinohara’s vision of poetic language focuses on the poetic function of overcoming paradigms through highly efficient use

⁵² See Shinohara (篠原), 『人新世の哲学: 思弁的实在論以後の「人間の条件」』 [Philosophy of the Anthropocene: “The Human Condition” after Speculative Realism].

⁵³ This “mutual negotiation with objects” in a broad sense, can be understood as interconnection with objects, negotiation, and mutual bonds with them. It is mainly understood as a Japanese cultural relationship that existed before the emergence of the culture of consumption and disposal under neoliberal capitalism.

⁵⁴ Shinohara, 『人新世の哲学: 思弁的实在論以後の「人間の条件」』, 169.

⁵⁵ Shinohara, 172.

of words and sharp intellectual activity. Furthermore, poetic language is not perceived as opposed to theoretical language, but rather as a complementary language capable of “pioneering” into new territories, such as those where academic language cannot reach.⁵⁶

Through a careful analysis of Ono’s poems, located in the southern part of Osaka’s industrial landscapes, Shinohara’s essay details examples of how poetic language can motivate encounters with objects. In his view, Ono’s poetics dealing with objects produced by industrialization and mechanization may provide an example of how to overcome the western dualism between matter and spirit. Moreover, Shinohara proposes using the word employed by Ono, *kokuretsu* (酷烈), translatable as “harshness” or “severe,” for approaching the natural worlds emerging in these landscapes of industrialization. Shinohara’s exploration shows how poetry can be an effective language for overcoming the Romantic view of nature as a pleasant and harmonious space. This poetry of harshness could be an effective way of retrieving the dialogue with objects, while coming into contact with the industrial objects and their spaces born in the Anthropocene.⁵⁷

Shinohara’s exploration echoes the importance of short poetry in Japan such as haiku and tanka, as a vernacular speech towards the natural-cultural world. It can also be connected to artistic practices in which words interact with material objects, not only as supports of their material existence, but as based on the idea that poetic words maintain a kind of intimate dialogue with things, and that these dialogues are not necessarily embellishing the world, or expressing a personal opinion, but practices of knowledge which are valuable for articulating

⁵⁶ Shinohara, 174.

⁵⁷ Shinohara, 192. This perspective reminds us of Joyelle McSweeney’s term “the necropastoral.” She states: “The Necropastoral is a political-aesthetic zone in which the fact of mankind’s depredations cannot be separated from an experience of “nature” which is poisoned, mutated, aberrant, spectacular, full of ill effects and affects. The Necropastoral is a non-rational zone, anachronistic, it often looks backwards and does not subscribe to Cartesian coordinates or Enlightenment notions of rationality and linearity, cause and effect. It does not subscribe to humanism but is interested in non-human modalities, like those of bugs, viruses, weeds and mold.” McSweeney, “What Is the Necropastoral?”

what remains unnoticed by other fields of knowledge. Based on his exploration we can argue that poetry can speak to objects because objects can be touched with the senses and the heart. In response, objects show us a new reality, their more intimate features in this sensorial, yet heart-based, language which is poetic. These arguments, when considered under the ecopoetic lens of reconnection and the central question of this chapter, can be stated as:

In the Anthropocene we have learned that poetic language can foster a kind of personal engagement with harsh industrial realities and human-produced objects.

2.6. Pedro Favaron's Poetic Reason

Shinohara's approach, based on a Japanese ethics of communicative reconnection for overcoming the environmental shortcomings of the modern scientific paradigm, resonates with some voices coming from the Amazon, such as Pedro Favaron, a poet, healer, and researcher connected with the Shipibo-Konibo traditional medicine and chants.

In his book *The Poetic Reason* (2020), Pedro Favaron criticizes the modern dissociation between scientific labor and "the researcher's emotional bonds and emotions" that have resulted in the imperative to maintain objectivity. Drawing on the Indigenous use of poetic language and some Western philosophical perspectives such as Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers' reflections on poetic language, Favaron's critique focuses on the Enlightenment paradigm that has led to the homogenization of the researcher's language and sensibility in favor of a supposed "objectivity." For Favaron, the predominance of the positivist rationality has resulted in an impoverishment of language and the separation of researchers and thinkers from humanity's deep voices. Thus, facing the shortcomings of modern positivist rationality, Favaron argues for looking to Western as well as non-Western philosophical traditions of

thought for finding those “dynamics of philosophical thought which surpass the conceptual frame.”⁵⁸

Favaron proposes reintegrating poetic imagination and affect (*afecto*) into modern thinking practices in order to heal the degenerate relationship that modern humans maintain with “Mother Earth,” which is an unhealthy relationship that contributes to the modern division between nature and society.⁵⁹ In Favaron’s perspective, linking poetic language with ecologically-concerned thinking practices can regenerate humans’ health by reconciling modernity with our primeval being (*ser primigenio*).⁶⁰ Favaron conceives of poetic language as part of a human “imaginative dynamics” (*dinámicas de la imaginación*) which can express those aspects of the world that cannot be expressed by conceptual or scientific formulation.⁶¹ Drawing on the mystical experiences of Western visionary poets such as Hölderlin and St. John of the Cross, Favaron argues that poetic imagination can foster an alternative rational thinking able to reconcile opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*). In his view, philosophies embracing poetic language and forms, the so-called “poetic philosophies,” expand our practices of thinking by allowing mental fluidity and aligning our thoughts with heart and body rhythms. In addition, Favaron highlights the necessity of an attitude of epistemic humility, especially coming from the mainstream scientific communities, in order to reintegrate poetic imagination into modern philosophies and to allow for cross-cultural ecological dialogue.

It is worth noting that Favaron’s proposal for “poetic reason” and epistemic humility is mainly inspired by his personal connection with Indigenous wisdom, oral traditions, traditional medicine, and practices of thinking, as well as proposals that have emerged from Indigenous thinkers and scholars advocating for the incorporation of frameworks based on heart, body, and

⁵⁸ Favaron, *La razón poética* [The Poetic Reason], 15.

⁵⁹ Favaron, 20.

⁶⁰ Favaron, 22.

⁶¹ Favaron, 25.

sensibility toward the spiritual worlds. Some of these proposals can be gathered under umbrella terms such as “heart-thought”, or “heart-epistemologies” (*pensamiento del corazón, epistemologías del corazón*)⁶² and are currently challenging the theoretical frameworks and practices of Western-centered education and academic scholarship. Based on Indigenous wisdom traditions and this emerging intellectual movement, Favaron calls for an alternative rationality based on the affectivity and complementarity between concept and figure, rejecting the romantic association of heart and poetry with irrational feelings.⁶³ Furthermore, Favaron argues that this “thinking of the heart” underpins the “Indigenous condition of being” (*indigeneidad*), Indigenous ontologies, ethics, and cosmic ties of kinship to their territories.

Favaron’s arguments, when considered under the eco-poetic approach of reconnection and the question of this chapter, can be described as part of a major epistemic current advocating for bringing the poetic language of the heart to the center of philosophical articulation and environmental thinking. In light of this eco-poetic approach of reconnection, I would like to connect these arguments to scholarly practices gathered under the term Ecocriticism. In my view, one particularity of a Southern eco-poetic approach would be its heart-centered way of

⁶² Among these scholars is Juan López Itzín, a Tseltal Maya scholar and thinker who employs in his writings and conferences the term *sp’ijilal o’tan* (wisdom or epistemologies of the heart) for referring to an emerging approach to knowledge and thinking practices rooted in the Maya culture and in resistance to spiritual colonization, see “Juan López Intzín - Sp’ijil O’tanil” [Juan López Intzín - Sp’ijil O’tanil: Heart-Epistemologies.]. In my view, the Tseltal conception of heart could be connected to ecological and philosophical approaches in Japan employing the word *kokoro* 心 (mind-heart) as well as *kanjusei* 感受性 (sensitivity). In the North-Western tradition it is worth mentioning two groundbreaking essays by James Hillman: *Thought of the Heart* and *Anima Mundi: The Return of the Soul to the World*. Also, it is worth noting that the expression “heart-thought” echoes the English research field of “methodologies of the heart,” developed by Ronald Pelias, Helen Owton, and scholars in psychology and sports studies for conducting qualitative research grounded in poetic language. According to Owton these methodologies highlight the relevance of developing a methodology located in the researcher’s body: “a body deployed not as a narcissistic display but on behalf of others, a body that invites identification and empathetic connection, a body that takes as its charge to be fully human.” Ronald J. Pelias Pelias, *A Methodology of the Heart*, 15:1. also in Owton, *Doing Poetic Inquiry*, 4.

⁶³ Favaron, *La razón poética*, 41.

thinking. Paraphrasing Cheryll Glotfelty's oft-cited definition of Ecocriticism's approach as Earth-centered,⁶⁴ we can state:

In the Anthropocene, we have learned that if Ecocriticism is defined for putting the Earth at the center of critical thought, Eco-poetics can be defined as bringing an awareness of the poetic and artistic language of the heart to ecocritical and environmental thought.

2.7. Gary Snyder's Notion of House Holding and Decomposers

Responding to the modern stance of questioning art's contribution and role in society, poet and activist Gary Snyder has introduced numerous arguments in favor of the poetic heart to ecological thinking. For example, in a 1976 interview of Gary Snyder realized by Paul Geneson, and published as "The Real Work," Snyder presents various arguments about the role of art and poetry for modern societies' ecological transformation.

First, when asked how poetry could transform our world's conditions, Snyder stated that according to Ezra Pound, "artists are the antennae of the race" and represent a group of people that, through their sensibilities and lifestyles, stay "tuned into other voices."⁶⁵ Extrapolating Ezra Pound's ideas into ecological thinking, Snyder argued that artists perceive the signals coming from both the non-human world and human societies, and can forward those signals to their communities as early warnings.

In a second argument based on the symbolic world, Snyder states that artists are a fundamental part of the human symbolic ecosystem. Snyder assigns artists the role of

⁶⁴ Glotfelty defines ecocriticism in the introduction of the *Ecocriticism Reader* as: "What then is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies." Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, xviii.

⁶⁵ Snyder and McLean, *The Real Work*, 71.

examiners who fiddle with “archetype images” and “symbol blocks” to see if they are working. Furthermore, in Snyder’s vision, poetry effects long-term social change by “fiddling with the archetypes” and “getting at people’s dreams about a century before it actually effects historical change.”⁶⁶ He states that even artists living at the edges of society are part of this symbolic ecology, and many artists play a useful role by transforming themselves into pathfinders who can find new directions for the “mind-energy to flow.” By performing these roles, artists find “structural connections” that “are no longer useful or applicable” and prepare new connections for those outdated connections to be digested. In his vision, the artists role of digesting the symbolic detritus, resembling “mushrooms, or fungus,” by decomposing and fostering the connections necessary to maintain human symbolic systems.⁶⁷

Snyder’s third argument focuses on poetry’s response when facing specific claims for social and environmental change. Snyder argues that focusing on prophecies or championing specific causes is not the major work of poetry. Despite his recognition that poetry can prophesize ecological scenarios or participate through social movements, for Snyder, the main work of poetry is “bringing us back to our original, true natures, from whatever habit-molds that our perceptions, that our thinking and feeling get formed into.”⁶⁸ For Snyder this “coming back to the natural nature” is based on a practice that attunes people to “*mother nature* and *human nature*” in an ethical way based on harmony and beauty.

Snyder also examines the question of poetry’s value and functionality in a society. For Snyder, it is possible to explore poetry’s value and function both in time and out of time. In time, poetry’s value is seen as attuning our lives to “*mother nature*” and “*human nature*” cycles so that we live meaningfully in a path of beauty and with a sense of a defined temporality. Out

⁶⁶ Snyder and McLean, 71.

⁶⁷ Snyder and McLean, 71.

⁶⁸ Snyder and McLean, 72.

of time, poetry's function is seen as a returning us "to our original true nature at this instant forever." Although Snyder recognizes that poetry has functionality, he warns that we should not take poetry's value or functionality as definitive guidelines. He highlights that poetry is not just a tool, an instrument, nor a valuable way for achieving a particular desired purpose, but rather something humans do as part of their human condition, as much as dancing or eating.⁶⁹

In light of Snyder's commentaries, poetry and art does not require any purpose or reason to exist ecologically; however, they affect human ecology and environments in a meaningful way. Summing up the arguments of this interview, for Snyder, poetry's ecological agency lies in its ability to affect human awareness and sensitivity to other voices, to compose and decompose connections in the human symbolic systems that sustain societies, and to bring people to their original nature while attuning them to "mother nature" and "human nature" cycles. Based on Snyder's arguments, we can argue in favor of the poetic heart:

In the Anthropocene we have come to realize that arts and poetry participate by affecting the connections in our mind and heart ecosystems even if we don't pay attention to their works.

2.8. The Ecofeminist Critique of EcoPoetics

Since its origins in the decade of 1990, EcoPoetics is a term that has faced resistance and critiques to its biased framing. However, rather than disappearing from discussion, this term has adapted to new perspectives embracing alternative definitions, including those that refer to the notion of "ecology" or "ecosystem" and the notion of "home." The prefix "eco" derives from *oikos*, which means "house" in Greek, and poetics derives from *poiesis*, which means "the act of creation." Thus, etymologically, ecoPoetics can be expressed as "house making."

⁶⁹ Snyder and McLean, 72.

Employing the etymology for defining the relationship between poetry and environment, when the term ecopoetics began to appear, it was defined as a sort of consciousness linked to the experience of dwelling.⁷⁰ The notion of ecopoetics as “house making” was resisted by several poets, artists, and critics, especially women’s writers. This resistance was outlined by Harriet Tarlo in her Introduction to *How2* magazine’s issue on Ecopoetics, as follows:

The biased “house” figure links it with a women’s domain as seen from the male gaze. Consequently, this ecopoetics discourse maintains the shortcomings of the male-gendered gaze over ecopoetic concerns and thinking supported in the Romanticist and Nature writing traditions.

The unwanted effect that a house-centered speaking on ecology has on suggesting that humans dwelling is the center of the world, thus entailing that ecopoetical thinking or writings (poems) are in the center of this centripetal anthropocentric movement. This second criticism can be linked with the highly anthropocentric Biblical discourse that tends to put non-human beings for the sake of human dwelling.⁷¹

Tarlo’s Introduction, which discusses the term “ecopoetics” in an issue precisely dedicated to Ecopoetics, argues for opening the term to include “different angles to the environment” departing from traditionalist approaches. By not getting attached to the figure of the house dwelling, feminist critics have expanded the field of ecopoetics and ecopoetry. For example, by gathering poets and artists’ works from distinct and diverse parcels of the modernist tradition, including those who do not identify themselves with the “wilderness,” “natural,” or “pastoral” traditions, but rather with “innovative,” “experimental” and “ethnopoetic” currents. The feminist critiques against the centrality of the idea of “home” in ecopoetics have shed light on the anthropocentric and patriarchally biased constructions of the terms “home” and “dwelling.” Consequently, ecopoetics has expanded as a field in which many assumptions are able to be critically discussed and put in creative tension.

⁷⁰ Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 42.

⁷¹ Tarlo, “Women and Ecopoetics: An Introduction in Context.”

Regarding the meaning of “home,” it is also true that its notion was already problematized by the precursors of ecopoetry and ecopoetics criticism. Gary Snyder himself, aware of the thorny problems aroused by the figure of house and house-speaking, in his book *The Practice of the Wild* (1990) calls for grounding a relationship with nature based on a notion of “home” not attached to specific places, but rather to the heart: “The heart of a place is the home, and the heart of the home is the firepit, the hearth. All tentative explorations go outward from there and it is back to the fireside that elders return,”⁷² Snyder’s literary play between “heart” and “hearth” poetically connects the sense of “home” with the ancestral practice of sharing our feelings, thoughts, and stories. For Snyder, the core of the sense of home seems to be connected to a practice of articulating the place we inhabit rather than with any particular scale or territory. In sum, since its precursors, different waves and turns within ecopoetics and ecocriticism have shed light on the idea that “home” and “dwelling” are linked to ways of living and articulating the world, rather than to any specific tradition.

Finally, the *How2* anthology also includes pieces which “escape the Anglo-American” perspective, and authors such as Christopher Arigo introduce an ethnopoetic perspective into the ecopoetic field by calling for a centrifugal ecopoetic movement. In my view, feminist and ethnopoetics “turns” have opened the field to different perspectives and practices of thinking and creation, even worldviews, to unite under a common dialogue, not by surrounding any particular definition of the experience of house, but rather by sharing their own particular practices of dwelling into a place they can call home. In other words, feminist and ethnopoetics arguments when considered under the ecopoetic perspective can be stated as:

⁷² Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, 26.

In the Anthropocene we have learned that there is not a single experience, nor a model, of home around which to attach ecopoetic consciousness. The ecopoetic articulation occurs in a universe without one single center, in a pluriverse.

2.9. Notes for an Indigenous Eco poetics

When I began to write poetry, there were some trends within Mexican literary criticism that treated poetry as an endangered genre. In fact, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, young poets in Mexico constantly faced the question of why they were writing poetry. In the Mexican context, this question implies an enormous skepticism regarding poetry's value and function. This skepticism, along with the erosion of the humanist culture and the literary elite's staunch rejection of popular culture or a multicultural perspective on literature, has contributed to a sense of separation between "literary" poetry and society. Nevertheless, responding to this sense of "disconnection," new trends in poetic creation, publishing, and cultural activism have flourished in the Mexican cultural landscape. For example, new and alternative ways of experimenting with poetry have boosted oral practices such as spoken word and poetry slams and varied forms of interaction between poetic language, multimedia, performance, and other arts. In addition, during the first decades of the twenty-first century, the cultural landscape in Mexico has seen simultaneously the emergence of a new generation of "independent" poets (often in association with the independent publishers' movement), and poets writing in Indigenous languages as well as Spanish.

In Mexico's contemporary cultural scene, the "independent" scene and the so-called Indigenous literature have become a fertile ground for debating issues concerning the connections between literature, identity, and the ancestral territories (or nature). One groundbreaking discussion is taking place in the critique of the conceptions of "literature" and

“nature.” For example, Yásnaya Aguilar, for whom the category of Indigenous is a political one, has highlighted that the notion of Indigenous literature is a vestige of a still prevailing colonialist perspective. In Aguilar’s view, rather than “literature” which is a culturally and historically determined phenomenon coming from the Western civilization, what traditionally exists within Indigenous communities is a variety of poetic phenomena, among which “literature” is just one option. In Aguilar’s view, “Indigenous literature” is a category used by Indigenous authors for contesting colonialist perspectives, for example contesting the mestizo and National State’s perspective on the relationship between people and the land.

Many authors who embrace the Indigenous perspective, while challenging the Westernized notion of poetry, have foregrounded “poetic voice” within a practice of intercultural dialogue. Aguilar has argued that although the relationship between the poetic function of the language and ancestral territories is as vast as the ways to relate to the land among nations and communities, within many Indigenous nations, the poetic function is a privileged one in the practice of creating “a complex network of rituals and meanings” (*una compleja red de rituales y significados*).⁷³ It is worth highlighting that in this perspective, the creation of poetic meanings is seen as part of a conscious, traditional, yet flexible practice of creating a communitarian network of relationship with nature, that differs from the Western colonial practice of relating to nature by rituals of possession and meanings directed toward sustaining the complex network of a system grounded in an inanimate land which can be controlled as a property.

The American-Chiapaneca poet Ambar Past once told me that most Maya Tsotsil speakers do not use the term poetry to refer to the poetic meanings in their languages, speeches, idioms, or proverbs because they do not perceive the word “poetry” as necessary. Ambar told

⁷³ Aguilar Gil, “Poesía en lenguas negadas. Una nota sobre la traducción al mixe de un poema de Mahmud Darwish” [Poetry in Denied Languages. A Note on the Translation to Mixe of a Poem by Mahmud Darwish], 62.

me that, despite not having “poetry,” their way of speaking is poetic for us and indeed expresses deep bonds between humans and non-humans. Ambar Past’s words echo Aguilar’s arguments, and a current of thought coursing from Patagonia to Alaska, calling for an epistemic openness to overcome the limited vision of the relationship between “literature” and “nature” or “environment” by expanding westernized notions such as “art” or “literature” toward a more all-encompassing notion of poetic creation seen as a practice of establishing the necessary connections for humans to relate with a living world: the Mother Earth. It is precisely within this “Indigenous” critical current where independent Latin American poets and scholars can encounter a fertile juncture for nurturing a decolonial and transcultural sense of ecopoetics.

In the Anthropocene, we have learned that Indigenous critical perspectives and the spiritual revitalization of poetry can converge to help dismantle a colonialist understanding of arts and literature and to broaden a relationist notion of ecopoetics.

In the Anthropocene, the researcher’s poetic heart resounds with a chant of constellation.

2.10. Ecopoem: Constellations of the Anthropocene

Writing in my notebook
Grandfather Grandmother
of the
quipus and the *yupana*
teach me
to tie
in time
and space
this crisis of the heart-world
called Anthropocene
this crisis of the heart-object

the spirit of *kokuretsu*

Guide me through
diversity
with the opening
of my heart
to the dialogues
of thinking-feeling

This knot is
for the Anthropocene
for our oblivion
that our heart
is flesh connected with the earth
a forgetting that creates illusions
divisions dislocations
injustice and an endless horror
a forgetting that is our fear
of the end of the world

Oh, and nonetheless
I've dreamt of you, father
you told me:
"sense the poetic
make poems
and you will find an ecological response
connected to life"

This life lies in plurality
eco=poetic
and in your heart
diversity converges

Identity is
for putting the broken pieces back together

Identity

can have a therapeutic value
for awakening hearts
from anesthesia

My identity continues in the stars
and stars aren't mere things
but life's frontiers

Thinking isn't mere concepts
but life's relationships

Ecopoetry

is the *oikos*
is the subject
is the poetry
is composing and decomposing
sprouting in the
heart-corazón-kokoro
心

Let's rephrase the question:

What is a geological signature on the heart?

Scholars say:

“don't fix yourself to visions.”

“it's ok to be puzzled.”

“we have to navigate through
these complicated feelings with awareness”

人 新 世

Humanity + New + World

The Earth tells me:

COVID-19,

the first wave
the second wave
the third wave
the fourth wave
the fifth wave
the sixth wave
the seventh wave passed

Nevertheless
on a wooded hillside
a mother and her daughter
play together
with the fallen leaves

*Daughter, don't forget
this knot:
the thought
breathes
together
with the flowers.*

November 2020 – September 2022. Tsukuba City.

2.11. Eco-poem: The Living Wind

As it is outside, it is inside
as it is inside, it is outside.
Today the wind has come
to blow away the leaves.

November 21, 2020. Tsukuba City.

2.12. Conclusion

Using both intellectual and emotional language, this chapter explored the relationship between the Anthropocene and ecopoetics. First, it introduced a perspective of the sensitive heart for approaching the Anthropocene and the self-conscious Anthropocene. This perspective shed light on the feeling of crisis associated with this term. Second, it explored the idea of the abilities of an Ecopoetic Heart in the Anthropocene by combining scholarly and poetic thinking. This exploration demonstrates that poetic language is perceived by many scholars from different latitudes as a key practice for creating and maintaining an ecological relationship between humanity and the landscapes, territories, and earth. This critique of poetic capabilities challenges Westernized definitions of literature and proposes alternative approaches to understanding the role of the arts in human communities. It also problematized assumptions regarding the way poetry and the arts act in modelling the human habitability on Earth, for example by arguing that there is not a single ecopoetic experience. Third, the heart-centered exploration also nurtured two ecopoems, the first one based on haiku-inspired contemplative awareness and the second based on the art of interweaving thoughts.

Nurturing an experimental ecopoem theoretically exploring the “crisis” of the self-conscious Anthropocene during this COVID-19 pandemic has allowed me to write these ecopoems of hope. This feeling of hope must be also understood as connected to the arguments explored and the answers to the question of what a poetic heart can do. Also, these poems aim to cross the border into that which Western reasoning can’t reach.⁷⁴ Crossing this border means to enter into the subjective and assume the risk of exploring a way to move people’s heart by crafting a language of the heart. In doing this, the poems are also a way to further develop Masatake Shinohara’s proposal for directing poetry creation toward the acquisition of an

⁷⁴ This image comes from a conversation in 2022 with the poet Andrés González.

awareness of our theoretical landscapes, specially tackling his critique of researchers' emotional disconnection from environmental issues.

This process of engaging in diverse philosophical-poetical callings for openness coincides with philosophers' recent appeal for an openness to feel the philosophy that comes from the heart and the poetic voice. Philosophers and thinkers from the West such as James Hillman and Timothy Morton, from Abya Yala (Indigenous America) such as Abadio Green, Pedro Favaron and Juan López Itzín, and from Japan such as Sansei Yamao exemplify this calling.

Looking through the window, I see the colors of *kōjo*, the leaves of *kaede* and *ichō* falling with striking colors. Even today, though I am aware that we are entering into the third wave of COVID-19, I realize that a wind has come to blow the leaves.

Chapter 3

The Eco poetic Design Approach: An East-South Approach to the Art of Reconnection with the Living Earth

Introduction

How is an ecological heart born with the guidance of the arts and poetry? How do we make this ecological heart participate in visions of ecological change? These are the two questions investigated in this chapter. This chapter introduces my conception of Eco poetic Design along with the notions of Love, Eco poetic Heart, and Eco poetic Cardiogenesis to explain how human hearts can open themselves to ontological and affective reconnection. Also, I situate Eco poetic Design within the ecological transition trajectory by positioning it as an ontological and affective “design” activity that can expand Arturo Escobar’s Ontological design for Transitions and Autonomy framework.

3.1. The Eco poetic Cardiogenesis

There is a moment when humans who believe in nature as a collection of “resources” begin a radical path toward reconnection with the Earth. It can start with a spiritual revelation or by following ecological common sense. In fact, the path leading toward a reconnection can take many forms. It will reshape our routines, the rationalist mindset in which we live, and our bodies and spirit. Moreover, the path can also reshape our hearts completely. When this path of reconnection with the Earth is nurtured by artistic and poetic practices that look for a balance between human lives and living beings, an eco poetic relationship is established. The eco poetic

relationship entails a heart-making activity which gradually articulates an affective and ontological understanding of humans and Earth. This ontological and affective tissue of understanding, which grows in the heart, also incorporates poetic and artistic language as part of its expressive language. Eventually, this understanding-tissue will give birth to a new heart full of an ecological wisdom and poetic expression. In sum, Eco poetic Cardiogenesis is a process of reconnection which gives birth to an ecological wisdom based on relational ontology and affective language.⁷⁵

3.2. Ontologies of Disconnection and the Heart.

Thinkers such as Arne Naess, Marisol De la Cadena, Arturo Escobar and Abadio Green have brought Ontology thinking to the center of environmental and political issues. From a cultural perspective rooted in the premise that there is not a single world but a world with many worlds within, as the Zapatistas' assert, Ontology refers to worldviews.⁷⁶ More specifically, ontology refers to how people answer questions about the *being* of things, such as the world, the real, and life. Ontological frames sustain the common sense of what beings are, what it means to be an A, B, or C, and propose hierarchies and relations between beings based on their epistemic practices. Escobar notes that modern globalization exerts a mono-ontological occupation of this planet based on its own ontological premises that sustain the ecologically unsustainable trajectory of contemporary development, for example, when maintaining that rivers or mountains are not sentient beings but resources. However, this Modern civilization's

⁷⁵ This notion of giving birth to a kind of heart through participation in the arts was inspired by a conversation in 2022 with the artist Daniel Godínez Nivón who shared with me his "midwife-perspective of the arts" (*una perspectiva partera del arte*).

⁷⁶ Escobar, *Sentipensar con la tierra. Nuevas lecturas sobre desarrollo, territorio y diferencia* [Feeling-Thinking with Earth. New Readings of Development, Territory and Difference], 12.

environmental and humanitarian crisis is so profound that it reveals the ontological crisis of such a model.

Arne Naess identified the Western ontology of disconnection from nature as the mechanist “Galilean ontology” which constructed a human reality severed from nature through a progressive adoption of viewpoints since the Renaissance. Within this onto-epistemic framework, reductionist views hostile to nature and the environment were presented as factual or objective, while other views referred to as mere “feelings” or “sentiments” were not accepted as real qualities of nature and environment, but “projections” of the mind.⁷⁷

In contrast to the mechanistic “Galilean ontologies” which have flattened nature’s reality by rooting themselves in certain “objective” qualities, Naess proposes the retrieval of a relational reasoning. Naess has explained how a relational ontology opens the door to an alternative understanding of reality without contradiction, following the premise that things are “in relation to,” through statements of the type A is B in relation to C. For example, a tree can be “50 meters tall” in relation to a measurement pattern, or it can be “a generous relative” in relation to the feeling of being sheltered on a rainy day. Importantly, there would not be any logical argument to assert that one premise is more or less accurate than the other. In light of Naess’ arguments, relationism is a philosophical principle capable of guiding ontological reasoning into an alternative ontology which bridges feeling and scientific measurement without violating the principle of non-contradiction.⁷⁸ Moreover, it opens a path for bridging Western philosophical thought with the ontological frameworks of other philosophies.

Naess’ philosophical reasoning on relational ontologies raises the question of how we compose relations. If we adopt the heart, not only as the place of our emotion but as the place in which our capacity for understanding and affection resides, then it is possible to establish

⁷⁷ Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 51–54.

⁷⁸ Naess, 54–57.

philosophical reasoning in which understanding, and affection are bridged. This shift implied in Japanese traditional philosophies of *kokoro*, and Indigenous “philosophies of the heart” opens the door to taking seriously love as a force that composes ontological and affective relationships between humans and non-human beings. Although the *kokoro* is something given to all of us at birth, an Eco-poetic Heart—the rational and affective platform for an ecologically-rooted relational ontology—is not something we are born with, but rather a kind of heart we need to give birth to over the course of our lives. Thus, philosophically speaking, ontologies of disconnection can be recomposed into relational ontologies by giving birth to an Eco-poetic Heart.⁷⁹

Thus far, I have proposed that the Eco-poetic Cardiogenesis is a process by which humans can give birth to a relational ontology. This reasoning presupposes the existence of an Eco-poetic Heart, which begins to beat when we come alive within a relational ontology in which humans *are* genuine humans in relation to their appropriate conduct with a living and spirit-filled Earth. As poet Fabricio Cajeme has told me once, for Yaqui people, genuine humans or *yoeme* are what they are *because of their relationship with nature*. This relation is based on rational and affective views toward a living Earth.⁸⁰ All people can give birth to an Eco-poetic Heart, but artists and poets practicing love for other beings and creating powerful messages can inspire and guide us in the process of recomposing our disconnected ontologies toward the ontology of a living Earth. Through their works and lives, artists are models of how this Eco-poetic Heart comes alive, and they encourage us to consider the artistic or poetic

⁷⁹ Relational ontologies are those other ontologies that stand different from the Modern onto-epistemic order. This order that sustains the modern cultural paradigm is summarized by Escobar as the belief in the individual, belief in the real, belief in science, and belief in the economy. Thus, our Modernity follows an onto-epistemic order in which “we are enmeshed, largely without our knowing it. This too, is the meaning of our ontological commitment to ‘being modern.’” Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 91.

⁸⁰ This notion suggests an onto-epistemic order in which the world is experienced as a world with life, agency, and spirit, as seen through different conceptions such as *animus*, *chulel* or *kami*. Onto-epistemic orders of this kind have been recently reasserted from different cultural traditions and academic fields, for example, by animist and Indigenous approaches.

dimensions of ecological transitions. To elucidate how the Eco-poetic Heart can gain a central position in the environmental trajectory of our civilization, I propose situating this Eco-poetic Cardiogenesis within the framework of Ontological design thinking. To this end, I will introduce the notion of Design in modernity, then the Ontological Design framework and finally the concept of Eco-poetic Design.

3.3. The Conception of Design in Modernity

I think it should be specified that the Latin verb *designare*, derived from *signum* (sign, symbol), means in Latin to mark with a sign, to give a sign or to symbolically represent something with signs, and from there, it also gained the value of indicating, designating, and representing something with a word. But in Italian, it gave rise to the verb *disegnare*, which specialized in the idea of drawing (representing something with strokes or graphic signs).⁸¹

Etymology of “design” in Diccionario Etimológico Castellano En Línea

The conception of “design” is deeply rooted in modern civilization’s technological, commercial, and industrial practices. The Latin etymology, *designare*, indicates that it was a verb used to refer to the act of representing something with signs. However, during the Renaissance, two broad meanings were present in the Italian verb *disegnare*, from which the word was passed to French, English, and Spanish. The first one is to “outline” or to “plot” a plan in the mind.⁸² The second one is to “draw” a sketch or an outline. This double meaning of the verb has evolved to mean the process of going from a mental image to a concrete representation, scheme, or model of something to be accomplished. In fact, design has become a verb and an entire creative process, grouping ordered activities valuable for the industrial

⁸¹ “Creo que habría que especificar que el verbo latino *designare*, derivado de *signum* (señal, símbolo) significa en latín marcar con un signo, dar un signo o representar simbólicamente algo con signos, y de ahí también pasó al valor de indicar y designar, representar algo con una palabra. Pero en italiano dio lugar al verbo *disegnare*, que sobre todo se especializó en la idea de dibujar (representar una cosa con trazos o signos gráficos).” Anders, “Diseño.”

⁸² Harper, “Design.”

revolution, such as identifying, imaging, representing, and modeling. Detached from the artistic intention, design has evolved as a fundamental piece of the modern industrial and technological order, for example, in disciplines such as Engineering, Industrial Design, Architecture, and Urbanism. Design is highly valued in the manufacturing industry, and it is also a common term in artisanal workshops and universities. Rather than being simply a verb, it has evolved into a creative practice for shaping things and spaces “surrounding” humanity, from needles to landscapes. In sum, design is a human world-making practice for modern cultures.

3.4. Designing the World, the Real and Life

Nowadays, design practices continue to evolve within our societies, and the conception of “design” has been problematized, criticized, and reinvented by artists, designers, users, and scholars. In the light of this debate surrounding design practices, it is worth asking about the ethical assumptions that support design as an essential practice of modernity. Arturo Escobar notes in his book *Designs for the Pluriverse* that in the last century, the idea of design has been affected by a cultural, environmental, and humanistic turn, “displacing the focus from stuff to humans, their experiences and contexts.”⁸³ This displacement has challenged the stuff-centered notion of design while simultaneously encouraging critical dialogue about our understanding of design and design ethics. According to Escobar’s examination of the state of affairs, it might be said that we have come to an age in which design has become a word referring to human’s ability to sketch, compose, scheme, arrange and plot their reality (Ontological Design).

Considering the evolution of design mentioned above, it is not surprising that design has become a keyword in the framework of ecological or environmental policies among many

⁸³ Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 34.

nations and grassroots movements. In fact, design has become part of the discourses surrounding the political and environmental debate. For example, “Ecological Design” considers sustainability a cultural process shared by common people and therefore calls for it to be considered a basic competence needed for shaping our world.⁸⁴ In daily life, we talk about designing strategies, tools, programs, objects, and campaigns for the human world. But what about designing a world with other Earth beings and spirits in mind (*heart*)? Escobar highlights this point in the following way: “What is at stake is the decentering of design from its anthropocentric and rationalist basement and recreating it as a tool against the unsustainability rooted in the modern world.”⁸⁵ Because design can refer to a more than world-making practices for consuming purposes, I want to introduce an Indigenous-inspired design proposal linking this relevant notion with ontological design.

3.5. Non-Western Composition Practices and Modern Design

A design has a song, it has a vibration, it has a spirit, a soul that is transmitted.⁸⁶

Chonon Bensho

When the word design (*diseño*) is employed by Chonon Bensho in the quote above to describe the traditional Shipibo *kené* compositions, we can feel that designing for her is an aesthetic and spiritual practice. Chonon’s statement suggests that a “design” of the type of *kené* embodies and transmit forces of this world for remembering and revisiting them. Chonon’s,

⁸⁴ Escobar, 44.

⁸⁵ Escobar, *Sentipensar con la tierra. Nuevas lecturas sobre desarrollo, territorio y diferencia*, 143.

⁸⁶ “Un diseño tiene un canto, tiene una vibración, tiene un espíritu, un alma que se transmite.” Words of shipibokonibo artist, weaver, and poet Chonon Bensho when talking about traditional *kené* designs during Dr. Juan Duchesne lecture “Hacia un humanismo ampliado: aspectos de la intersección entre Humanidades y Biología” [Towards an Expanded Humanism: Aspects of the Intersection between Humanities and Biology] part of the “Etnobotánicas” [Ethnobotanics] Seminar program of Universidad del Cauca, Colombia. (Virtual seminar hold on May 18th, 20th, 25th and 27th, 2021).

and Shipibo conceptions more broadly, of *kené* suggest that design is an activity of creative composition carried out within a relationship with a vibrational and spiritual world from which the designs are received. Consequently, the *kené* design cannot be woven simply by following the aesthetic principles, technical skills, and representational understandings associated with the Western understanding of design or art. Rather, it requires visionary skills and the embodiment of certain personal relationships with the song, spiritual, and vibrational worlds. As Luisa Elvira Belaúnde states, the designs are not crafted for static representation but for performing a change in the world by covering people and things. A relevant understanding of *kené* reveals when considering that these designs not only *represent* a worldview but *perform* powerful paths and currents of knowledge.⁸⁷

When appreciating Chonon's works of art, we can feel how design reveals the Shipibo legitimate world, reality, and life and performs a transformative action through its spirit. For example, Chonon's work composes, along with a more-than-human-world, a piece showing the legitimate relationship between humans and nature when they coincide in the cross design named *koros*, a symbolic space of complementation and balance (figure 1). Let us hear Chonon Bensho's (with her husband Pedro Favaron) comment on this work.

In the specific case of this work, the cross is a symbol of the complementation that must exist between human beings and other living beings in ancestral territory. For this reason, the lower part of the *kené* symbolizes the fish and inhabitants of the world of water, the *jene nete*. On the left side of the cross, a *ronsoco* [capybara] has been painted. The *ronsoco* is one of the rainforest animals whose meat has been part of the regular diet of the Amazonian peoples and belongs to the four-legged beings that walk through the forest. On the right side, a heron has been painted. Herons are fishing birds with abundant populations in Amazonian rivers and lakes and belong to the world of birds or winged beings. At the top of the cross appears the man sailing in his canoe, which allows him to come into contact with the different beings of our ancestral territory. This *koros* design composition symbolizes the inseparable links that relate to all living beings and between which there must always be a balance. The ancient teachings contradict modern

⁸⁷ Belaúnde, *Kené. Arte, ciencia y tradición en diseño* [*Kené. Art, Science and Tradition of Design*], 31.

world practices, which do not respect other beings' lives and think that people can extract whatever they want from the territory. The greed of capitalist modernity breaks with the healthy balance that the ancients knew how to maintain with the territory.⁸⁸

When she presents her composition as a legitimate work of art based on traditional designs in a gallery, she is bridging the traditional practice of *kené* with the modern trajectory of art and design. Her work supports the idea that Non-Western inspired works of art and design involve relational modes of composing reality which challenge the mechanistic ontology of Modernity and the practice of design and art itself. She shows us that design and art can mean an affective and ontological practice of relationality for transforming our world.

3.6. Using Design for Achieving a Profound Ecological Change

Given the ecological crisis scenario, Ontological Design considers the proposition that an alternative ecological worldview is something that can be designed. According to ontological designers, our age demands an ontological recomposition of our planetary modernity. In his book *Designs for the Pluriverse*, Arturo Escobar champions Design Thinking and Ontological Design as two theoretical platforms from which to address issues related to ecological change. Escobar draws a connection between the ecological shift nations and autonomous communities are working toward and the ontological shift evolving within Design.

⁸⁸ “En el caso específico de este trabajo, la cruz es símbolo de la complementación que debe existir entre los seres humanos y los demás seres vivos del territorio. Por eso, la parte inferior del *kené* simboliza a los peces y habitantes del mundo del agua, *jene nete*. En el lado izquierdo de la cruz, se ha pintado a un ronsoco, uno de los animales de monte cuya carne ha sido parte de la dieta regular de los pueblos amazónicos, y que pertenece a los seres de cuatro patas que caminan por el bosque. En el lado derecho se ha pintado una garza, pájaro pescador con poblaciones abundantes en los ríos y lagos amazónicos, que pertenece al mundo de las aves o seres alados. En la parte superior de la cruz aparece el hombre navegando en su canoa, la cual le permite entrar en contacto con los diferentes seres de nuestro territorio ancestral. El conjunto de este diseño *koros* es símbolo de los vínculos indisolubles que relacionan a todos los seres vivos y entre los que debe existir siempre un equilibrio. La enseñanza antigua es contraria a la práctica del mundo moderno, que no respeta la vida del resto de seres y piensa que puede extraer del territorio todo aquello que desee. La codicia de la modernidad capitalista rompe con el equilibrio saludable que los antiguos supieron mantener con el territorio.” Bensch and Favaron, “Chonon Bensch, Ucayali, Perú.”

According to Winograd and Flores, Ontological Design refers to the fact that in designing *things* we are designing *ways of being*. Or stated in another way, as proposed by Anne-Marie Willis, the things we design, design us back.⁸⁹ Escobar's extensive exploration into Ontological Design sheds light on an increasing awareness that design has become an activity with ontological implications. This awareness raises thorny questions related to design ethics, design's connection with the transhumanism agenda, and its role in sustaining or redirecting the modern onto-epistemic order. Therefore, for Escobar the ontological work of design faced with the challenge of achieving a desirable ecological transition would mean imagining and putting into practice other forms of knowing-being-doing without losing our capacity to skillfully navigate our modern ontological commitments.⁹⁰

One of the arguments in Escobar's book is an outline for a field of "Design for transitions" and a second field he calls "Design for autonomy."⁹¹ According to Escobar, the two fields respond to a division of views he observes in ecological discourses between the "Great Transition" and the "Autonomous" views. The first view encompasses a variety of discourses which assume that humanity is entering a new ecologically challenging planetary phase. According to the "Great Transition" view, it is argued that only a significant transformation requiring "fundamental changes in values and novel socioeconomic and institutional arrangements" will effectively tackle this major ecological challenge.⁹² The "Great Transition" view incorporates a wide range of discourses coming both from the Global North and South, for example: economic degrowth, post-development, rights of nature, postcapitalist, biocentric, and post-extractivist discourses. On the other hand, the "Autonomous" view is centered on "the struggles of communities and social movements to defend their territories and worlds against

⁸⁹ Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 110.

⁹⁰ Escobar, 91.

⁹¹ Escobar, 19.

⁹² Escobar, 142.

the ravages of neoliberal globalization.”⁹³ One major difference between these two views is their vision of the world and humanity. While the “Great Transition” view sees one single modern humanity struggling in a “global” and “civilized” world, the “Autonomous” views are precisely struggling to defend the plurality of their worlds and the recognition of a constellation of ways in which humanity is legitimately lived.

Addressing the two main views he identifies; Escobar proposes a theoretical framework of ontological design both for “Autonomous Design” and “Design for Transitions” (see diagram 2). According to the diagram, Ontological Design fulfills a fundamental creative function in forming an interrelationship between the diverse dimensions required for composing an ecological transitional framework. Some of these functions may be, for example, empowering collaborative practices for embodying community, providing directions for life projects aiming toward sustainment in resonance with Earth or coordinating the development of communities rooted in their ancestral practices. By presenting case studies of “Autonomous Design” in Colombia, Escobar exemplifies how Ontological Design, when actualized, can encourage different scenarios and responses that will vary depending on the communities, their territories, and their own relationship with paradigms of modernity.

3.7. Criticism of Escobar’s Framework

Escobar’s view of the ecological change or transition scenario splits the “globe” politically into North and South, although he clearly notes that the Great Transition and Autonomous views can be found in both hemispheres. However, where to situate the eco-

⁹³ Escobar, 20.

civilizational transitions proposed by countries like China, resisting Western-centered notions of civilization?⁹⁴

Escobar’s “Ontological Design/ Transition Design” framework lacks a concrete proposal of where to situate the contribution of the arts and the affective language. Although he mentions the relevance of considering the affective and non-conventional approaches to design, such as dreams, for example, when commenting on the slogan *disoñar* (designing-dreaming) from poet Leon Octavio and social groups in Colombia, he doesn’t explore in depth how the affective and poetical could be a critical key to Ontological Design. Nevertheless, Escobar recognizes that confronting modern rationalist expertise and knowledge practices requires opening the door to intuition, emotion, and body. He states:

It is necessary to reiterate that learning how to take seriously the insights of relationality is one of the most intractable issues modern humans, particularly those qualified as experts, have to confront. What does “nondualist existence” mean in everyday life? An entry point into this question, and a sequitur of this book’s ontological analysis, is the phenomenological insight that we are not just, or even primarily, detached observers but rather participants and designers who engage the world by being immersed in it. Knowing is relating. As the Mapuche poet and *machi* (shaman) Adriana Paredes Pinda puts it in a lecture at Chapel Hill (2014), “*we have to relearn to walk the world as a living being.*” Engaging with people’s lifeworld and attaining again a certain intimacy with the Earth are essential to this endeavor. This inner work is led not only by analytical knowledge but also by what Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) called *conocimiento*, which involves embodied knowledge, reflexivity, intuition, and emotion. In other

⁹⁴ For example, the “ecological civilization” (*shengtai wenming*) planned by China is characterized as a sustainable development strategy that integrates the political and cultural system of the nation: “Different from other national sustainability strategies that China has adopted in the past, eco-civilization takes a more comprehensive approach, integrating not only economic, social, and ecological (or environmental)—the traditional three pillars of sustainability—but also political and cultural systems of the nation.” Gu et al., “Ecological Civilization and Government Administrative System Reform in China”. In terms of ideological discourse, “ecological civilization” is a state-promoted imaginary that contests the “unsustainable development prompted by industrial civilization” by “invoking a Chinese trajectory of traditional eco-philosophy and a reinterpretation of the socialist legacy.” According to the analysis completed by Halskov, Li and Svarverud, the Chinese eco-civilization is a discourse and imaginary of utopic characteristics that aims to transgress the 21st-century model of global capitalism. Furthermore, it presents a new imaginary of the global future guided by the Communist Party and serves as a political basis to support the Party’s promise to the people and its own continuity. Hansen, Li, and Svarverud, “Ecological Civilization.”

words, the inner work demanded for a relational practice of living and designing requires other tools than (or besides) those of theoretical reflection.⁹⁵

Despite recognizing the importance of heart-based practices, Escobar doesn't examine *how* the aesthetical and poetical dimensions may complement or re-elaborate the Transition and Autonomous Design conceptual framework in this book. Certainly, Escobar's framework underscores that all transition thinking needs to develop a fundamental attunement to the Earth, which he identifies as the historical project of the liberation of Mother Earth. It also points to the importance of an "feel-thinking attuned to the Earth" (*sentipensar con la Tierra*) in imbuing a strong notion of relationality within Autonomous thought. Escobar exemplifies this conviction with a statement by a Nasa activist: "who would have believed it: heart and earth are one single being."⁹⁶ However, the activist's statement raises the question of *how* this attunement is achieved, especially when heart and Earth are seemingly so separated in our modern onto-epistemic order. In other words, Escobar doesn't develop how we compose or design that links between "heart and earth," and how we can employ the "*sentipensar*" (feel-thinking) and the "*co-razonar*" (heart-reasoning) that seems so fundamental to his epistemic framework.

Escobar's transitional framework is definitely valuable because it offers an onto-epistemic ground of ecological change in which to grow the Eco poetic reflection. To complement his vision, my proposition is to raise the role of poetry and the arts within this framework by making room for Eco poetic Design. Here I suggest that there exists a cardiogenesis process that exemplifies the spirit of attunement with the Earth from which "transitional" or "autonomous" ecological impulses must originate. Furthermore, there exists an Eco poetic Heart that guides us as we move toward (re)composing the ecological and

⁹⁵ Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 157.

⁹⁶ Escobar, *ibid.*, 204.

relational ontology with the help of the arts and poetry. Whether the framework is “Transitional” or “Autonomous,” experiences of artistic and poetic reconnection with Earth can give us models of *how* this attunement between Heart and Earth is achieved.

3.8. Eco poetic Design

According to my definition, Eco poetic Design is the artistic and poetic practice of composing affective patterns of relationship which seeks a reconnection between human life and the Earth. Eco poetic Design thinking sheds light on different patterns of reconnection created by poets and artists. Also, it fosters the conception that the arts and poetry are a way of imagining and crafting reconnections through ways of life that gradually give birth to an ecologic and affective heart within a relational ontology. To put it another way, Eco poetic Design is the set of practices that make aesthetic and affective connections between human beings and the beings of the Earth in order to prepare the tissues that give birth to an Eco poetic Heart, a heart that beats within a relational conception of the world. Eco poetic Design thinking suggests that the patterns of relationship crafted by poetry and arts are transversal and dense. To say that patterns are transversal means that they cross through different dimensions of reality, such as the rational, spiritual, and aesthetic, and also through various kinds of activities and experiences, for example, ecological learning, artistic composition, caring for animals, cultivating the land, praying, meditating, or taking part in a creative community. To say that patterns are dense means they act like roots creating firm meshes of complexity, sentient connections that bond human and non-human beings’ bodies, hearts, and spirits. Transversality and density are characteristic of artistic and poetic webs of ecological and cultural

commitment.⁹⁷ Moreover, philosophically speaking, transversality and density seem an essential characteristic of relational ontological orders as the meshes in which the possibilities of *being* are enriched in qualities.

Next, I propose some key points to describe these ontological-affective patterns of Eco-poetic Design.

3.9. The Shapes of Love: Eco-poetic Patterns of Love

Takatora asked me about what I usually think when writing poetry.

I told him that lately I was thinking about the truth of things.

Truth is what appears in front of you all the time, like now.

Then, Takatora said something about some Japanese *ikigai* diagram (of the life worth living).

—For me, this diagram, is fine, but it’s two-dimensional, it lacks the third dimension, the dimension of truth.

—Perhaps that is the dimension of love, I told him.

—Yaxkin, that’s right. It is not the dimension of doing what you desire, but the dimension of knowing in your heart that you are loved.

September 23, 2021.⁹⁸

Eco-poetic Cardiogenesis composes patterns of the Eco-poetic Heart, but the force of connection is love. However, this is not romantic love, but a sympathetic love that echoes Ingrid Toro and Omar Felipe Giraldo’s notion of *environmental empathy*, when saying that

⁹⁷ This commitment echoes Donna Haraway’s conception of response-abilities and cat-cradle’s “sympoietic” figuring through which people opt to stay with the trouble. Haraway uses the term “response-ability” as a word that suggests both the act of humans assuming a responsibility and the ability to respond given the ecological mesh of interconnection between species. “Response-ability is about both absence and presence, killing and nurturing, living and dying—and remembering who lives and who dies and how in the string figures of natural-cultural history.” Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 28. Regarding cat cradle’s figuring, Haraway exemplifies the speculative fiction “play” as a string figuring co-creative activity “sf, string figuring, is sym-poietic. Thinking-with my work on cat’s cradle, as well as with the work of another of her companions in thinking, Félix Guattari, Isabelle Stengers relayed back to me how players pass back and forth to each other the patterns-at-stake, sometimes conserving, sometimes proposing and inventing.” Haraway, 34.

⁹⁸ From a conversation in 2022 with Takatora Abe.

“empathetic affectivity” is “the glue, the substance or the myelin” that connects distinct bodies.⁹⁹ Love encompasses relationships of care, negotiation, and responsibility with other beings and these relationships makes us human. Love is not something chaotic or formless, but an aesthetic, affective and ontological force which draws connections between different kinds of qualities in meaningful ways. Love reflects that relational ontologies are aesthetic and involve affective speaking. In light of Toro and Giraldo’s framing, love is the *environmental empathy* that raises between paths and entanglements of bodies: “As we have discussed, paths and entanglements are not disorganized; they are not random encounters but rather follow self-organized aesthetic patterns, through which we find symmetries, proportionalities, balances, and harmony that we deem beautiful in the web of life.”¹⁰⁰

As an ontological force, love gives birth to *beings*. We *are* a work of love. And when love becomes the substance of relationality, it also becomes the note of the ontological string defining the being of things. Eco-philosophically speaking, the relationist principle *A is B in relation to C* becomes a matter of how the relation can be articulated in terms of love to the Earth. For example, we see this in statements like *we are nature, we share a common origin with all beings, and spirit is embedded in all the things of the universe*.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, love is also an epistemic force because these patterns shape modes of interaction that become wisdom

⁹⁹ “La noción de empatía ambiental nos sirve para decir que el afecto empático es el pegamento, la sustancia, la mielina que conecta los distintos tipos de cuerpos a medida que interactuamos con ellos.” [The notion of environmental empathy helps us to say that empathic affect is the glue, substance, and myelin that connects the different types of bodies as we interact.] Giraldo and Toro, “Prefacio” in *Afectividad Ambiental. Sensibilidad, Empatía, Estéticas Del Habitar*.

¹⁰⁰ Giraldo and Toro, sec. Estética de los saberes vernáculos [Aesthetics of Vernacular Wisdom].

¹⁰¹ These conceptions also pose philosophical problems, such as the differentiation between the individual and the living animated world. Philosophically, Emmanuelle Coccia has articulated the notion of *being nature* as *being born from Gaia*. In Coccia’s vision, every being born *is* nature. See Coccia, Emanuelle, *Metamorfosis* [Metamorphosis], 28. It is worth noting that Coccia’s view resonates with Indigenous perspectives, such as Abadio Green’s view of human beings as children of Mother Earth. Tackling the obstacle of individual identity, according to Coccia, living beings exist in a sort of “cosmic twinship” in which to be alive means to be an “I” and at the same time being “world.” He states: “Being nature means being a twin to everything that lives. [...] Not only are all beings of the same species twins, but all species are twins: humans, ants, oaks, cyanobacteria, and viruses are no more than heterozygous twins who do not stop duplicating the reality of the world in which they are body and spirit” Coccia, Emanuelle, 32.

for sustaining human life. In other words, they shape the practical wisdom for living. Thus, love inherited by our human family and the love we nurture entails the necessary ontological and epistemic forces to understand *how* modern humans regenerate their ancient ontological meshes of meaning in their journey through the modern ecological trajectory.

Heart patterns are diverse in love. This means that, when approaching works of art and their histories through this conception of Eco-poetic Design, we are actually exploring the diversity of Eco-poetic Hearts. Patterns differ from individual to individual and community to community; however, they all are interconnected by this force shaped by human experiences. In other words, love within individuals and groups exists in a broad dialogue with traditions. Therefore, an Eco-poetic Heart is something crafted *in dialogue* with a tradition.

Love is a force grouping morphologies of recognition. Through love we recognize the plenitude of life in other beings, and, ontologically speaking, recognize a vibrant a spirit-filled real world which I call the living Earth. This means that the Eco-poetic Design approach resound with a diversity of worlds recognizing a love-based mesh underlying the Earth, such as the Christian Creation, and worlds such as Mother Earth, Gaia, and the Japanese Life-worlds described by Shoko Yoneyama.¹⁰² The love morphologies traverse different kind of practices and faiths. This makes them a potential rich soil for practicing interdisciplinarity and cross-cultural approaches.

Finally, Eco-poetic Hearts are experienced and embodied by subjects, and it is from the body that the Eco-poetic Heart is born. Therefore, when examining these patterns, we must recognize the embodiments and practices through which those designs came to exist as flesh.

Diagram 3 illustrates this work's Eco-poetic Design proposal in relation to the Ontological/Transition Design approach and the exploration undertaken by this research.

¹⁰² Shoko Yoneyama has discerned the characteristics of the “animistic” vision in contemporary Japan in her notable work *Voices for the Anthropocene from post-Fukushima Japan* (2019).

Within the “Great Transition” and “Autonomous” transition trajectories proposed by Escobar, Eco-poetic Design creates a space for thinking about how the heart works for the ecological transitions or changes. At the center of my proposal lies the Eco-poetic Heart, which is a living tissue anchored in the intersections between Heart and Earth, Cardiogenesis, and Love. Based on this framework, the Eco-poetic Design approach invites us to explore the composition of a relational (ecological) and poetic (artistic) ontology. Part II of this work explores five ways through which we can exemplify Eco-poetic Design: the composition of self-identity through self-portraiture painting (Frida Kahlo), the building of a new society through a countercultural way of life (The Tribes), the embodiment of ancient wisdom through walking and poetry composition (Nanao Sakaki), the articulation of an ecosophy (ecological wisdom) through philosophical and poetic reflection (Sansei Yamao) and the management of personal activities through agroecological farming and artistic creation (El Xastle).

3.10. Conclusion

Eco-poetic Cardiogenesis is a whole-life and radical process based on love, recognition, and responsibility to the Earth, giving birth to a new heart. It demands nurturing our existing heart and patiently guiding it toward the eco-poetic relationship. We can conceive of it as a gradual creation within ourselves of an eco-poetic *kokoro* (mind, heart, and inner nature) by gradually metabolizing the modern onto-epistemic framework of civilization. To describe the heart-making process, Patricio Guerrero Arias has employed the term “Corazonar” to describe a movement of consciousness for recognizing the wisdom of the heart seen in ancient and Indigenous traditions characterized by privileging tender, feminine, and sacred approaches to the world. Guerrero describes this “Corazonar” as a relearning process that brings the subject

closer to those other subjectivities whose existential horizons remain distant, mainly by hearing, speaking, and sharing.¹⁰³

Ecopoetic Cardiogenesis retrieves Guerrero Arias' notion regarding practices of opening and contact, and also states that "Corazonar" has a telluric and spiritual dimension: episodes in our lives that break the hardened tissues of our previous heart. We can relate this process to emotional and spiritual dynamics such as revelations, turning points, or life-changing experiences. The spiritual dimension gradually fosters the realization of an entirely new dimension of existence, as Takatora's words quoted at the beginning of this section suggest.

To illustrating the Ecopoetic Cardiogenesis process, we can draw inspiration from Masaki Takashi's (正木高志) metaphor of the ecologic cocoon and the metamorphosis philosophy of Emmanuel Coccia.¹⁰⁴ The process is similar to crafting a cocoon to give birth to a new inner nature. The cocoon is the product of an interaction that exists within a relationship. For many insects, it is a process of digesting and transforming the substance of the plant into a matrix, a mesh capable of supporting and nurturing a new being to be born. When the cocoon fabrication starts, it follows some patterns, some intuition, and some wisdom. Eventually, inside the cocoon, the transformation will mature and give birth to a new transformed creature. In the same way, an Ecopoetic Heart is born. To reiterate, Ecopoetic Cardiogenesis prepares the conditions necessary for the radical transformation, whose agency is the life of the Earth itself.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Guerrero Arias, "Corazonar desde el calor de las sabidurías insurgentes, la frialdad de la teoría y la metodología" [Corazonar from insurgents' wisdoms warm, the coldness of the theory and the methodology], 217.

¹⁰⁴ See Masaki (正木), 『地球のマユの子供たち』 [Cosmic Cocoon Children]; Coccia, Emanuelle, *Metamorfosis*.

¹⁰⁵ In a perspective that positions human beings as part of nature and in relation to a living earth (i.e., Mother Earth, Buddha Nature, or God's Creation, etc.), the Earth becomes an entity imbued with a transformative agency that can be explained by each ontological framework. In the example of Mother Earth, this agency would exist as we are conceived, carried to term, and born by a planetary-scale Mother, usually related to the feminine principle of fecundity that governs the world. In the example of Buddha Nature, this agency would be granted by the potential of achieving illumination and giving birth to the "Buddha inside us" (in fact, the Sanskrit concept of *tathāgatagarbha* involves, to some degree, the idea of an embryo or womb). Finally, in the example of God's

Following the wisdom of the metamorphoses, we can avoid the “self-alchemy” and posthuman approaches willing to design “humans.” Eco-poetic Cardiogenesis requires the intimate practice of directing ourselves into a loving relationship with the Earth. Moreover, It also requires confidence in the notion of being alive to be born again. The whole process pushes us day by day to pay more attention to this world and its signals, crafting a new ontological relationship for the new being we are becoming, and finally experiencing love and fulfillment in the heart that has born.

To summarize the arguments of this chapter:

1. Ontologies of disconnection can be reconnected through the ability of the heart to compose relationships.
2. An Eco-poetic Heart is a Heart which exists within a relational ontology and an affective relationship with the Earth, which is recognized as a “living Earth.”
3. A heart composing eco-poetic relationships eventually will give birth to an Eco-poetic Heart. This process is called Eco-poetic Cardiogenesis.
4. An Eco-poetic Heart and Eco-poetic Cardiogenesis can find a place within Ontological Design thinking. This field emphasizes world-and-being-creating aspects of Design and Arts in our modernity.
5. The concepts of Eco-poetic Heart and Eco-poetic Cardiogenesis can find a place in Ontological Design thinking within the framework of “Design for transitions” and “Autonomous design” proposed by Arturo Escobar. This introduces an approach which I have called Eco-poetic Design

creation, this agency is granted by the Holy Spirit, which carries God’s power of creation for transforming us into a “new creation.” In each of the cases mentioned, the cocoon metaphor can be enriched and adjusted to each framework.

6. Just as Car Design designs cars industrially, Eco poetic Design poetically and artistically designs “ontological and affective patterns of relationship that search for a reconnection between human life and the Earth.” These patterns are based on relationships of love and the process is explained through the “cocoon” metaphor of crafting a mesh or tissue preparing the birth of an Eco poetic Heart.
7. Eco poetic Design opens a field of exploration regarding how these patterns can be arranged and actualized in concrete humans’ lives.

PART II

Chapter 4

The Animalist Perspective of Self-identity: Fulang-Chang and Frida Kahlo

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore Frida Kahlo's poetics of self-representation with animals. It is argued that Frida's famous self-portraits reveal the composition of an animalist vision contesting Western anthropocentric values and ontology while demonstrating an Indigenous-inspired understanding of the "human" persona. Moreover, Frida's animalist vision of herself in many of her pieces where she appears surrounded by animals and other species can be connected to the notion of "nahualli." This animalist vision reveals an aesthetic dimension of the relationship between humanity and animality and an ontological design woven through Frida's history of companionship with Mexican native animals.

4.1. Animals' Suffering

Tragedy is the most *ridiculous* thing "man" has
but I'm sure that
animals suffer,
and yet they do not exhibit their "pain"
in "theatres" neither *open* nor
"closed" (their "homes").
and their *pain* is more *real*
than any *image*
that any man can
"perform"

as painful.¹⁰⁶

Frida Kahlo (excerpt from her diary)

The above excerpt from Frida Kahlo's diary shows that the Mexican painter had an acute awareness of animals' lives and empathized with their suffering. For Frida, animals experienced an existential grade of "reality" defying representation. Ironically, Frida, who is famous for representing her own suffering through self-portraiture, recognized in animality a profound existential condition. The appearance of the animal world in her paintings invites the viewer to explore the relationship between representation, art, and animals.

Focusing on Frida's history with animals and some of her famous self-portraits, this chapter examines the representation of animality in the fine arts. Considering the importance of perspective, gaze, and perspective within environmental humanism and multispecies studies, it is worth wondering if, among genres linked to the West's anthropocentric representation such as the self-portrait, Frida's self-portraits allow a glimpse into another way of presenting the human-animal face in the mirror of our modernity.

This chapter argues that Frida Kahlo's self-portraits propose an animalist vision based on love and care that questions human and animal figures' anthropocentric representation. Frida Kahlo's vision found inspiration in a vision of self with an Indigenous origin: that of the *nahualli*. This exploration of Frida Kahlo's animalist perspective offers us a glimpse of the patterns of love in Frida's relationship with animal species. These patterns are analyzed in her compositions and are compared with other self-portraits where the human figure subdues the animal figure's presence. Finally, this chapter suggests that Frida Kahlo crossed the frontiers

¹⁰⁶ The excerpt comes from the English translation of Frida's diary, published in 2005 and translated by Bárbara Crow de Toledo and Ricardo Pohlenz. I'm omitting the parts that Frida had crossed out in the original. Kahlo, *The Diary of Frida Kahlo*, 239.

of the Western humanist self-portraiture culture to smuggle the seeds of a Mesoamerican ontological vision of animality and succeeded in weaving an Eco-poetic Design into her art.

4.2. Animals, Animalistic Perspectives, and Notions of Self

The Western modern relationship with animality, philosophically speaking, has been based on an ontological division between humanity and animals. Donna Haraway and Val Plumwood have noted that the boundary that the modernist paradigm has drawn to mark this difference has been fixed as an ontological division that, with the evolution of capitalist culture, has deepened into an ethical and ontological abyss, an incommensurable distance, and a hyper-separated dualism.¹⁰⁷ Giorgio Agamben argues that the scientific name *Homo sapiens*, which supposedly defines our identity as a species, is the form of a sort of cognitive device to deal with our own identity as separate from other species: “*Homo sapiens*, then, is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human.”¹⁰⁸ He notes that the “anthropogenic” machine has, in the Western world, dealt with the interactions between our understandings of “human” and “animal” through a continuous habit (both ancient and modern) of visualizing human beings as a metaphysical conjunction of an animal or natural element comprising the body and a supernatural, social, or divine one comprising the soul. In sum, our understanding of humanity implies a recognition of animals’ ontological status in relationship with humans.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Derrida have observed that this “anthropogenic” device has historically been an ontologically exclusivist machine that results in a consequent problematic ethics toward animals and our modern

¹⁰⁷ Rose, “Cosmopolitics,” 103.

¹⁰⁸ Agamben, *The Open*, 26.

disconnection from their suffering.¹⁰⁹ This cultural device has also shaped the face of human identities and ethics, both personal and collective, in the mirrors of humanism.¹¹⁰ Of these mirrors, one that stands out, given its ability to capture our attention and hearts, is the art or poetics of representing the self. This poetics of self-representation can include diverse genres and techniques, such as self-portrait and autobiography, and has found a place in museums and galleries, books, and diaries. From confessional songwriting to the so-called “selfies” populating the internet, participation in a poetics of self-representation is a nearly universal way we modern humans present ourselves to others and construct our identities.

Although the Western poetics of self-representation has reinforced the anthropogenic device of the ontological human-and-animal dualism, some artists have distanced themselves from this view and have confronted the hegemonic discourses of the Western status quo. When I looked at Frida Kahlo’s paintings some years ago, I was amazed by her ability to situate nature and animals as the protagonists in her work. This initial sense of amazement developed into a question about how she viewed animals and how those perceptions related to her vision of herself. At the beginning of this inquiry, I came across the expression, “animalist vision,” in an intriguing passage from Derrida’s posthumous work, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*:

I admit to it in the name of autobiography and in order to confide in you the following: given the infinite complications that I am in the process of recalling, I have a particularly animalist perception and interpretation of what I do, think, write, live, but, in fact, of everything, of the whole of history, culture, and so-called human society, at every level, macro-or microscopic. My sole concern is not that of interrupting this animalist “vision” but of taking care not to sacrifice to it any difference or alterity, the fold of any complication, the opening of any abyss to come.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ See Agamben, *The Open*; Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.

¹¹⁰ Agamben argues that Humanism, as the realm of thought created by the European anthropological machine, is based on both the metaphysical mystery of conjunction exclusive to the human world and human existence, and an ontologically degraded world and existence reserved for animals and other living beings. According to his view, humanism can be seen to function as a narrative to bolster human anthropocentrism.

¹¹¹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 92.

Here, Derrida confesses the “animalist” view of himself and the world while recognizing it not as a limitation but as an epistemic ground for his philosophy. What, though, does it mean to have an animalist vision of oneself, and how can we examine this “perception and interpretation” more deeply as it relates to (human) identity? Individual poetics of self-representation can help us develop a line of sight for making connections.

Ethically looking animals suffering caused by humans’ modern civilization, it is reasonable to think that if our anthropocentric conceptual border undergirds our current relationship with animals, we ought to eliminate that abysmal division responsible for the colonization and destruction of their worlds and our lack of compassion towards their lives. Consequently, we ought also to look for an alternative ontological device allowing us to reconnect humanity and animality in a respectful and empathetic way.

As the Australian anthropologist Deborah Bird notes, in non-Western philosophies an alternative vision moves beyond the assumption that difference and equivalence between species is fundamentally ontological.¹¹² Within these philosophies, we can begin to search for the vision that emerges behind the anthropocentric mirror which had previously reflected only the “human” as rich and full, standing in contrast to a passive, mechanical, and existentially “poor of world” animal existence.¹¹³ Alternative visions emerging from other philosophies can introduce us to other ontological frameworks of humanity based on relationships and respectful coexistence.

¹¹² In contrast to this ontological distinction, she suggests that an alternative vision treats difference between species as a matter of phenomenological distinctions. Rose, “Cosmopolitics,” 104–5.

¹¹³ Bird Rose notes that: “Much of the contemporary discussion of differences between humans and other animals goes back to Heidegger’s statement that animals are ‘poor in world’, and to his efforts to support that assertion.” Rose, 104.

4.3. Frida and Her Companion Animals

Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) was a Mexican-born painter of the twentieth century, a “serial self-portraitist,”¹¹⁴ and a “definitive paradox”¹¹⁵ whose paintings became widely popularized after her death. Nowadays, her self-portraits have become famous worldwide and are used as icons for many identity-based movements, including the Chicano, LGBTQ+, and Feminist movements. According to the art critic James Hall, Frida’s work has earned a place in the history of self-portraiture since it both anticipated and influenced the twentieth- and twenty-first-century tendency to explore the artist’s body and identity. He further argues that Kahlo’s uniqueness lies in her appropriation of this paradigmatic genre in Western art through her own exploration of an identity that portrays the “intricate plays of polarities” between man and woman, Mexican and European culture, and face and body.¹¹⁶

Art historians like Hall have typically focused on Frida’s dialectic aesthetics of identity. For others, Frida’s aesthetic world can be characterized as an aesthetics of suffering. This approach is mainly based on her biography, and highlights Frida’s severe illness and episodes of physical pain.¹¹⁷ However, very little research has explored Frida’s aesthetics in connection with ancient Indigenous philosophies and nature.¹¹⁸ Among recent analyses approaching Frida’s art and life through its bonds with nature, Udall’s work focus on her iconography of

¹¹⁴ Hall, “Beyond the Face: Modern and Contemporary Self-portraits” in *The Self-Portrait: A Cultural History*.

¹¹⁵ “Frida es una paradoja definitiva para ejemplificar el poder de la rebeldía ante el destino, del triunfo de una actitud, de la belleza del ser consciente, de la voluntad tendida como flecha ante un destino adverso.” [Frida is a definitive paradox to exemplify the power of rebellion against destiny, the triumph of an attitude, the beauty of being conscious, and the will stretched out like an arrow against an adverse Destiny.] Tibol, *Frida Kahlo* [Frida Kahlo: An Open Life], 15.

¹¹⁶ Hall, *The Self-Portrait: A Cultural History*.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Amezcua, “Frida Kahlo o la estética del padecimiento” [Frida Kahlo or the Aesthetics of Suffering].

¹¹⁸ Some works approaching Frida Kahlo’s works through their relation with Indigenous cultures are: Helland, “Aztec Imagery in Frida Kahlo’s Paintings”; Vera, “Octavio Paz y Frida Kahlo” [Octavio Paz y Frida Kahlo: The Pre-Columbian Heritage].

wings and flying,¹¹⁹ while Komatsu and Maki focuses on her iconography of plants.¹²⁰ Given how much has been written about Frida Kahlo, it is surprising that a facet of her life which has always figured prominently in her work —her relationships with her companion animals— has received so little academic attention.¹²¹

Frida and Diego Rivera, the famous muralist and her husband, lived with two spider monkeys named Fulang-Chang and Caimito de Guayabal, a parrot named Bonito, an eagle called Gertrudis Caca Blanca, several xoloitzcuintli dogs, including one called Señor Xolotl, and even a fawn named Granizo.¹²² When researching Frida’s history with these Mexican animals, one frequently encounters popular magazines, blog entries, and websites from museums and galleries which insist on recounting the history of Diego and Frida’s “pets.” Nevertheless, Frida’s paintings and photographs taken by her friends, such as Lola Álvarez Bravo, Florence Arquin, and Gisèle Freund, reveal a more profound and rich history of cohabitation and companionship (figures 2 and 3). Frida’s relationship with these animals was not a conventional owner-pet relationship. Instead, it was a relationship strongly influenced by Indigenous and popular Mexican philosophies.

Under careful analysis, these pictures point us toward a history of companionship that Frida explores in even greater depth through her self-portraits. Moreover, many of Frida’s famous self-portraits reveal an aesthetic of identity constructed according to an indigenously rooted vision of herself in connection with animals (co-essence). This aspect

¹¹⁹ Udall, “Frida Kahlo’s Mexican Body.”

¹²⁰ See for example, Komatsu (小松), 「フリーダ・カーロ：人間身体から植物への擬態，生命の循環」 [Frida Kahlo: Mimicry from Human Body to Plant, the Cycle of Life]. And Maki, “Kahlo’s Philodendron.”

¹²¹ Recently, there has been a shift toward reviewing Frida’s work through new lenses. One exhibit that stands out is “Frida Kahlo: Art, garden, life” held by the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx, see Daubmann, “The Botany That Inspired the Artist.”

¹²² Bradley, “Frida Kahlo’s Monkeys, Dogs & Birds.”

of Frida's aesthetics contests the traditionally anthropocentric aesthetics of Western self-portraiture.

4.4. Animalier vs. Animalist: Two Contrasting Approaches to Animals in Self-portrait

In the Western art tradition, self-portraiture has played a significant role in shaping our sense of individuality. Moreover, self-portraiture is said to be the defining visual genre of our confessional age.¹²³ As Hall explains, self-portrait is one of the most popular forms of representation in modernity, and its popularity in modern art is heavily based on the expectation that it can give us a “privileged access to sitter’s soul.” Within the Western worldview, self-portraiture is a genre connected to the history of mirrors and the enchantments they hold as windows for discovering our own identities.¹²⁴

The tradition of Western self-portraiture employs a wide range of techniques for displaying the psychology and personality of artists, as well as their relationships to their environments. Some self-portraits were painted to communicate the class, hobbies, and status of the artist, for example presenting Dürer as a noble gentleman (*Self-portrait at 26*, 1498), Courbet as a traveler (*The Meeting*, 1854), or Warhol as a celebrity (*Self-Portrait*, 1987). With its focus on the human figure, this genre has been central in influencing the image of modern human subjectivity in its various manifestations. With regard to non-human species, self-portraiture has assigned value to the human figure through scale and composition in relation to other beings (i.e., animals, plants, and objects), thus establishing networks of signification between humans and other subjects portrayed in the scene.

¹²³ Hall, “Introduction” in *The Self-Portrait: A Cultural History*.

¹²⁴ This visual capability of the mirror to reflect our body gained a more abstract, subjective connotation in the twentieth century as it became associated with confessional genres, psychoanalysis, memoir, dreams, and autobiographical accounts (Hall, 2015). This confessional shift is also worth noting, particularly in Kahlo's paintings (Hall, 2015).

I would argue that the self-portrait is not by definition an anthropocentric genre that separates humanity from animality, vegetality, or other ontological conditions, but rather an ideological battleground for anthropocentric representations of domination and other heterodox ones, including representations of ontological relationships. In anthropocentric representations, we find that the human figure establishes a dominant relationship with the non-human figures. In heterodox representations, the human figure may assume other forms of relationship. To illustrate this argument, I contrast a representative self-portrait featuring the anthropocentric gaze with Frida Kahlo's self-portrait, both of which are part of the collections of renowned museums.

The first one is François Desportes' *Autoportrait de l'artiste en chasseur* [*Self-portrait in Hunting Dress*] (ca. 1699) offered by Desportes as his reception piece for the Académie Royale. In this painting, the subject is the artist, who represents himself as an aristocratic recreational hunter. Furthermore, this self-portrait participates in a broader chapter of eighteenth-century Western artistic tradition that represents animals through a lens of recreational and aristocratic values and practices, such as hunting and falconry. "Animal painters" like François Desportes initiated a surge in animal and still life paintings that were widely produced throughout the nineteenth century.

Let us observe the composition of *Self-Portrait in Hunting Dress* (figure 4). In this painting, animals are either dead or looking toward the human figure. All the animals' lines of sight are oriented toward the hunter's face. Looking carefully, we can observe that the gazes of the animals and the human figure form a compositional triangle (figure 5). At the bottom right are the vacant stares of the dead hare, duck, and quails. On the left, at a higher level, are the whippets, looking up from their position toward the man, who is seated like a king in a throne. Thus, we can recognize that this composition centers the human figure within a specific

relationship of hierarchy between species. This results in a particular depiction of aristocratic pleasures and the perception of animals as trophies or servants.

Compared to Desportes' self-portrait, Frida's self-portraits with animals take a 180 degree turn from this view. Her self-portraits, 55 in total, portray a history of companionship with animals that was inspired by Mexican Indigenous philosophies. Let us begin our analysis with Frida's self-portrait *Fulang-Chang y yo* [*Fulang-Chang and I*] from 1937 (figure 6).

This painting is housed at the New York Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). According to MOMA's web page description in 2019, *Fulang-Chang and I* can be interpreted as a humoristic appropriation of the European tradition of Madonna portraits with a touch of subversion. MOMA's curator interprets the appearance of animals in Frida's work as pets "replacing" the children that Frida could not have with Diego.¹²⁵ The interpretation of animals as symbols "replacing human people" due to the *horror vacui* in Frida's works is mainly based on comments made by Frida herself.¹²⁶ However, I suggest that the artist's way of life highlights the environmental importance of her work by showing that companion animals are not meant to be dominated, but rather sentient beings to be loved as individuals. Rather than viewing Frida's work and identity through the lens of her tragic biography, European art, or Diego Rivera, I aim to use other lenses that do not disregard the fundamental question of who Fulang-Chang is and why Frida signed the portrait "Fulang-Chang y yo" (Fulang-Chang and I).

It is necessary to depart from MOMA's entry, however interesting its anecdotes are, for it obscures the history of Frida's cohabitation with animals and the peculiarities of her perception of "animal" and "human," which, we must stress, is specifically rooted in the soil of the Mexican Indigenous and popular heart. In opposition to the "pet" interpretation, I will

¹²⁵ Roberts, "MoMA | A Close Look: Frida Kahlo's Fulang-Chang and I."

¹²⁶ Pastás, "Análisis, Obra Frida Kahlo" [Analysis, Frida Kahlo's Work].

examine the history of Frida's cohabitation with her *animalitos*,¹²⁷ as they are called in Monica Brown's bilingual children's book "Frida and her animalitos."¹²⁸ Let us shift from the vision of Frida's "extravagant pets" toward the world of the animalitos who lived *alongside* her in the Casa Azul. Let us give Fulang-Chang the recognition she or he deserves, because the title is *Fulang-Chang and I*, and, as is well known, the order of appearance matters in composition.¹²⁹

Fulang-Chang is the name of the spider monkey who appears in the foreground of the self-portrait. We know for a fact that Frida lived with Fulang-Chang (originally a present from Diego) and Caimito de Guayabal in the Casa Azul, a beautiful, colonial-style house with extensive gardens in the Coyoacán neighborhood of Mexico City. Fulang-Chang and Caimito de Guayabal appear in many of the self-portraits she painted from 1938 until about 1945. This means that for roughly eight years, Frida shared her house, time, heart, and art with these two spider monkeys. Fulang-Chang was a spider monkey, or "mono araña," (*Ateles geoffroyi*). Along with the howler monkey, spider monkeys are one of the two remaining species of monkeys in present-day Mexico. Their habitat is now limited to just a few areas of the southeastern Mexican rainforest, and they are an endangered species that is close to extinction.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, in ancient times these monkeys played an important role in Aztec life, especially in traditional stories and iconography.

Ozomatli or *ozomahtli*, is the Nahuatl word for monkey, which Frida was highly likely familiar with. According to the myth of the five Cosmogonic Suns, modern monkeys are the descendants of a previous humanity that inhabited the era ended by the Sun of Wind (Nahui

¹²⁷ *Animalitos* is the diminutive of "animals" in Spanish and can be translated as "little animals." The "-ito" suffix also connotes affection and tenderness.

¹²⁸ Brown and Parra, *Frida Kahlo y Sus Animalitos*.

¹²⁹ This is especially true in the Spanish language and its poetic sense. Take, for example, the title of the famous book by Juan Ramón Jiménez, *Platero y yo* [*Platero and I*] (1914), about the relationship between Platero (a donkey) and a young boy.

¹³⁰ "Mono Araña Centroamericano (*Ateles geoffroyi*)" [Central American Spider Monkey (*Ateles Geoffroyi*)].

Ehecatl).¹³¹ Ozomatli, the monkey deity, is also the sign of the 11th day in the Aztec calendar and is associated with fertility, pleasure, and exuberance.¹³² As is often the case, animals that appear in calendars tend to be linked to histories and characteristics that influence people born under those signs. Ozomatli is represented in popular folk tales, ancient Mexican codices, sculptures, and ceramics.¹³³ Frida and Diego's deep relationship with ancient Mexican representations of animals is evidenced by the huge collection of pieces representing animals they gathered in the Anahuacalli house.

Fulang-Chang, the spider monkey, is the central figure in the composition of *Fulang-Chang and I*. Here, in relationship to the viewer, Frida appears behind Fulang-Chang. Her hair is long, black, and smooth, and its color-contrast with her clothes imitates Fulang-Chang's fur colors: black and pale gray. The picture presents a game of interspecies mimicry. These species include not only Frida and Fulang-Chang, but also the two "old man cactus" (*Cephalocereus senilis*), the ear-shaped plant that resembles a cristatus variety of cactus or a "chichicastle manso" (*Wigandia urens*), and three broad leaves in the background that Ethyn Maki has identified as a species of *Philodendron*, a sacred Mexican plant known as *huacalxochitl*.¹³⁴ According to MOMA's Roberts, the self-portrait's humoristic visual game can be understood as an "irreverent ode to hair."¹³⁵ However, from my perspective, by bringing together a tropical rainforest monkey, hairy Mexican plants, and Frida herself, this painting also becomes an artistic tribute to the interspecies game of self-expression. Additionally, hair becomes a signal of identity not just for human subjects, but for all five creatures that seem to be looking toward the viewer. Thus, the portrait's game presents an overall composition of subjects who face

¹³¹ Moreno de los Arcos, "Los cinco soles cosmogónicos" [The Five Cosmogonic Suns].

¹³² Urbani, "De uzumatin, jimias y otros micos mexicanos" [Of Uzumatin, Jimias and Other Mexican Micos: Neotropical Primates in the Novo-Hispanic Chronicles of the 16th Century].

¹³³ The spider monkey, represented by the Aztec Ozomatli, is also a native species which is said to have been the *nahualli* of Xochipilli (the deity of spring, the arts, and poetry).

¹³⁴ Maki, "Kahlo's Philodendron."

¹³⁵ Roberts, "MoMA | A Close Look: Frida Kahlo's Fulang-Chang and I."

directly toward the viewer while sharing a proud and individually distinct message of “hair” (figure 7).

Now, let us move to Frida’s work *Autorretrato con mono* [*Self-portrait with Small Monkey*] from 1945 (figure 8). In this painting, three figures look directly toward the viewer: the xoloitzcuintli dog, Frida, and a spider monkey that could be Fulang-Chang or Caimito de Guayabal. The other figure that appears is in three-quarter view and seems to be an ancient, likely feminine, character, which resembles the ceramic pieces that Diego collected from Colima and western Mexico. This terracotta figure seemingly observes the other three from the background. All four figures in the painting are bound by a ribbon that circles their necks. The interweaving strand around the necks of the four figures suggests a connection between these figures and a kind of special communion. The cumulative effect produces a sense of equality across difference.

Let us explore the significance of that ribbon. Sharyn Udall has identified two ideas of importance to this research, namely that Frida’s ribbons stand for the links that “tie her, literally, to her companion animals.”¹³⁶ Thus, the ribbon painting suggests an interspecies bond that is also connected to the gaze of the ancient terracotta figure. The gaze of the Indigenous figure may be a clue that helps us to enter the world underlying this self-portrait.

The dog portrayed is not a “generic” dog, but a xoloitzcuintli dog. In is worth noting that one of Frida’s dogs was called Señor Xolotl (Mr. Xolotl), in reference to Xolotl, the guiding spirit of the underworld, drawing a connection between her companion dogs and the sacred underworld of death, Mictlan. In fact, for Aztecs, xoloitzcuintli dogs were respected as animal incarnations (*nahualli*) of Xolotl and spiritual guides that helped lead human beings in their journey to Mictlan after death. As Helland has noted regarding the painting *El abrazo de amor*

¹³⁶ Udall, “Frida Kahlo’s Mexican Body,” 13.

del universo, la tierra (México), yo, Diego y el señor Xólotl [*The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth (Mexico), Diego, Me and Señor Xolotl*] (1949), the xoloitzcuintli dog's figure may be polysemic in Frida's painting, but one of its possible significances may be the representation of Xolotl, the twin brother of Quetzalcoatl.¹³⁷

Given Frida's years spent living with her "animalitos," we can assert that her relationship with the animals living in the Casa Azul, even if she used the Spanish word "mascotas," was closer to a kind relationship between *companion animals* than to the contemporary one between humans and "pets," as it is usually characterized.¹³⁸ Animal companions were significant in Frida's life because they helped to heal her physical and emotional wounds, and simultaneously, as seen in her self-portraits, they reinforced the connection of her identity to Mexican Indigenous spiritual visions of human life. This, in fact, may be the vision connected to the eyes of the mysterious pre-Columbian creature: human beings are linked to animals by the force of their the *nahual* (figure 9).

The word *nahual* refers to a spiritual component of a human individual, similar to the Western notion of anima or soul, which can adopt many forms and relate with the environment. The term *nahual* is widespread through a vast and ethnically diverse territory that goes from northern Central America up to Mexico, and it is relatively common to hear about *nahual* and *nahuales* (its plural form) in rural areas and Indigenous communities. Furthermore, the term "Nahualism" refers to a whole set of phenomena such as extra-corporeal experiences, medicine, sorcery and shamanic practices, dream interpretation, and some individuals' ability to change into animal forms (similar to the Western notion of therianthropy).

¹³⁷ Helland, "Aztec Imagery in Frida Kahlo's Paintings," 10.

¹³⁸ Donna Haraway portrays companion species as a category bigger than companion animals that implode nature and culture in historically specific stories of living beings and people related to each other in a significant otherness. This approach to stories of living with animals has "relation" as the "smallest possible unit of analysis," see Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 15–25.

According to Martínez González in his book *El nahualismo* [*Nahualism*] (2011), the word *nahual*, which has its root in the Nahuatl term *nahualli*, is highly polysemic, polyvalent, and has changed in its use over time. As his book states, despite all the diverse uses, the notion of *nahual* comes from an shared Indigenous symbolic system in which the core concept of *nahualli* refers to a particular type of relation of co-essence between a human being and another creature: “Simultaneously with birth, a non-human creature, called *nahualli*, is sometimes assigned to the person to protect, assist, and advise them throughout their life [...] Man and his co-essence are so closely linked that any damage suffered by the *nahualli* will have an impact on its human counterpart.”¹³⁹

Based on the definition of *nahualli* as a relationship of co-essence discussed above, I suggest that Frida assumed an Indigenous perspective that shared this symbolic system of the *nahualli*. Moreover, there are some clues that Frida was both aware of, and interested in, Mexican Indigenous understanding of *nahualli*. For example: the parrots portrayed in Frida’s portraits were considered Frida’s *nahuales* by her close friend Anita Brenner;¹⁴⁰ Frida and Diego had a vast collection of Indigenous pottery and sculptures with animal motifs later moved to the Anahuacalli House; In her work *Xibalba-Alado-Xólotl* (ca. 1950) Frida painted a xoloitzcuintli dog that appeared in her dreams surrounded by the words “Xibalba-Alado-Xólotl-7 ríos” [Xibalba-winged-Xólotl-7 rivers] that recognizes the “nahualist” character of these dogs as incarnations of Xolotl; and Frida’s painting *El venado herido* [*The Wounded Deer*], from 1946, is commonly interpreted to portray Frida’s image of her *nahual* in the form of a woman-deer.¹⁴¹ All these clues suggest that she was aware of the “nahualist” nature of her vision of animals.

¹³⁹ González, *El nahualismo* [*Nahualism*], 502.

¹⁴⁰ Udall, “Frida Kahlo’s Mexican Body,” 13; Calabró, “Frida Kahlo and Mexican Tradition Identity,” 102.

¹⁴¹ Echávarri, “Frida Kahlo, escrituras plurales” [Frida Kahlo, Plural Writings], 53; Vera, “Octavio Paz y Frida Kahlo,” 53.

Considering the perspective of Nahualism allows for a reinterpretation of Frida's self-portraits from an indigenously inspired vision of identity. In this view, a human identity may not be restricted by the division between species, but rather it may be a fluid co-essence that moves into other creatures' forms. Furthermore, from this perspective, the animals in Frida's self-portraits might be simultaneously portrayals of her beloved companion species and references to a world of co-essence expressed in visions of Indigenous heritage. What emerges, then, may be that the phenomenon we call identity is not "a point" concentrated on the human subject, but rather a sacred bond of connections and relationships that extends beyond the human person to other species, as well. This pattern of sacred bonds reveals an ecopoetical design that is both an affective, ontological, and spiritual design of the relationship between humanity and animality.

4.5. The Animalist Perspective in Frida's Diary

...We take refuge in, we take flight into irrationality, magic, abnormality, in fear of the extraordinary beauty of the truth of matter and dialectics, of whatever is healthy and strong —we like being sick to protect ourselves. Someone —something— always protects us from the truth —Our own ignorance and fear. Fear of everything —fear of knowing that we are no more than vectors direction construction and destruction to be alive, and to feel the anguish of waiting for the next moment and taking part in the complex current (of affairs) not knowing that we are headed toward ourselves, through millions of stone beings —of bird beings —of star beings —of microbe beings —of fountain beings toward ourselves...¹⁴²

Frida Kahlo (excerpt from her Diary)

¹⁴² "... Nos guarecemos, nos alamos en lo irracional, en lo mágico, en lo anormal, por miedo a la extraordinaria belleza de lo cierto, de lo material y dialéctico, de lo sano y fuerte —nos gusta ser enfermos para protegernos. Alguien —algo— nos protege siempre de la verdad— Nuestra propia ignorancia y nuestro miedo. Miedo al todo —miedo a saber que no somos otra cosa que vectores dirección construcción y destrucción para ser vivos, y sentir la angustia de esperar al minuto siguiente y participar en la corriente compleja de no saber que nos dirigimos a nosotros mismos, a través de millones de seres piedras— de seres aves —de seres astros de seres microbios —de seres fuentes a nosotros mismos..." In Kahlo, *The Diary of Frida Kahlo*, 248–50.

In addition to self-portraits, Frida Kahlo's diary offers us a complementary view into her thoughts and feelings regarding sentient lives. As can be seen in pages 87 to 92 from her diary, Frida envisioned human life as "part of a total function" moving through a "complex current (of affairs)." This flow was seen as a journey through multiple forms of life to return to ourselves.¹⁴³ This vision of a dynamic journey of the self seems to be connected with her indigenously inspired notion of self. As a result, Mother Earth's living beings became connected to her own intimate aesthetic sensibility. According to Ingrid Toro and Omar Felipe Giraldo, Frida Kahlo and other "surrealist artists" opened the doors to an expanded aesthetic thinking and a way of generating sensitive wisdom (*saberes*) and the connections between thinking and feeling with a living Earth.¹⁴⁴

Frida Kahlo also recognized animals' capacity to suffer just as humans do but without the necessity of performing their suffering. For instance, page 69 of her diary affirms that animals' pain is so real that there is no human way to represent it. In an emphatic sense, she perceived animal suffering as exceeding the dramatic dimensions of human suffering, expressed for example in arts, and therefore without the necessity of being expressed in the way humans do.

On page 123 of her diary there is a drawing of a Xoloitzcuintli dog (in fact it is a drawing of Señor Xolotl) as the Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Universal Republic of "Xibalba Mictlan" (the Maya term followed by the Aztec term for the underworld) (figure 10).¹⁴⁵ On this page Frida's recognized her own companion dog as a spiritual messenger able to connect to other realms of this world. Thus, Frida not only recognized animals suffering as equal to (or

¹⁴³ The notion underlying this dynamic view of the self was Frida's understanding of the world as a *mundo dador de mundos – universos y células universos* [world bringer of worlds - universes and cell universes], see Kahlo, 50.

¹⁴⁴ Echeverri, Ramírez, and Echeverri, "Métodoestesis," 57.

¹⁴⁵ Kahlo, *The Diary of Frida Kahlo*, 268.

even more real than) humans’, but also animals’ exclusive roles in guiding humanity. This view is similar to what was perceived by Mexican Indigenous worldviews regarding xoloitzcuintli dogs.

Finally, I hope to complete this journey by exploring the “confessional” mirror in front of animals by presenting my own “self-portrait” as an Eco-poem written during the days I was carrying out this research. This eco-poem titled “Christ and The Chickens of the Next Transgenic Generation” was written as a poetic memory of the Livestock x Literature meeting held at the T-PIRC (Tsukuba-Plant Innovation Research Center) in Japan, on March 17, 2021. I hope this eco-poem highlights art’s capacity to reveal our anthropocentric domineering practices while inspiring a path of personal reconnection with animals. Like Frida’s diary entries, this poem also empathizes with animals’ suffering, and like Frida’s self-portrait with Fulang-Chang, it aims to show a history of cohabitation, care, and love for reconsidering the human form in the eyes of our companions.

4.6. Eco-poem: Christ and the Chickens of the Next Transgenic Generation¹⁴⁶

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.

Matthew 23:37

It’s time to look head on
with the heart
To acknowledge our responsibility
To correct something

¹⁴⁶ This poem was written as a poetic memory of the Livestock x Literature meeting on March 17, 2021, at the University of Tsukuba.

To feel the suffering
and embrace
Yesterday we went to the T-PIRC
called the next generation lab: 次世代

Here, where genetically modified tomatoes grow
I don't know if there is a self-conscious Anthropocene¹⁴⁷
or similar discourses

Here, at the very heart of the GMO produce
and livestock
there is the next generation

And here they talk about efficiency and recycling
about robots and feeding techniques
about the resource-animals
And they talk about how to meet the growing demand
for meat, the excessive demand for
chicken, dairy, and eggs, all year
and the challenge posed by the lack of humans
who in the future will deal with
the animals that are
that meat, dairy, and eggs.
And they talk about the difficulties
of importing fodder from the USA
or feeding grains and soy
to those who evolved to eat grass
And then the technological solutions appear:
the shipments
the machines
the latest research
all of this, which helps to tackle
the problems of the next generation

¹⁴⁷ Self-conscious Anthropocene is a term coined by critic Lynn Keller to name the phenomenon of cultural and critical awareness of the scale and severity of the effects of human activity on the planet, see Keller, *Recomposing Ecopoetics*.

And the problems are tackled

And yet...

Why have we gathered today to talk about “Livestock x Literature”?

What is the meaning behind all this, my teachers?

Maybe that “x” means
a longing
for exchange
or fertile multiplication?

Here are our two guides:

Tajima sensei

Eguchi sensei

And Professor Tajima (a livestock and poultry researcher)
seriously presents us a numerical comparison
between the species
appearing in the *Kojiki* (The Book of Ancient Japanese Chronicles)
and the species
that appear in the book of *Genesis*

<i>Kojiki</i> 古事記	<i>Genesis</i>
Bird 鳥 43	Lamb 55
Horse 馬 34	Cow 32
Sparrow 雀 34	Donkey 24
Boar 猪 30	Bird 24

And he reveals what the ancient words make clear:
in the Japanese book
wild animals predominate
in the book of Israel
farm and domestic animals predominate

Professor Eguchi (a cultural researcher)
presents her research about ewes,
sheep, rams,
lambs, and goats,
including their linguistic diversity
until reaching the *agnus dei*

And she reveals the scarce presence of sheep and goats
in Japan's food history
and her recent research on lambs
in Japanese Modern Literature

And I think about Christianity
and what
the lamb of God
is doing on these islands

Then, Professor Shimizu (a philosopher)
presents us an example of an artist
known as the "goat man"
who walks, imitates, and explores living like a goat
in some region of the European continent

Finally, we all go to meet the animals
we all go to feel the reality

And the reality begins
with the experimental sheep
and moves on to
the experimental cows
and finishes
with the experimental chickens and hens
where it becomes
a *chō-riarity* (a harsh reality)

After providing us with robes, boots, hair caps
and disinfectant
the professor guides us through dim rooms
with cages stuffed with chickens
in front of cages crammed with roosters
In the two-story rows of tiny cages
two hens per cage eat and lay eggs
surrounded by cave-like dark walls
covered with crusts of dust and grime

I hear the nervous clucking
the incessant cry, I feel

Is there pain here
Christ?

Then, the professor takes us to the back of the room
and he puts a chicken
in each of our hands
—Grab their legs firmly
and then while hugging the chicken,
bring it closer to your chest—he tells us
and we do so
and the chicken calms down
and I feel chicken's heat
and the professor tells us
—Chickens' body temperature is greater than ours
around 40 to 41 degrees—
Then, holding the chicken
I understand our karma:
in the heat
and the large-scale
poultry farms
there are viruses

Then, we return the chickens to their cages

Is there pain here,
Christ?

This is the harsh reality —he tells us—
and explains to us his ongoing research
about eggs and chickens
and self-regulating incubator machines
—Very expensive ones—
that can hatch eggs by the hundreds
and the chickens are born in these machines
365 days a year
And I think about where the energy comes from
to sustain all these chickens and incubators?
and karma again

 reveals itself to me
like a lightning bolt
stretching from a nuclear power plant
to the tasty chicken breast
stuffed with vegetables and cheese
that I ate for lunch

There is a lot to do
the professor seems to say
with his research,
and I do my part, literati
and you,
eco-poet
what do you say
to confront life's reality?

Yesterday I asked myself about today
where to go,
God?
Is there also a Christ who says
let the animals come to me?

And then I see a scene
that of the newborn Christ in the stable
surrounded by animals:
 sheep, donkeys, cows, chickens
 and the humble shepherds
that celebrate the king
of hope
and forgiveness

And I see a light
like a little star
glowing
steadily:
it's the stories of my friend Shinnosuke in Saitama
with his hens
it's that of Raúl in Santa Clara de Yarinacocha
with his chickens
it's that of Ámbar in San Cristóbal de las Casas
with her guinea fowl
it's that of Carlos and Sandra in Santa María Zacatepec
with their ducks and turkeys

And I think and feel, God
yes, there's so much to do, my sisters my brothers
the question is
What's the first step?

March 2021. T-PIRC (Tsukuba-Plant Innovation Research Center), Ichinoya, Tsukuba City.

4.7. Conclusion

Frida's self-portraits show us that the "confessional genre" of self-portraiture can be a valuable means to explore artistic anthropocentric ideologies while revealing alternative

designs of relationship with animals, such as co-essence. As can be seen from comparing Frida's self-portrait with that of Desportes', the genre can expose the ideological contrasts between artistic visions of relationship. On the one hand, Desportes' vision is that of man as a dominator, based on a hierarchical, pyramidal representation in which the human gaze is situated at the top. On the other hand, Frida's vision is that of a woman whose identity shares a co-essence bond with her non-human companions.

This eco-poetic approach has served to introduce Frida's self-portraits as emblems of an eco-poetic relationship in at least three ways: first, through a deep reverence toward animals as subjects connected with the sacred Mexican heritage; second, through a history of companionship and cohabitation with her "*animalitos*"; and third, through an animalist understanding of human identity inspired by the particular notion of *nahualli*. Taken together, these comprise three fundamental layers of Frida's eco-poetic relationship.

Frida Kahlo's eco-poetic relationship reveals an Eco-poetic Design that achieved a reconnection between her life and the Earth, which she conceived as a Mexican-native Mother Earth. We can further sense this ontological and affective reconnection when considering her emblematic painting *The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth (Mexico), Myself, Diego, and Señor Xolotl* of 1949. This is a portrait in which a "Mexican Mother Earth" appears as a sort of maternal spirit embraced by the cosmological duality and simultaneously embracing plants, animals, and Frida Kahlo, who is also embracing a naked Diego Rivera. Thus, her connection with animals is part of this cosmological reconnection with Earth that she was pursuing through her life and art. Frida's own maternal embrace of her animals mirrored the way she understood herself to be embraced by her Mexican Mother Earth. For her, Earth was not conceived of as only a dwelling place or environment but as a being that embraces us maternally and connects humans and all living beings through a sacred bond.

Depending on how we choose to focus on Frida's history, she may be considered a pioneer in the modern self-portraiture tradition for her treatment of animality as a world that is not beneath humanity but intimately connected to our identities. It is also worth noting that her animalist vision inspired by the Indigenous gaze may be significant in shaping people's modern sensibilities who are seemingly "disconnected" both from these heritages and from animal suffering due to this current civilization's cruel practices. Approached in this way, self-portraiture can become a healthy alternative to help steer modern toxic and environmentally destructive identities toward re-rooting themselves in more ecologically ethical soils. The human "confessional" self-portrait, then, becomes not an art of portraying our "anthropocentric humanism," but rather the bonds by which we humans situate ourselves in an interspecies mesh of relationship.

Chapter 5

Counterculture, Poetry, and Earth: Buzoku (The Tribes) and the Fractal Growth of the Spirit of Reconnection with Earth

Introduction

Buzoku (部族), generally translated as The Tribes (or The Tribe), was a transnational collective of artists, poets, activists, and young people who soon became one of the most vital Japanese countercultural voices. Between 1967 and 1980, they participated in what they called “building a new society within the shell of this civilization” on the Japanese islands. Despite scholars’ and mass media’s recent interest in their lives and literary works, there are common misunderstandings resulting from the characterization of Buzoku as the Japanese hippies (ヒッピー), or *fūten* (フーテン). There is also a tendency to suggest that, in contrast to American countercultural movements, the legacy of Japanese countercultural and social movements simply faded and failed to ignite any widespread cultural transformation, instead becoming obsolete or at best anachronistic in the subsequent decades. Given this background, this chapter employs the eco-poetic approach to explore what Buzoku’s artists were aiming to transform and what their legacy has been. It argues that Buzoku exemplifies how Japanese countercultural movements in the sixties had a subtle but significant impact in transforming Japanese mass culture by creating an alternative scene of ecological awareness and artistic ways of life that have not faded, but rather evolved, expanded, and been continued by new generations.

This chapter first introduces Buzoku’s formation in the period between 1965 and 1968, during which “tribalist” ideas took form within the group. Then it analyzes Buzoku’s eco-poetic

design of tribal communes as a countercultural return to Earth accompanied by “arts and poetry” while maintaining communication with the “global society.” The result was an inspiring mix of counterculturalism and cosmopolitanism that evolved in a spiral form beyond the group by expanding their voices among the Japanese alternative movements in the next generations. Buzoku’s history exemplifies how this contemporary Japanese “tribalism” entails an ecological and poetic design that still influences communities on the Japanese islands.

5.1. The Japanese Sixties

The sixties were a period of significant social and economic changes in Japan, which saw the birth of diverse opposition movements, such as the New Left (Shin-sayoku 新左翼) political movement, the All-Campus Joint Struggle Committees (popularly known as Zenkyōtō 全共闘) student movement, and the countercultural hippie and *fūten* movement. Japan’s postwar modernization during the fifties and sixties was strongly influenced by the US, as the country, protected militarily by the Japan-US Security Treaty, became the Asian front of US Cold War geopolitics. Between 1960 and 64, the government of Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda (1960-64) established a social transformation program that focused on the mechanization of agriculture and the construction of large industrial corridors. The sociologist Munesuke Mita stresses that some of the effects of Japan’s rapid postwar modernization were the disintegration of traditional small-scale agricultural communities, the migration of large numbers of workers to the cities, and the industrial transformation of the rural landscape. Mita states that the policies that made the economic growth of the 1960s possible, the so-called Japanese economic miracle, were also accompanied socially by a radical wave of rebellious youth who wanted to free

themselves from the new forms of repression and discrimination inherent in the emergent Japanese society still struggling between the ideals of democracy and communism.¹⁴⁸

In his book *Social Psychology of Modern Japan* (1992), Mita names the period from 1960 to 1975 as “the dream period.” It is a period marked by the wave of international youth rebellion, the figure of Che Guevara, the international student movement of 1968, surrealism, and the literature of the so-called Beat Generation. Unlike the youth of the previous decade, the youth of this era were not divided by a yearning for American-style democracy or Soviet-style communism. On the contrary, their main criticism was directed toward the model of the nation-state and its institutions. As an alternative, many of these young “dreamers,” as Mita calls them, incubated other forms of community and lifestyles. According to Mita, this time saw the emergence of new youth movements “based on trial and error” as they dreamed of building new ways of life for a new era. Although Mita doesn’t mention the group, this is a characterization that aptly describe Buzoku’s spirit during the sixties.¹⁴⁹

During the sixties, many Japanese political and cultural movements, such as Buzoku, ran parallel to the social and cultural movements of the United States. However, as Eiji Oguma has noted in his monumental work 1968, even if there was a common myth of political and cultural revolution in the air, there was also a clear split between the Japanese leftist student movements and the cultural liberation movements such as the hippies and fūten.¹⁵⁰ Daizaburō Yui concludes that in contrast to the American sixties, the Japanese sixties didn’t lead to a major transformation of the mass culture.¹⁵¹ Given this background, a group such as Buzoku may seem a countercultural relic whose spirit vanished or, at best, became anachronistic during what Mita calls the “fiction period” of the mid-1970s to 90s. However, I argue that it is necessary to

¹⁴⁸ Mita, *Social Psychology of Modern Japan*, 521.

¹⁴⁹ Mita, 518–22.

¹⁵⁰ Oguma (小熊), 『1968』, 1:88.

¹⁵¹ Yui (油井), 「Interpretations of the 1960s in Japan and the US」.

consider Buzoku from a different angle in order to contest this defeatist vision that results from the historical generalization of the period. As recent increasing attention to Buzoku's legacy demonstrates, their message of constructing an alternative society prevailed in the imagination of younger generations. Let us consider the eco-poetic focus to illuminate to the group's particular spirit by highlighting their Eco-poetic Design that continues to evolve and expand.

5.2. Buzoku, the Japanese Tribes

Buzoku (部族), generally translated as The Tribe or The Tribes was the name adopted by a group of artists, poets, activists, and young people in the Japanese islands that between 1967 and 1980, participated in the creation of what they called “another society with a completely different appearance from any nation-state.”¹⁵² During this time, the group divided into five “tribes,” founded three communes and meditation centers, printed a newspaper, attempted to establish communal agriculture and business, held artistic parades, organized poetry readings, and took part in environmental and spiritual activism. Despite its short existence, their collective experiences and artistic works served as a precedent for Japanese countercultural movements, alternative media, and the creative environment of the next generations.

Because the group was strongly inspired by the Beat Generation poets and the American countercultural environment of the sixties, mainly by Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg, it is often associated with the international beatnik scene. Also, they have been identified by mass

¹⁵² In fact, “The Tribes’ Declaration” begins with the following statement: 「ぼくらは宣言しよう。この国家社会という殻の内にぼくらは、いまひとつの、国家とはまったく異なった相を支えとした社会を形作りつつある、と。」 [We want to declare: Within the shell of this National society, we are forming another society with a completely different aspect to the National State.] Nagasawa (長沢), 「部族宣言」 [The Tribes’ Declaration]. According to Gary Snyder the theme was initially coined by the Industrial Workers of the World labor union, commonly known as wobblies, see “Passage to more than India,” published in Snyder, *Earth House Hold*. 1969.

media as part of the hippie and *fūten* generational phenomena. Nevertheless, as Tetsuo Nagasawa (長澤哲夫), one of the founders of Buzoku, has clarified in recent interviews, the members of these “tribes” did not identify themselves with these labels. Instead, they perceived their own identity as part of a transnational movement of many “tribes” creating a new culture and building a contemporary society. Although the Buzoku groups were mainly formed by young Japanese people, they welcomed people of other ages and nationalities, and some of their members traveled abroad and participated in translation projects. Cultural openness was characteristic of Buzoku’s spirit.

Buzoku’s original “tribes” born in 1967 share a common origin in the Bum Academy (Bamu Academii バム・アカデミー or sometimes written as 乞食学会 with the reading バム・アカデミー), an earlier group of vagabond poets founded by Nanao Sakaki (ナナオ・サカキ), Sansei Yamao(山尾三省), Tetsuo Nagasawa (also called Nāga), and Kenji Akiba (called Nanda) (秋庭健二) among others, in Tokyo. These Japanese “bums” adopted their name from a suggestion by Gary Snyder, who related the way of life of the Japanese artists and dreamers with the characters of Jack Kerouac’s novel *The Dharma Bums* (1958).

To describe Buzoku’s spirit, we can look at one of its founder’s, Tetsuo Nagasawa’s, “Buzoku Sengen” 「部族宣言」 [Tribe’s Declaration], published in *The Tribes Newspaper* in 1967. Nagasawa’s provocative manifesto begins with the following statement:

We want to declare that within the shell of this nation-state, we are forming another society with a completely different appearance from any nation-state. Without individuals or institutions to govern or be governed by, we are creating a society that doesn’t employ the word “government.” We are not building something to dominate what is born from the earth. Just by living with the

earth, we are forming a society returning to the earth, in which each person is connected by the love, freedom, and wisdom found in the breath of the soul itself. We call this a tribal society.¹⁵³

Nagasawa's words announce the relevance of "returning to earth" and the "tribal" lifestyle as a path to attain the desired new society. This particular "primitive-inspired" spirit of looking for a reconnection with the earth lies at the foundation of Buzoku and persists as a voice still inspiring people in Japan.

Buzoku's life stories and works are becoming powerful voices in the Japanese literary and cultural scene. For example, the *Tokyo Poetry Journal* issue on the Japanese beatnik scene "Japan & The Beats" (vol. 5, 2018) and the issue of the magazine *Spectator* titled *Nihon no hippii muuvumento* 『日本のヒッピー・ムーヴメント』 [*The Japanese Hippie Movement*] (vol. 45, 2019) have focused their attention on Buzoku's poets. Even before this, episodes from Buzoku's members had attracted Gary Snyder's biographers' attention. For example, Nanao Sakaki is a well-known name for virtually all Beat Generation poets and Snyder scholars. Moreover, recently, Nanao Sakaki and Yamao Sansei's works have been highlighted by a new Transpacific and Japanese environmental and cultural criticism.¹⁵⁴ These recent studies illuminate Buzoku's contributions to transnational environmental literature and the intricate connections between Japanese counterculture, environmentalism, and spirituality. For instance, Masami Yuki notes in his article "American Nature Writing and Japan" that "some contemporary Japanese writers suggest that there has been an ongoing literary influence of

¹⁵³ 「ぼくらは宣言しよう。この国家社会という殻の内にぼくらは、いま一つの、国家とは全く異なった相を支えとした社会を形作りつつある、と。統治する或いは統治される如何なる個人も機関もない、いや「統治」という言葉すら何の用もなさない社会、土から生まれ、土の上に何を建てるわけでもなくただ土と共に在り土に帰ってゆく社会、魂の呼吸そのものである愛と自由と知恵による一人一人の結びつきが支えている社会をぼくらは部族社会と呼ぶ。」 Tetsuo Nagasawa in Ueno (上野) and Shiosawa (塩澤), 『全記録 スワノセ第四世界: 日本のヒッピー・ムーヴメント』 [*The Complete Recordings, The Fourth World Suwanose: The Hippie Movement of Japan*], 10.

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, Nagakari (永假), "A return to nature" [A Return to Nature: The Life History of Mr. Sansei Yamao]; Thornber, *Ecoambiguity*; Thornber, "Literature, Asia, and the Anthropocene"; Melchy Ramos, "Cómo habitar en el planeta tierra"; Yuki (結城), "American Nature Writing and Japan."

American counterculture on nature writing in Japan in a subtle yet sophisticated way.”¹⁵⁵

Moreover, the legacy of Buzoku’s poets is now becoming perceived by the Japanese mass media as containing valuable lessons and messages for current environmental issues.¹⁵⁶

Despite all the increasing recognition of the Tribes’ poetic works and lives, for the curious observer from abroad, there are still gaps and ambiguities in Buzoku’s history that make it challenging to identify their protagonist, their “ideology,” and the origins of their dreams. Nevertheless, in Japanese, there is a considerable number of sources and documents: the memories written by Buzoku’s founders: Sansei Yamao and Kaiya Yamada (Pon) (山田 塊); photographic archives by notable photographers such as Kikujirō Fukushima (福島菊次郎); and Buzoku’s publications, magazine articles, and published interviews. However, most of these materials are not readily available in libraries or bookstores and scarcely circulate beyond the underground scene. One of the most significant archives is held in Hobbito-mura (ほびと村), an alternative life center, originally founded as a commune, located in Ogikubo, Tokyo. Hobbito-mura has a library, a cafeteria, a meditation room, and an agrochemical-free vegetable shop. Among the many projects carried out in Hobbito-mura, one especially significant for preserving Buzoku’s memory was a series of interviews with the protagonists of the Japanese counterculture. The recordings of this series can be found under the name “Watashi no aozora kauntakarucha-akaibu” 「私の青空 カウンターカルチャー・アーカイブ」 [My Blue Sky: Countercultural Archive] uploaded by Kikori Makita (槇田きこり) on his YouTube channel.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Yuki, “American Nature Writing and Japan,” 1.

¹⁵⁶ Yamamoto (山本), 「山尾三省、長沢哲夫...自然回帰の詩人たち、現代を照らす 揺らぐ日常、価値観見直すヒントに」 [Sansei Yamao, Tetsuo Nagasawa...: Poets Who Return to Nature, Illuminating the Modern World].

¹⁵⁷ Makita (槇田), 「私の青空 カウンターカルチャー・アーカイブ」 [My Blue Sky: Countercultural Archive].

During Buzoku's formation period (1965-1968) spanning from the foundation of the Bum Academy to the creation of Buzoku, the group's members forged a unique "tribal" identity that included a poetic vision of reconnection with the earth, which defies the stereotypical characterization of many countercultural discourses. These ecopoetic lives were grounded in a sharp criticism of "materialist civilization" (*busshitsu bunmei* 物質文明), yet they employed modern media and tools for forging alliances with an international "tribal" scene. Also, they used their poetic and artistic alliances, translation skills, and networks to lay the groundwork for their "dreamed-of" community firmly rooted in a mix of "spirituality," "primitive-inspired ways of life," and "ancestral wisdom." Despite Buzoku's common association with a movement of young people building their communes in isolated landscapes and practicing farming lifestyles, Buzoku's original community first formed at a coffeehouse called Fugetsudō in Shinjuku, Tokyo that became a meeting place for travelers and wanderers. In order to understand this "uniqueness", next I will recount the transition from the Bum Academy to Buzoku.¹⁵⁸

5.3. Fugetsudō Coffeehouse

The Fugetsudō Coffeehouse (風月堂 喫茶店) was located in Shinjuku 3-chōme near the East exit of Shinjuku Station in Tokyo. This medium-sized business that was open from 1951 to 1973 and was owned by the record entrepreneur and art collector Gorō Yokoyama (横山五郎) and was managed by Mamoru Yamaguchi (山口守). The Fugetsudō was a popular meeting

¹⁵⁸ The following account is based on the manga titled "Mangaban nihon no hippii muuvumento" 「まんが版日本のヒッピー・ムーヴメント」 [Manga of The Japanese Hippie Movement], 2019, made by Ryūchi Akata (赤田 祐一) and Myū Sekine (関根美有), the interview with Tetsuo Nagasawa, and facsimile documents included in Spectator Magazine issue 45. It is also based on Sansei Yamao's memories found in the book *Semai michi. Kazoku to shigoto to aisuru koto* 『狭い道 家族と仕事と愛すること』 [The narrow path: Family, Work and Love], 2018, the testimony of Katsusuke Miyachi (宮内勝典) titled "Biitoniku no dandizumu" 「ビートニクのダンディズム」 [Beatniks Dandyism], published by the Silvestar Club magazine in 1987, and an anonymous special feature on Buzoku's poetic parade held in Miyazaki, published by the Shūkan Dokubai magazine in 1967.

place for listening to classical music records and making conversation. According to Yamaguchi, during the sixties, the place became popular among Japanese and international visitors to the Olympics, artists, hitchhikers, beatniks, and hippies, which contributed to creating the countercultural atmosphere of the Shinjuku Station area.¹⁵⁹

According to Akane and Sekine, during the fifties and early sixties, the Shinjuku district was characterized by cheap hotels that received many low-budget international travelers who came to the Tokyo Olympics of 1964. Among those travelers was the journalist John Wilcock, who published the 1965 bestseller *Japan and Hong Kong on Five Dollars a Day*, in which Fugetsudō is described as the hotspot of the Japanese artistic vanguard.¹⁶⁰ John Wilcock's book led to the popularization of Shinjuku among many young travelers from around the world making Fugetsudō an ideal place for encounters between backpackers, artists, and travelers. According to Yamaguchi, the interaction between foreigners and Japanese citizens fostered a shared sense of solidarity.¹⁶¹

Fugetsudō was a two-floor classic coffeehouse with a cosmopolitan atmosphere where people could sit for many hours just by consuming a cup of coffee. During the sixties, the first floor became a common meeting point for artists, young people, and travelers, while the second floor was a well-known meeting point for the Japanese Student Political Activists of Zengakuren (全学連) [All-Japan Federation of Student Self-Government Associations]. The first floor was also the meeting point for a translation study group that gathered every night. The area surrounding Fugetsudō was frequently compared with the famous Greenwich Village

¹⁵⁹ Yamaguchi (山口), 「風月堂物語—元支配人の回顧する新宿風月堂の28年」 [The Story of Fugetsudō: 28 Years of Shinjuku's Fugetsudō as Reflected by Their Original Supporters], 203.

¹⁶⁰ Later, it would be called the “mecca” of the Japanese hippies and an avant-garde spot visited by artists such as Yoko Ono, Shūji Terayama and Maro Akaji, see Akata (赤田) and Sekine (関根), 「まんが版 日本のヒッピー・ムーヴメント」 [Manga: The Japanese Hippie Movement], 43–44. And Endo (遠藤), 「ななおさかき小伝」 [Nanao Sakaki Brief Biography], 205–6.

¹⁶¹ Akata and Sekine, 「まんが版 日本のヒッピー・ムーヴメント」, 53.

cafes of Manhattan. Among the visitors to Fugetsudō was the photographer Fukushima Kikujirō, who dedicated twenty photographs and an essay to the Coffeehouse (figures 11 and 12).

One of the participants in Fugetsudō's translation group was Nanao Sakaki. Nanao was by that time a vagabond poet and frequent visitor who used to chat with the different people gathered in the coffeehouse. In his memoir, Sansei Yamao states that though Nanao was always penniless, he was a natural leader and a confident person who always found a way to be invited to a drink.¹⁶² In fact, many young people looked up to Nanao, among them Yamao himself and Tetsuo Nagasawa, a young poet and Sanskrit translator who used to hang out with Nanao. Soon, Fugetsudō became the “meeting point” for Nanao's group and the place that fostered their contact with foreigners. In his account of Fugetsudō history, Yamaguchi remembers that Fugetsudō was where the “tribal ideology” emerged publicly around 1965 when all the Translation Group members appeared wearing large wood and bone necklaces and dressed in ancient-fashioned clothes. At this point, the group had already formed an ideological basis necessary for becoming a community.¹⁶³ The years before the appearance of Buzoku were characterized by Nanao's group's first public appearances as The Bum Academy.

5.4. The “Bum Style”

Around 1965 or 1966, Nanao Sakaki, Tetsuo Nagasawa (Nāga), Kaiya Yamada (Pon), Sansei Yamao, and a high-school senior, Mitsuo Nagamoto (Namo) (長本光男) formed a group they called Bum Academy.¹⁶⁴ The Bum Academy forged a collective identity based on

¹⁶² Yamao (山尾), 『狭い道 家族と仕事と愛すること』 [*The Narrow Road. Family, Work and My Beloved Things*], 41.

¹⁶³ According to Yamaguchi the “Bum Academy” group had already departed from Fugetsudō by 1965. Yamaguchi, 「風月堂物語--元支配人の回顧する新宿風月堂の28年」, 204.

¹⁶⁴ Akata and Sekine, 「まんが版 日本のヒッピー・ムーヴメント」, 37.

poetry writing, literary translations and wandering through the Japanese islands. They were inspired and guided by Nanao, who had begun to walk around Japan a decade before. This odd school for wandering was built on Nanao's experiences and poetic inventiveness to interweave Asian and Japanese poetic wandering narratives (including haiku poets and Buddhist sages), Indigenous people's ways of life, and the beatnik narrative of the "bums." Nanao had previously forged a particular way of life characterized by wandering, writing, translation, and reluctance to make money that people used to call simply Nanao's style, or as Yamao Sansei puts it, "the vagabond way" (*hōrōsha no michi* 放浪者の道).

The term "bum" was adopted by Nanao and his followers, inspired by Jack Kerouac's novels. According to Miyauchi, the poet and Zen practitioner Gary Snyder once jokingly called Nanao's group the "Bum Academy" due to their style that resembled the hitchhiking poets described in Kerouac's novels. In addition, it seems that Nanao's friends had read Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, and probably, *The Dharma Bums*.¹⁶⁵ For example, one of Nanao's "disciples" (*deshi* 弟子) was the writer Katsusuke Miyauchi (宮内勝典), who at that time was 17 or 18 years old. In an interview, he declared that, for him, *On the Road* was a model for a lifestyle.¹⁶⁶ According to Miyauchi, the Japanese "bums" were captivated by beatnik writers' ideals of a "return" to the primitive, spiritual, and "wild" (*arano* 荒野) life. Also, they resonated with their fresh approach to Buddhism.¹⁶⁷ Yamao also reflects on the Bum Academy and its connection with Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* as follows: "When I was

¹⁶⁵ The novel didn't appear in Japanese translation until 1973, translated as *Zen hippie* (禅ヒッピー).

¹⁶⁶ Miyauchi (宮内), 「ビートニクのダンディズム」 [Beatniks Dandyism], 153.

¹⁶⁷ Miyauchi, 153–55.

a university student, I read Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and was knocked down by his book. Then, I was just an insignificant private teacher, but my soul wanted to beat."¹⁶⁸

According to Yamao, before the foundation of the "Bum Academy," Nanao instructed young people, who often approached him looking for advice, to embark on long journeys across the country with little to no money. Traveling without money was the guidance Nanao offered young people overwhelmed by their urban and competitive lifestyles. In his memoir, Yamao recounts Nanao's instructions to a friend named Ryū Shirasu (Shiro) (白須隆), who used to work in a juvenile detention facility in Nerima:

—Your eyes are dirty— said Nanao.

—I can't bear looking at your dirty eyes. So, please hurry, embark on a long journey— repeated Nanao.

— And how should I make that journey— asked Shiro.

— Now, take off your pants— replied Nanao. When Shiro obediently took off his pants, Nanao took a scissor he had neat to him and cut the pant legs in half, transforming the garment into shorts.

—Now put that on and set out on your trip— said Nanao.

—Yes, replied Shiro, putting on his cut pants, and despite owning just one or two hundred yen, he departed from Tokyo to Kagoshima by hitchhiking.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ 「学生の頃、ジャック・ケラウックの『路上』を読み、その本にぶっとばされていた僕は、形の上ではしががない家庭教師だったが、魂はビートのつもりだった。」 Yamao, 『狭い道 家族と仕事と愛すること』, 43.

¹⁶⁹ 「君の眼は汚い」

とナナオが言った。

「君の眼は汚くて見るに耐えない。旅に出なさい」

とナナオが言った。

「ようやく旅に出るんですか」

とシロは尋ねた。

「君のズボンを脱げ」

とナナオが言った。シロが素直にズボンを脱ぐと、側にあったハサミでそのズボンを半パンに切って、「それをはいて旅に出なさい」とナナオは言った。

「はい」

とシロは答え、半パンに切られたズボンをはくと、百円か二百円のお金は持っていただろうが、そのまま東京から鹿児島へ向かって、ヒッチハイクの旅に出て行った。」 Yamao, *ibid.*, 38.

As revealed in the previous episode, Nanao was very serious about this way of traveling without an itinerary or money as a way to purify one's life. In my view, the instruction to travel without cash was essential for forcing people to walk long distances and connect with others. Nanao knew by experience that walking was work for the feet, the senses, and the heart, and as an admirer and translator of Kobayashi Issa's haikus and Milarepa's chants, he also knew that wandering was an ancient spiritual way of discovering a purpose of life and the true self. Therefore, Nanao's style of guiding people to travel differed from the modes of travel promoted by the burgeoning "material civilization." For many young followers of Nanao, this style was adopted as a path toward liberation, guiding them to a new sense of fullness, self-confidence, and determination. In fact, at a time in which modernization had provided Japanese society with efficient means of transport that had become a consumable commodity, Nanao's way forced people to travel in a rustic manner, opening body, mind, and senses to the risk of not having money and depending on others' generosity. This "poor" way of wandering might have fostered a broader experience of discovering the material and non-material connectedness with others among the Bum Academy followers.

In summary, the "Bum Academy" was the group born at the crossroads between: Nanao's vagabond way of life, inspired by ancestral teachings, his experiences on Japan's roads, and time spent in the countryside during the fifties and early sixties; American poets of the "Beat Generation, and a younger generation of Nanao's Japanese followers. This crossroads also stimulated a countercultural synchronization which can be exemplified in one of the Bum Academy's names in Japanese: ^{バム・アカデミー} 乞食学会 a neologism employed by Yamao that appropriates the traditional Buddhist term *kojiki* 乞食 by attaching to it the furigana reading for "bum," inspired by the "Dharma Bums." Yamao replaced the usual Japanese phonetic reading *kojiki gakkai* with the anglicism *bamu academii*. By using the name Bum Academy in this style, he

seems to give the name both a spiritual feeling close to Japanese Buddhism and a countercultural attitude.

Considering these exercises in translation, one can argue that Buzoku's members did not adopt a passive stance toward the "Western" countercultural movement. They instead carried out a complex series of translations and appropriations. Also, it is worth noting that these translations and appropriations were not only directed toward the American counterculture. Yamao also used to employ the Indian term *harijan* (ハリジャン) [meaning of the "untouchable" cast or "children of God"] to refer to their way of life, showing that the group was also trying to tune their identities not only with the Western "bums" but also with marginal Asian peoples. The "Bum Academy" was born at the intersection between Fugetsudō's translation circle and international poet and artist travelers, promoting a new countercultural vision. At the core of this intersection flourished the countercultural, environmental, and spiritual exchange of ideas between Nanao and Gary Snyder. The friendship between these two poets opened a spiritual and poetic bridge that connected the young Japanese poetic voices with those of their American peers.

In 1966, the Bum Academy organized The First Festival of the Bum Academy in Shinjuku. The following year, they organized a Second Festival, whose poster was designed by "Pon" and Toshie Nakazima and published in the no. 001 *Psyche Journal* on April 5th of 1967. On the first of the four pages there is an anti-war poster signed by Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, and Paul Krassner; on the next page appears a poetic manifesto in Japanese and English divided into eight sections arranged in a design of Buddhist inspiration. On the third page there is a poster inviting readers to the poetic parade called "Revolution by Love." Finally, on the last page appears Gary Snyder's text "Buddhism & the coming revolution," translated

into Japanese by Nagasawa (with a picture of Nagasawa, Snyder, and Ginsberg in Kyoto in July of 1963).

The Bum Academy's Second Festival was titled "Revolution by Love. Poetry reading, Free Words & Music." The poster includes the names of Nanao Sakaki, Gary Snyder, Phillip Whalen, Franco Beltrametti, Harry Hoogstraten, Yamao Sansei, Nagasawa Tetsuo, and Akiba Kenji. Also, it contains a message: "Bring *shōchū* and goats! Bring a wonderful kiss! Bring dandelions and *renge* flowers. Also bring your frustration!" and below "A Gathering and a Parade for prophesying through your own free language the collapse of the world."¹⁷⁰ The parade departed from Toyama Heights to Shinjuku Station's West Exit. The next day a poetry reading was held in the Meiji Yasuda Hall (新宿西口安田生命ホール).¹⁷¹ This festival was followed in the same year by a third festival held in Miyazaki City (August 20-21, 1967) and the fourth festival in Kagoshima City in 1968. As Akata and Sekine note, the third festival was carried out just three months after the massive parade called Human Be-In with around thirty thousand people flocking to San Francisco, indicating an intense transpacific dialogue.

5.5. The Birth of Buzoku as a "Tribe of Tribes"

In the modern Japanese cultural context, Buzoku's history may be seen as the history of a "tribe" among other countercultural "tribes" of the sixties. For example, the suffix *zoku* 族 is commonly used for referring to groups gathered around a specific place or identity, as in the expressions *Fugetsudō-zoku* or *fūten-zoku*. Akata and Sekine's historic compendium of

¹⁷⁰ 「焼酎もってこい、山羊もってこい！ ゴールデンバットもってこい！ 素晴らしい Kiss もってこい！ タンポポとレンゲの花もってこい、フラストレーションも！」 and 「世界の滅亡を予言する自由言語による集会と行列」 *Psyche Journal* facsimile reproduction in Akata and Sekine, 「まんが版 日本のヒッピー・ムーヴメント」, 51.

¹⁷¹ The Hall operated until May 2017 when it was finally closed.

Japanese counterculture in the form of manga sheds light on the intricate landscape of different “groups” that shared common meeting places, tastes, and outlooks by the late sixties. Among these groups were the so-called hippies and *fūten*. As Akata and Sekine point out, the Japanese media tended to refer to all the groups as hippies or *fūten*; however, the last ones were just Japanese young people who adopted the American hippie fashion and a semi-homeless lifestyle. Despite the Japanese media’s tendency to mix them all indiscriminately, the reality is that, prior to the appearance of hippies and *fūten*, the Bum Academy members had developed their own ideas, views, and what Yamaguchi calls their ideology.

The sixties’ ideas of returning to a “tribal” way of life took root in the Bum Academy. Countercultural literature critic Shigeyoshi Hara (原成吉) has stated in an interview that Nanao’s notion of “tribe” must be understood as directly linked with Gary’s characterization of Native American nations’ way of life.¹⁷² In Snyder’s influential text “Why Tribe” (1966), the term tribe is proposed to suggest “the type of new society now emerging within the industrial nations.” Snyder recognizes that although the term can be directly associated with “Native American Indians,” his image is more related to European “Gypsies”: “a group without nation or territory which maintains its own values, its language, and religion, no matter what country it may be in.”¹⁷³ For Snyder, “Tribe” seems to gather various groups looking for a different style of life, who are multicultural in origin, ancient in inspiration, and subversive to modern civilization.

In the opinion of some Buzoku members, there were many reasons the members of the Bum Academy decided to transform the group into Buzoku. Some of these reasons were:

¹⁷² Hara (原), 「日本のヒッピー運動を記録した映画はこの作品だけです」 [This Is the Only Film That Records the Hippie Movement in Japan], 68.

¹⁷³ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, 113.

1. The desire to engage in full-time communal life. This led to finding a convenient place to settle down collectively.
2. The changes in burgeoning Tokyo due to Shinjuku area gentrification. Also, the Fugetsudō staff became less permissive to Bum members' non-consuming practices.
3. The influence of Gary Snyder's text "Why Tribe" (translated by Nagasawa), plus letters and diaries received from the West Coast scene (especially the San Francisco Oracle newspaper). News from the United States inspired the Bum members to enter a new stage.
4. The Bum members desire to follow ancient practices such as Zen and Advaita Vedanta meditation. Also, their interest in Milarepa, Native American, Ainu, and Australian aboriginal spiritual visions was perceived as trivialized by the ongoing popularization of the hippie fashion and the "junkie" counterculture.

The first and second reasons are closely related to the urban space. According to Kaiya Yamada (Pon), although in 1967 Shinjuku was the *fūten*, gay and anarchist meeting zone, it was gradually rearranged as part of an urbanization plan set to be finished before 1970 (when the US-Japan Security Treaty was going to be extended). As a result, open meeting places, such as the famous green area called The Greenhouse (グリーンハウス), were prohibited, or suppressed while multiple floor buildings began to change Shinjuku's landscape. On another note, "Namo" argues that many of the "bums" (including himself) just wanted to settle permanently in a place spacious enough to accommodate many people, and thus they began to search for ideal spaces in Tokyo's outskirts. At that time, moving to the countryside became a feasible option for building a new communal living project. Gary Snyder's vision also influenced delineating the identity and setting the stage for this commune creation period with his interpretation of tribal communitarian living.

It is worth noting that there were also some thorny issues involved in Buzoku's decision to leave Shinjuku, such as Bum Academy members' irritation at the hippie movement's ongoing popularization of drugs. According to Miyauchi, entwined with the "process that goes from beatnik to commune living" was the "drug issue." In general, the Buzoku members tended to take a more "naturalist" approach. For example, Miyauchi states that he sympathized with a particular vision of consuming mushrooms, marijuana, and peyote (LSD, which became prohibited in Japan in 1970) as spiritual springboards, while he found himself unable to sympathize with the "junkie" vision of drug-consuming as represented in that time by heroin and William Burroughs's approach to drug consumption.¹⁷⁴ Ironically, the "junkie" vision of drug consumption soon became particularly popular in Tokyo, and during the summer of 1967, many youth who fled their houses embraced the hippie fashion, a homeless life, and huffing paint thinner. They were the so-called *fūten*, portrayed by the Japanese media as the Japanese hippies.¹⁷⁵

Most *fūten* were mainly young people who had run away from home without the apparent intention of contesting the consumerist civilization, connecting with spiritual practices, or building a new society. In contrast to *fūten*'s appropriation of the "hippie movement," the Bum Academy poets' relationship was inspired by a shared communitarian, anti-war, and psychoactive vision of a new global culture. Like some "hippies", they also felt spiritually

¹⁷⁴ Miyauchi, 「ビートニクのダンディズム」, 154.

¹⁷⁵ *Fūten* (フーテン), from the existing word *fūten* (瘋癲), was the name adopted by groups of young people that ran away from home and began to gather in the so-called "greenhouse" (グリーン・ハウス), a grassy area near Shinjuku station. According to Akata and Sekine, these young people adopted the style and fashion of the American hippies, started a semi-homeless life around Shinjuku, and used to sniff inhalants such as paint thinner, and consume sleeping drugs such as *haiminaaru* (ハイミナル) (64). Most *fūten* were under twenty years old, liked modern jazz, and adopted this lifestyle without manifesting any political stance or criticism toward the social status quo. Based on Biito Takeshi's portrayal of *fūten*, Akata and Sekine distinguish *fūten* from hippies stating that the former can be described as Japanese young people who simply copied the hippie fashion and lifestyle without adopting their anti-war attitudes, utopian community dreams, or critical messages. However, Japanese newspapers, reporters, and magazines tended to call these young people the Japanese version of American hippies, using the terms *fūten zoku* and *hippii zoku* interchangeably. Akata and Sekine, 「まんが版 日本のヒッピー・ムーヴメント」, 68.

connected with the “primitive” Japanese culture of the Jōmon period, the Harijans of India, and excluded peoples around the world.

5.6. The Original 5 Tribes

In the summer of 1967, the Bum Academy’s members (except for Nanao, who had departed on a journey) held a meeting in a Coffee shop called Seiga (青蛾). During that meeting, they changed the group’s name to Buzoku and decided to publish a newspaper with the same name. According to Nagasawa, the foundation of Buzoku opened an opportunity for moving into the stage of building a community.¹⁷⁶ 1967 was the decisive year for transitioning from the “Bum Academy” to “The Tribes.” According to Akata and Sekine’s recounting of events, in the months from April to September of 1967, five tribes were established.¹⁷⁷ These tribes were:

1. The Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe (*Kaminari akagarasu zoku* カミナリ赤鴉族).

This tribe moved to the valley of Fujimi in Nagano Prefecture at the foot of Mt. Nyūkasa (Nyūkasayama 入笠山). The Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe was the first to settle a “base camp” in a 2000 square meter terrain that Sansei Yamao and three friends bought in Fujimi valley (around April of 1967). Tetsuo Nagasawa (Nāga) and Kenji Akiba (Nanda) were the first ones who moved to the terrain to begin the base camp’s construction, logging, and farming. The name was inspired by a local myth about a three-legged Crow that symbolized the Mountain and its frequent lightning.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Akata and Sekine, 59.

¹⁷⁷ Akata and Sekine, 60.

¹⁷⁸ Akata and Sekine vividly illustrate in their manga on The Tribes “one ordinary day” in the Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe Commune.

2. The Banyan's Dream Tribe (Gajumaru no yume zoku がじゅまるの夢族). This tribe moved to the island of Suwanose in Kagoshima Prefecture and established a meditation center that was later renamed the Banyan Ashram (Banyan Ashuramu バンヤン・アシュラム). The meditation center and its commune lasted until 1980, when it was ultimately dissolved.¹⁷⁹ The idea of turning the meditation center into an ashram seems to have emerged from the spiritual connection that many members of this tribe felt toward Hinduism. Nanao's original vision for this ashram was to build a "meditation center" on the island where they could retire to cultivate their body and spirit and practice a sustainable life by farming and fishing. For Nanao, this was a necessary step for Buzoku's members to overcome what he called the "disbelief of modern civilization" (*gendaibunka no fushin* 現代文化の不信).¹⁸⁰ Rather than envisioning a bustling commune, Nanao envisioned a still and quiet place for meditation and spiritual practice. Near the spot where Buzoku's members built their dormitory was a banyan tree under which they used to meditate. Apart from Nanao, the first members who moved to Suwanose in 1967 were Kenji Akiba (Nanda) and Kenji Shinkai (Kyappu) (新貝健司), and later they were joined by Tetsuo Nagasawa, Gary Snyder, and Masa Uehara.

3. The Emerald Breeze Tribe (Emerarudo soyokaze zoku エメラルドそよ風族 or sometimes called Emerarudo burīzu エメラルド・ブリーズ). This tribe moved to the Kokubunji district in Tokyo and founded a commune in a two-story building that became the residence for around twenty of Buzoku's members. The rental of the entire building was arranged by Sansei Yamao when the commune was set up in 1968. In the commune, members shared their food and ran two shared businesses: a food cart of Kagoshima-style ramen and a

¹⁷⁹ Maebara (マエバラ), 「ヒッピー用語の基礎知識」 [Fundamental Knowledge of Hippie Terms], 96.

¹⁸⁰ 「日本ヒッピー族南の島にたてこもる」 [Japanese Hippies Retreat to a Southern Island], 15.

rock music cafeteria named Horagai (ほら貝). The commune lasted for two years until 1970 when the building was sold, and the commune dissolved.¹⁸¹

4. The Seven-colored Rainbow Mantle Tribe (Nanairo no niji no manto zoku 七色の虹のマント族). This tribe was apparently gathered around Gary Snyder and his peers in Kyoto in the first months of 1967. Nevertheless, some months later, Gary and Masa moved to Suwanose island, and it seems that the tribe merged with the Banyan’s Dream Tribe.

5. The Dreaming Hermit Crab Tribe (Yume miru yadokari zoku 夢みるやどかり族). This tribe moved to Miyazaki by invitation of an abstract painter named Asahi Itō (伊東旭), who was a local sympathizer of Nanao and his peers. On August 20 and 21, 1967, the members of this tribe carried out the third “Bum Festival” in Miyazaki Jingu sanctuary and its surrounding area. According to an article published by a weekly magazine, the festival included yoga and meditation sessions and held a musical-poetic parade.¹⁸² Sometime later, near the coast, in what is today part of the city’s port, some members of this tribe founded a commune that lasted until 1971 or 72.¹⁸³

It is worth considering how Buzoku’s members were building “a new society” in these communes. Kikujirō Fukushima’s photographic essay titled *Kaminari akaragasu zoku no shikō to hyōgen* 「かみなり赤烏族の思考と表現」 [*The Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe’s thoughts and expressions*] offers a look into the Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe commune or “ashram” that the author visited in 1967.¹⁸⁴ In his essay, Fukushima expresses his perplexity toward what seemed to be a generational phenomenon of young people who opted for a primitive-peasant way of life in the midst of the economically buoyant sixties in Japan.

¹⁸¹ Maebara, 「ヒッピー用語の基礎知識」, 95.

¹⁸² 「日本ヒッピー族南の島にたてこもる」

¹⁸³ Ono (小野), 「コンテンツ 4 〈インタビュー〉 with 小野和道」.

¹⁸⁴ As described by Fukushima, at the commune’s entrance stood a plate with “Bum Ashrama” written on it.

Kikujirō Fukushima’s photographic essay (figures 13 and 14) comes with a written testimony of his visit to the commune of the Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe. In this testimony, Kikujirō tells how one member of the commune manifested his discomfort at being called *fūten*:

Unfortunately, the chief, Sansei Yamao, was digging potatoes in the field, so one of the young, urban-looking members offered himself to guide me. “It’s annoying that we’re called *fūten*” ... he said first. One of the Red Crows’ ideals was to predict the end of material civilization, to restore the original form of human beings by creating an ancient society in this mountain, and to expand a “new human class society.” ... They called themselves harijans (children of the gods, classless); by the same token, they called each other, regardless of their class or scholarship: “Sansei,” “Nanda,” “Captain,” “Boy A,” and so on. Some of these primitive men used to be before a devout worshiper, an artist, and a high-fashion stylist.¹⁸⁵

5.7. The Publication of The Tribes’ Newspaper and the Founding of Communes

On December 20th, 1967, Buzoku’s first newspaper, simply titled *Buzoku Shinbun* 「部族新聞」 [*The Tribes Newspaper*] was published. The first volume had a print run of ten thousand copies in full color. Each copy cost one hundred yen, and the newspaper became a major hit in Japan’s countercultural scene, especially among the *fūten* and other young people who used to hang out in the Shinjuku area. The first volume featured Nagasawa’s manifesto titled “Buzoku Sengen” 「部族宣言」 [Declaration of The Tribes], which would later become one of The Tribes’ most representative manifestos. The second issue of *Buzoku*

¹⁸⁵ 「折悪しく酋長の山尾三省氏は畠に芋を掘りにでていたので、割に都会じみた青年の一人が案内役をしてくれた。「われわれがフーテンよばわりされているのは迷惑だ……」と彼はまず言った。赤烏族の理想は、物質文明の終末を予測し、この山中に、古代社会を創造することによって人間の原形を回復させ、“新人類部属社会”を全国に拡げてゆくことだった。……彼らは自らをハリジャン(神々の子、無階級者)と称していた。従って階級、学識を問わずお互いを サンセイ、ナンダ キャブテン、少年A、という具合に呼びあっていた。この原始人たちは、敬虔な宗教者、アーティスト、トップモードのスタイリストだった。」 Fukushima (福島), 『戦後の若者たち Part II リブとふうてん』 [*Young People from the Postwar. Part II. Ribu and Fūten.*], II:106–7.

Shinbun appeared on June 20th, 1968, published by The Emerald Breeze Tribe. As can be seen by comparing Figures 15 and 16, there were some similarities between the covers of the San Francisco Oracle newspaper and the back cover of *Buzoku Shinbun*: the two-color print design, the theme portraying an ascetic, the psychedelic motifs, and the use of the cover page as a poster for promoting a collective event to be held.

The San Francisco Oracle was an underground newspaper published in San Francisco by the poet Allen Cohen. Its 12 issues were published from 1966 until 1968 and included many poems and texts of the *Beat Generation* poets Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder. The vol.1 no.5 issue of the *San Francisco Oracle* (January 1967) displayed on its cover a poster for the “Gathering of The Tribes in the Human Be-In,” a performance held on January 14th, 1967, in San Francisco (figure 15). Similarly, *Buzoku Shinbun*’s back cover featured a poster inviting people to contribute food, work, and love to the recently established Meditation Center of the Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe (figure 16).

Four aspects of Buzoku’s vision for building a new society were embodied in newspaper publishing, establishing communes, building their meditation center, and farming were. In this way, Buzoku’s members synchronized with the ongoing movement of forming communes that emerged across the United States. As planned communities, many of these communes initially took inspiration from European and American socialist cooperatives, Native American villages, and religious communities such as Indian Ashrams. It can be said that the decade of the sixties saw the emergence of a transnational movement of commune creation. For example, in New Mexico alone, around 30 communes were established in the sixties, although almost all of them closed before 1973.¹⁸⁶ Among the communes that have remained through 2022 is the Lama Foundation, founded in 1967, which was visited by Nanao Sakaki in 1974.¹⁸⁷ In a similar way

¹⁸⁶ Lama Foundation, “Lama Foundation Oral History Project - Social Networks and Archival Context.”

¹⁸⁷ Lawless and Leonard, “Nanao Sakaki Publishing Event.”

to these American communes, Buzoku's communes were inspired by Hindu, Buddhist, and Native American spiritual paths and ways of life, forming a collage of overlapped communitarian lifestyles aimed toward root themselves in one shared territory. Like many of their American peers, Buzoku's communes faced the challenges of community life and self-sufficiency. Finally, in the eighties, the last of Buzoku's communes, the Banyan Ashram, was dissolved as members moved away or quit; however, all these communes left behind spiritual seeds of reconnection with a living Earth along their path.

5.8. The Spiral Growth of the Spirit of Reconnection with Earth

Although Buzoku's communes dissolved one by one, they left behind a community of families, intellectual and artistic works, and a shared spirit of life, inspired by the vision of building a new society in reconnection with the Earth. Buzoku's spirit of life (their dream) was not a mere matter of idealism; networks of solidarity and friendship and works such as poems, essays, translations, drawings, and songs have contributed to an accumulation of critical reflections, practical knowledge, and wisdom regarding how to build an alternative Japanese society. In 1993, Nanao Sakaki stated in an interview with Shi Jing that Buzoku's spirit was still growing as spiritual energy in the lives of a new generation:

Shi Jing: So, the group that you started in the sixties, The Tribe, how is it doing?

Nanao: It's still going. We call it "The Tribe" but it's not tight, it's very loose. We started many places, nineteen sixties. Now we still have several places but not like a commune, just like families, several families together. One group is more like Hindu, another is Zen Buddhist, there's another group has no religion at all, they are carpenters, artists, musicians. The musician Kitaro is one of our group. He has become suddenly famous. Many people have come from our circle – photographers, artists. New spiritual energy growing up.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Nanao Sakaki, "Blue Mountain, Green Water, This Is My Home: An Interview with Nanao Sakaki."

Nanao's words recapitulated Buzoku's vision in the nineties as a loose group not defined by a particular spiritual path or occupation, but as a circle of friendship embodying the bond of growing spiritual energy. Moreover, this spiritual bond connected families across continents, as Buzoku's circle of friendship included families scattered throughout the Japanese archipelago and North America. Let's explore this "growing energy" as an Eco-poetic Design.

When Buzoku's communes dissolved, their growing spirit had already spread to other artistic projects and communes. Over time, a network of different projects began to emerge across Japan, each of which was interconnected by a shared desire to build an alternative society. This common spirit started by Buzoku and continued by the next generations is what can be called the cultural shell of an alternative Japanese society. I became aware of this ongoing work during the music and arts festival called Mangetsu Matsuri held in 2021 in the Bakugenjin village (猿原人村), a hippie commune and eco-village located deep in the mountains of Fukushima.¹⁸⁹ There was a discussion circle between Masai Kazami (風見マサイ), Sogyū Fukumura (福村祖牛) and Kikori Makita, founders and leaders of eco-villages and countercultural and eco-artistic events. During that conversation, Masai recounted the history of the Bakugenjin village, which began in the mid-seventies as a hippie commune inspired by Buzoku's commune in Suwanose. Then, Sogyū, an ex-Zen priest, recounted the history of Yamauto (エコトピア山水人), an eco-utopia and eco-village born in 2005 in the mountains of Shiga Prefecture. Finally, Makita Kikori told the history of the Milky Way Caravan (ミルキーウェイ・キャラバン), an annual caravan organized by Teruo Tomo (大友映男) during the seventies that brought together people moving between festivals and communes from Okinawa to Hokkaido. During the conversation following their discussion, somebody from the

¹⁸⁹ The hippie commune and eco-village has a home page, see Yūki and Masai, 「猿原人村 公式 HP」 [Bakugenjin Mura Kōshiki Home Page].

public read “Buzoku Sengen” [Tribe’s Declaration], and it became clear to me that these projects, rather than being mere nostalgic imitations of Buzoku, were in fact extensions of Buzoku’s spirit that were actively carrying their message to the next generation.

Buzoku’s spiritual legacy reveals a dimension of Eco-poetic Design for building a cultural shell under which many autonomous projects can take place. In other words, bonds of friendship and alliance with the Earth woven by each life project (individual and collective) simultaneously become the weft from which new projects receive inspiration and begin their own eco-poetic weaving. This also shows that Eco-poetic Design enterprises can both accommodate and encourage diversity of thought and organization. Eco-poetic Design shells, such as Buzoku’s, are multipatterned meshes under which families, collectives, and individuals can construct a new society. Thus, this shell is not something that is completed by one single group, commune, or collective, but rather an ongoing work that, like a seashell’s spiral, both grows and advances over time while simultaneously maintaining a single impulse. Within this spiral growth, we can observe the appearance of new projects, communes, and generations of people aiming to reconnect with the Earth and feel a spiritual connection with their predecessors. In this “tribal seashell” of Buzoku’s legacy, we see the spiral and the spiritual merged into a single Eco-poetic Design.

To illustrate this point, figure 17 presents a list of projects which have worked (and continue to work) toward building this “tribal” shell for a new society reconnected with Earth. These are just some of the projects I encountered during my research, and they represent a brief sampling from a vast pluriverse of communities and networks. In this figure, each section weaves a particular design (pattern) while the design as a whole forms a patched spiral construction. Each pattern corresponds to each project listed. With each new project emerging from the shell, new sections begin to grow, expanding themselves and changing the patterns of

the whole design but not its spirit, its impulse. This is a way to envision the growing spirit and legacy of a project like Buzoku, and its impact on contemporary Japanese society. Although the original “commune” designs ended, new patterns and shapes continue growing under the same shell.

Rather than finding the nostalgic “remains” of a countercultural dream, I have found a vibrant shell that shifts and adapts its Ecopoetic Design. The following two ecopoems were written during my visits to Suwanose Island and Yakushima Island, while meeting people who are keeping Buzoku’s spirit alive. Through these ecopoems, I aim to transmit the spirit of Buzoku as it was stated by Nanao. For me, this spiritual spiral is also a way to give birth to a native heart, which is the heart of human beings able to feel themselves connected to a living and spirit-filled Earth.

5.9. Ecopoem: Three Ways to be Native

Preamble: Dream (figure 18).

I dreamt of trash, trash filling the seas.

At 9:00 in the morning I arrived at the port of Suwanose. Waiting for me there on the concrete dock were Nāga and his partner, Rada. They brought me to their home, where I left my things in the guest room and ate a light breakfast in the house that Nāga built. It is a circular, wooden house that I imagine as some type of Mongolian yurt. The rustic construction, with its clay *ofuro* and wooden windows, looked like a house built in Mexico. Nāga, Rada, and I talked about geography and Rada told me how Nāga likes the ocean and is a fisherman.

Nāga showed me an anthology of modern Mexican poetry in Japanese and told me that the poems he liked most in the anthology were by a poet named Ámbar Past. Surprised, I told him that she was my friend and that she now lives in the Himalayas. I told Nāga that Ámbar’s home, which I visited in San Cristóbal de las Casas, in Chiapas, is a house that looks a lot like his and

Rada's in Suwanose. Nāga told me that he had built the house himself after they moved to the island.

In the afternoon I went with Nāga to the beach, which they call *bana* (バナ) here, rather than *hama*. Then I spent a long time down on the rocks during low tide looking at the fish and watching the waves crash against the reef in the distance. We were walking along the rocks, beachcombing. These days, the beaches here receive trash from many parts of the world (this phenomenon probably has to do, in part, with the fact that the island is right in the middle of the Kuroshio current). Later, Rada and Nāga told me that every week there are clean-up crews to gather all the trash on the beaches of Suwanose, but that more trash always washes up.

After visiting the beach, we went up to the foothills of the island's active volcano. There, I saw the volcano's ash plumes and some wild goats eating the weeds and grasses. On our way, we stopped to visit a small park where the *yamazakura* (wild cherry) has become a popular attraction for residents on outings, especially in spring. When we drove back down in the car, Nāga showed me where the old Ashram was. Now, there is a stable for the "town's" cows on this island of 70 residents.

On the way home, I showed Nāga a few small shells I found on the beach. They're called *takaragai*, the tide brings them to this beach, he tells me.

Nāga showed me the garden, the vegetable patch (*hatake*) and the fruit trees. We talked about the island's temperate climate, which resembles the climate of certain parts of Mexico and Latin America. We talked about Latin America and Japan, about life in cities and rural areas, about the pollution of rivers, waterways, and seas. They tell me that on this island, even though the climate is good for agriculture, water is scarce.

At the knife-edge of night, I bathed in the clay *ofuro* heated by firewood from outside.

We ate a dinner of *tsubashi* sashimi, and tiny fried fish, vegetables, soup, beans, and wine. We listened to music from Mali, songs by Manu Chao, and Wixárika songs. Nāga shows me his Spanish dictionary, and an anthology of poetry by Federico García Lorca (edition by Editores Mexicanos Unidos, the same one I have in my home in Mexico City).

Before going to bed, I look out at the night, which is a new moon, and I see an infinity of stars. I think about Ámbar Past and about this house on a small island in the Tokara archipelago where I'm here together with a fisherman poet and his partner. Outside, the stars watch me and the wind whispers through the bamboo.

I write:

Nanao, Sansei, Nāga. These members of the Tribe went searching for their roots and were transformed into native residents.

I. Suwanose Jima

God, spirit star
fill my dream
in the humble void,
in the dance of days.

Episteme of light,
of flowers,
let your gracious word
rest
in the silence of March.

Stars
and shells
on the beach
I hear the waves
in my breath
and I see the *Kuroshio*,
ancient
and invisible
current.

I told the fisherman poet,
—if I take a ship
on this current
I'll land in Mexico—
and we laughed together.
Nāga (Nagasawa Tetsuo)
is his name
which means serpent,
water messenger
a dragon
of the Pacific.

Nāga, I feel

like an older brother's
younger brother
in your house,
in Suwanose,
where you ride the current
and tell me about
the poet Ámbar Past
—and this house is just like
Ámbar's house
which I visited in Chiapas—

¡Ah!
the Himalayas, Mexico,
the Japanese islands, the mandarin trees
sashimi and fried fish.

We ate together
Nāga, Rada and I
on this island with 70 residents
and an active volcano.

And that night
before arriving
at Nāga's house
I dreamt of the trash
littering
all the seas'
beaches
and I was there,
in Suwanose,
ten hours by boat
from Kagoshima
surrounded by coral
and PET bottles
from every ocean.

Rada tells me
—Every so often
the island's residents
collect trash
to send to Kagoshima
for processing,
but more trash
always arrives
and the fish, the turtles
the birds
eat that trash
and get sick—

God,
on this boat of the world
shield my eyes from the trash
and from the trash in my heart.

Show me the way
full of flowers
gardens, birds
and blue coral:
—*Inochi no sango*— *Coral of life*
that's what these ecologist poets
said decades ago
to save the coral
and American youth
traveled to Suwanose
in their dreams.

Today,
my hands
and my feet
move me
carrying
the seeds

of some glimmer
through distant lands.

I explore the love
of my grandparents
and of my little seashells
from Coatzacoalcos.

These shells
which are called
takaragai, cowries,
are treasure shells.

II. Yakushima

The Wixárika violin glimmers
just like a few days ago
on the banks of the Isso river,
the flowers glimmered
with the flowery word
of the *xiuhtotl* bird.

Back then, in Yakushima,
the island of the Jōmon cedar,
in the Yamao house,
we talked about flowers
and insects
and the *sankōchō* 三光鳥 bird
a bird of paradise
in May.

That night,
we talked about the word
that fills the hearts of flowers
and I laughed together with Sansei's young brother

Akihiko “Fool Squash”
and his wife Haruko
and the guitar of Te-chan
who’s reading my poem right now.

Japanese people from the city,
ex-citizens,
who now farm the earth
who care for the Earth
and pray
to the Amida Buddha.

And Amida Nyorai
is in the paradise
of a mountain hut 山小屋
for singing songs of compassion and miracles.

Here, in his fool’s hermitage 愚角庵,
Sansei recited Milarepa
read Rumi
recited the Lotus Sutra
and alongside Shinkai
listened to a record by Atahualpa Yupanqui.

And the good living
of the heart
perfumed
this room
whose books are now aging
and whose tatamis are being eaten by ants.

Collections of rocks,
photographs next to plants,
Sansei Yamao —anarchist student leader
of 68 Japanese youth—

sows yams
and potatoes,
writes poems about squashes,
and flowers
that survive the typhoons.

Then Fool Squash
shows me the record by Yupanqui:
El hombre, el paisaje y su canción
recorded in Sapporo
and he takes out books which he gifts me,
among them, a treatise on Bashō
(that I hope to read one day)
and in careful calligraphy he writes his name
愚唐茄子 Gutōnasu (Fool Squash).

That night we eat breaded shrimp,
spinach and a delicious stew of Yakushima potatoes.
I speak in Japanese
almost without knowing how
heartfully explaining
Tecayehuatzin's conclusion
at the meeting of Huexotzingo poets:

Flower and song are what make our friendship possible.

—We were young
trying to find our way,
but back then, who would have said
that thirty years later
a Mexican poet would come to visit us— says Haruko

Oh, hidden path,
it's the Shirakawa one, the Issō one,
that leads to a Zen Buddhist temple

next to two tons of rock.

That's where Sansei Yamao and Nanao Sakaki went together

To visit the birds of paradise

¡Sankōchō!

¡Sankōchō!

III. Satsuma Sendai

Bird of paradise

returning each year

to the southern islands

like the *mokuren* flowers,

like the ashes

and the triturated bones

of Nanao Sakaki

returning

to the Sendai river

north of Kagoshima.

There, in Nanao's homeland

I saw the indigo

of his fabric-dyer family in Satsuma,

and the blue was a newborn fish

migrating to the sea.

And maybe now,

Nanao, the wanderer

who arrived at the Moon,

who founded the Bum Academy,

is departing on his planetary journey

through this galaxy

on a grain of sand.

He sets sail on a raft,

on the song

of this tribe.

Oh, seeds of the wind
bringing good news
from the mysterious islands.

Wind seeds
go walking
sailing
singing
with the spring:

*Along the native path
spread all across the hills
the yamazakuras are blooming.*

March 2018. In Suwanosejima, Yakushima and Satsuma Sendai.

In Suwanosejima, Yakushima and Satsuma Sendai.

5.10. Conclusion

This chapter has recounted Buzoku's emergence by looking into their origins. It has proposed a vision of their tribal-inspired spirit as the starting point of their impulse to build an alternative society on the Japanese islands. This account also contextualized Buzoku's relationship within the countercultural movements of the sixties. As the consciousness of a global countercultural scene spread after 1965, many groups were labeled by the Japanese media (because of their fashion and attitudes) as hippies or *fūten*. The mainstream media characterized Buzoku's members and their performances and communes as simply part of the hippie movement and the *fūten* phenomenon. Nevertheless, as Akata and Sekine's manga shows, Buzoku's origins are from before the hippie movement's appearance in Japan and

America, between 1965 and 1967 when the Bum Academy was formed, and even many years earlier, in the lifestyles of Nanao Sakaki and the “Beat Generation” poets Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg.

This chapter underlined the transpacific connection that allowed Buzoku’s members to develop a contemporary Japanese tribal identity. Gary Snyder was the direct interlocutor for Nanao and Buzoku’s members due to his Japanese language proficiency and experience living in Japan for many years. However, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac also seem to have influenced Buzoku’s poetry writing styles, performances, and choice of spiritual paths. Importantly though, Buzoku’s members didn’t adopt a passive stance toward the “Western” countercultural movement. Instead, they carried out a complex series of translations and appropriations to forge Buzoku’s spirit. The comparison between Buzoku’s newspaper and the San Francisco Oracle shows that at least this countercultural group in Japan’s sixties scene carried out complex linguistic, artistic, and spiritual synchronizations with the Western countercultural movement. These processes of appropriation are crucial for understanding the crafting of a collective work aware of the epistemic, ontological, and spiritual tasks necessary for building their dreamed-of society of tribes.

This account also supports Akata and Sekine’s positioning of Buzoku as the inspirational model for the hippie movement in Japan. When the hippie and other countercultural movements emerged in Japan, both Japanese hippies and *fūten* tended to see Buzoku’s communes, manifestos, and gatherings as a direct model of individual liberation and spiritual exploration. Buzoku’s tribalist movement must be considered as a unique cultural movement of the Japanese sixties with a strong ecological, communal, and poetic vision whose Eco-poetic Design of building a new society in reconnection with the Earth spread to the hippie generation.

Buzoku’s Eco-poetic Design took the form of setting a community of tribes in their first communes. When the last commune of Banyan Ashram was dissolved in 1980, the spiritual

energy had already matured and evolved, creating new patterns beyond the original design of communal living. Buzoku's spirit inspired subsequent generations giving birth to communes, eco-villages, festivals, caravans, memorial spaces, and archives. In this way, Buzoku's legacy has expanded its spiritual spiral of ongoing work to craft an alternative ecological society in Japan. This spiritual spiral, which was born with the establishment of communes aiming to facilitate a return to the Earth, and which then evolved as a network of communication and mutual inspiration, reveals two fundamental layers of Buzoku's eco-poetic relationship: their conception of Earth as a sacred community and their ecological connection with local environments such as the Suwanose island.

Buzoku's eco-poetic relationship makes evident an Eco-poetic Design that achieved a reconnection between its members' lives and the Earth, which they conceived of as a sacred community. We can further sense this ontological and affective reconnection when analyzing some works composed by the members who lived in these communes. For example, the emblematic Fourth World Suwanose Mandala, illustrated by Kaiya Yamada (Pon), states that all sentient beings, such as plants and animals of the Suwanose Island, could be considered bodhisattvas. For Buzoku's members of the Suwanose commune, the Earth was not understood as simply a dwelling place or environment surrounding their commune, but as the community itself. We can also feel this in the movie *Suwanose daiyonsekai* 『スワノセ・第四世界』 [*Suwanose the Fourth World*] (1976), portraying the Ashram Banyan life and the Yamaha Boycott movement. The members' reconnection with Earth itself was conceived through the reconnection with the Suwanose island as an "ecological union," there is a narrative title card in the movie which states "the island is a single community" (*shima wa hitotsu no kyōdōtai* 島はひとつの共同体).¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Ueno and Shiosawa, 『全記録 スワノセ第四世界: 日本のヒッピー・ムーヴメント』, 56.

Chapter 6

Walking the Earth: Nanao Sakaki, Kokopelli, and the Wandering

Ecocosmopolitanism

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore Nanao Sakaki's (1923-2008) walking poetics. This poetics can be both connected to ancient Japanese and Native American walking cultural figures. To explore this connection, this chapter focuses on the North American Kokopelli adopted by Nanao as an emblem and model of his own way of walking the Earth while bonding people and spreading ecological awareness. This chapter argues that Nanao's walking ecopoetics can be interpreted as a three-fold poetics: first, a poetics of encounter by being *here*; second, a poetics of spiritual association; and third, a poetics of gifts that form constellations. This three-fold walking poetics is exemplified in three of Nanao's poems "Kokoperi" 「ココペリ」 [*Kokopelli*] (1992), "Mitsuyu ningen" 「密輸人間」 [translated by Nanao as "Me, a Smuggler"] (1996), and "Ōkina fukuro wo kata ni kake Daikoku sama ga kikakaru to" 「大きな袋を肩にかけ 大黒さまが 来かかると」 [translated by Nanao as "Doctor Big Black Coming"] (1996) published in his book *Kokoperi* 『ココペリ』 [*Kokopelli*] (1999). Finally, this chapter includes an ecopoem written during a visit to Nanao's last house in the village of Ōshika mura in 2019. It was during this visit that I encountered the Kokopelli walking spirit in Japan.

6.1. Nanao's Path as a Wanderer Poet

Traveler, your footprints
are the only road, nothing else.
Traveler, there is no road;
you make your own path as you walk.¹⁹¹

Antonio Machado

To be, I would now say, is not to be *in* place but to be *along* paths. The path, and not the place, is the primary condition of being, or rather of becoming.¹⁹²

Tim Ingold

Poet Nanao Sakaki exemplifies the natural coherence between living and writing poetry. Nanao was a wandering poet of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. His life and work have been associated with the postwar countercultural spirit, the rise of environmental consciousness, and the emergence of transpacific Buddhism. Nanao's poetics is often described as a beatnik, cosmopolitan, ecologically aware, and connected to the ancient wisdom of East Asian poets, scholars, and pilgrims.¹⁹³ According to friends and critics, Nanao's path as a wanderer poet is connected to the ancient lineage of Chinese and Japanese wandering thinkers and poets represented by figures such as Chuang-tzu, Hsieh Ling-Yun, Bashō, and Issa. For example, Gary Snyder, in his foreword to Nanao's book of poems, *Break the Mirror* (1987), depicts this connection to this ancient lineage as part of Nanao's karma:

His poems were not written by hand, but with the feet. These poems have been sat into existence, walked into existence, to be left here as traces of a life lived for living—not for intellect or

¹⁹¹ Machado, "[Traveler, Your Footprints] by Antonio Machado."

¹⁹² Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, 12.

¹⁹³ Many of these portraits of Nanao's life and poetics are found in the book *Nanao or Never* (2000), a book of testimonies, essays, pictures, interviews, poems, and drawings collected, edited, and published by Nanao's friend, the poet and editor Gary Lawless, see Lawless, *Nanao or Never*.

culture. (...) For all his independence Nanao Sakaki carries the karma of Chuang-tzu, Hsieh Ling-yun, Lin-chi, En-no-gyoja, Saygyo, Ikkyu, Basho, Ryokan, and Issa in his bindle.¹⁹⁴

In light of Snyder's opinion, Nanao's poetics can be presented as a walking and existential poetics characterized by its acute perception of life born from direct contact with the Earth. Snyder also emphasizes that Nanao's spiritual independence is a genuine feature connecting him with his East Asian wandering predecessors. It is well known that Nanao was reluctant to envision spiritual lineages as specific to one religious tradition, nor did he see himself as only belonging to a single spiritual lineage. For example, in a conversation with John Brandi, when asked if he was part of the lineage of the haiku poet Issa, Nanao replied: "I think so. Not only Issa, but many other people, like Lao Tzu in China. Many beings come to me, from me, many rivers going down, running down, sure."¹⁹⁵ And when the eminent Buddhist priest Chögyam Trungpa boasted to him about his lineage, Nanao responded, "I need no lineage; I am a desert rat."¹⁹⁶ Nanao's critical attitude toward "fixed" lineages and practices can be associated with his way of life as a cosmopolitan wanderer, poet, and environmental activist. In sum, Nanao's walking poetics are embedded with his particular wisdom and his spiritual vision of the wanderer poet's role in our modern Earth.

To introduce Nanao's ecocosmopolitan walking poetics, it's worth mentioning his personal image of the Earth. This image is an Earth unfolded in what Nanao called Earth A, B, and C in his poems. In fact, one of his poetry books in Japanese is titled *Chikyū B* 『地球 B, 1989』 [*Earth B*]. In Nanao's poem "Yuki no umi koideyuku" 「雪の海 漕いでゆく、1987」 [Rowing in the Snow Ocean], Earth B appears as a kind of twin to Earth A (this Earth) in which nature has been preserved from the environmental and human degradation. Nanao's poetic play

¹⁹⁴ Snyder, "Foreword" in *Break the Mirror*, XI.

¹⁹⁵ Sakaki, Brandi, and Bryan, "Cup of Tea, Plate of Fish an Interview with Nanao Sakaki," 73.

¹⁹⁶ Snyder, *ibid.*, XI.

with the idea of an Earth B may be an allusion to the environmental slogan that states that there is no Earth B, stressing the idea that we must take care of our only planet and home. Nanao's poetics, which exhibits a dimension of environmental consciousness, can represent what ecocritic Ursula K. Heise has described as the sense of a planet that is ecologically interconnected. Furthermore, Nanao's planetary vision recognizes a "more-than-human" world in the same way Heise characterizes eco-cosmopolitanism.¹⁹⁷ Thus, Nanao's poetics of walking can be representative of an eco-cosmopolitan poetics connected to wandering and environmentalism.

Nanao's wandering eco-cosmopolitanism was also one way of supporting environmental campaigns and cultural denunciation. From his former days as a "bum" poet, Nanao gained a deep consciousness of the ongoing environmental issues in Japan. Some critics, such as Karen Thornber, have noted that some of his poems are very critical of Japanese society's destruction of nature.¹⁹⁸ However, it may not be convenient to introduce Nanao's environmental critique without introducing his spiritual proposal for living ecologically: walking, chanting, and writing. As a life-long walker, Nanao opened his eyes to a walking spirituality and shared his environmentally conscious and poetic way of walking with the younger generations. One clear example of environmental observation and poetic walking in alliance with writing is his *fudoki* diary of North America written in 1990.¹⁹⁹ Also, his long walks alongside friends through the Nagaragawa riverside in the nineties were perceived by

¹⁹⁷ "Eco-cosmopolitanism, then, is an attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary "imagined communities" of both human and nonhuman kinds." Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, 61.

¹⁹⁸ Thornber, when analyzing Sakaki's poem "Ancestors of the Japanese," observes: "In addition to highlighting the inseparability of Japanese 'culture' and damaged environments, Sakaki's poem also preempts any claim that this culture is attractive, much less illustrious. It emphasizes that a society founded on destruction, no matter how glorious its achievements, is not sustainable. Sakaki's poem gives no alternatives. It portrays Japanese justifications of wrecking ecosystems to create culture as at best misguided and at worst diabolical." Thornber, "Literature, Asia, and the Anthropocene," 995.

¹⁹⁹ Sakaki (さかき), 「砂漠には風のサボテンが・・・」 [Cactus of the Wind in the Desert].

Nanao as a form of cultural and environmental resistance--in this case, against the construction of a major dam in what was used to be the last undammed Japanese main river.²⁰⁰

To deepen the analysis of Nanao's eco-cosmopolitan wandering and poetics, I suggest focusing on his encounter with the ancient spirit of Kokopelli. If Earth B was Nanao's vision of the planet in an age of environmental crisis (and therefore compatible with the self-conscious Anthropocene), Kokopelli is connected to Nanao's image of the wanderer poet and himself. There is a bond of love between the poet, Kokopelli, and Earth, which form an Eco-poetic Design of walking. Kokopelli is not just an adopted cultural icon in his poetics, nor simply a symbol of Nanao's wandering spirit, but rather a spiritual presence to which Nanao became related. This relationship came to reshape Nanao's identity, echoing Professor Hara's portrayal of Nanao as "the Kokopelli poet of our time" (*watashi tachi no jidai no kokoperi shijin* わたしたちの時代のココペリ詩人).²⁰¹ In the following section, I will examine Nanao's relation with the Kokopelli and Earth spirit to introduce his Eco-poetic Design by walking the Earth.

6.2. Nanao Meets the Kokopelli

Nanao traveled to North America for the first time in 1969, at age 46, invited by Gary Snyder, and he stayed in the United States until Christmas of 1970.²⁰² He visited the Libre Community in Colorado and the Sri Ram Ashram in Benson, Arizona. He also traveled through California and made his first visit to Mexico (The Pinacate Desert). Tomoyuki Endo's

²⁰⁰ Some of these aspects of Nanao's ecological vision in his life and work are briefly explored in the chapter "Yo soy una canción y aquí camino." La recuperación de la figura del viajero" ["I'm a song and here I walk" the retrieval of the traveler's figure] from my master thesis. Melchy Ramos, "Cómo habitar en el planeta tierra," 130–47.

²⁰¹ Hara (原), 「編者のあとがき」 [Editor's Epilogue], 218.

²⁰² Robert Lee states that Nanao was invited by Snyder in 1968, see A. Robert, "Japan Beat: Nanao Sakaki." According to a life timeline held in the Magokoro Literature Museum in Satsuma Sendai, Nanao traveled to the United States in 1969 and returned to Japan (Haneda airport) for the 1970s Christmas.

biographical account of Nanao's life states that Nanao met the hippies in San Francisco during this time, but they didn't interest him, and he instead moved to the desert regions of the Southwest, staying in Taos, New Mexico.²⁰³ According to some testimonies collected in the book *Nanao or Never* (2000), during this first trip, Nanao met the itinerant poet John Brandi (around early 1970), who became a lifetime partner in his journeys. Also, he became captivated by the desert landscape, the Native American peoples, and the back-to-the-land communities.²⁰⁴ Nanao's relationship with the American Southwest deepened during his subsequent visits in the seventies and eighties. He published a poetry book, participated in peyote ceremonies, stayed long periods meditating in caves, met the painter Georgia O'Keefe,²⁰⁵ and walked through impressive landscapes such as the Rio Grande, Chaco Canyon, Hopi's Mesas, Monument Valley, and the Pinacate Desert. Nanao likely came across Kokopelli rock paintings, petroglyphs (rock carvings), stories, and visions during his many Southwest journeys. Brandi describes his walks with Nanao like this:

Usually, we would bird watch along the Rio Grande. Or head into the high desert: Chaco Canyon, Ashislepah, the Hopi mesas, Monument Valley, Cañon de Chelly. Or to the mountains: the Jemez, Sangre de Cristos, Sandias. We would set up a modest camp, tell stories, walk, climb a peak, explore a canyon, pick up fossils, ear ferns and mushrooms, swim, slap mosquitoes, watch a datura blossom slowly unspiral at dusk—and fall asleep under shooting stars.²⁰⁶

From 1979 to 1996, Nanao split his time between North America and Japan. During these years, he also went on many international journeys. He visited China (in 1982 and 88), Taiwan (in 1992), Czechoslovakia (1990), Indonesia (1992), Australia (Tasmania), England and

²⁰³ Endo, 「ななおさかき小伝」, 211.

²⁰⁴ Brandi, "Desert Rat, Planetary Citizen," 4.

²⁰⁵ In 1979, Nanao stayed again in New Mexico. There he met Carroll Merrill, who at the time was the assistant of the painter Georgia O'Keefe. A poem portraying this encounter can be found in *Nanao or Never*. Carroll Merrill and Nanao had a son, Issa Abraham Sakaki Merrill, who lost his life to Batten's Disease. Carroll raised Issa as a single mother with the support of Albuquerque's Religious Society of Friends, a Quaker community. In 2020 the "Issa Sakaki Merrill" Scholarship for Peacemakers, in memory of their son, was announced. Albuquerque Friends Meeting, "Memorial Minute for Issa A. Sakaki Merrill."

²⁰⁶ Brandi, "Desert Rat, Planetary Citizen," 4.

Ireland (1993), and Korea (1996). In addition, Nanao was frequently invited to participate in poetry readings, festivals, and environmental-related conferences and events.²⁰⁷ For example, in 1987, he was invited to Alaska to participate in the Fourth Annual Sitka Symposium along with the writers Paula Gunn Allen, Barry Lopez and Gary Nabhan;²⁰⁸ and in 1988 he was invited to the Ecopoetry Round-Up event in San Francisco. During 1989-1990, Nanao continued traveling through the United States from West to East, and then he re-visited Chaco Canyon and wrote a travel diary inspired by the traditional genre of *fudoki* (風土記) titled *Sabaku ni ha saboten no kaze* 「砂漠には風のサボテンが・・・」 [*Cactus of the wind in the desert*], which was later published in his book *Kokoperi* (1999). In this diary, there is a passage in which Nanao describes his encounter with Kokopelli's paintings (figure 19):

Ruins or images of the future?

How long, Chaco Canyon. One of the most important vestiges of the dwellings made by the Indians of North America. Here lived the Anasazis, considered as the ancestors of various peoples such as Hopi and Pueblo.

In these five-story buildings that were built with adobes baked in the sun, 5,000 people were housed. On the nearby cliffs, cave paintings, such as the Kokopelli, move the hearts of observers.

This architecture, these images, are they one of the patrimonies of humanity? Or perhaps the key to accessing the future?

September 27th.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Nanao was invited to several countries worldwide during this period. For this reason, it is tough to keep track of the exact number of times he entered and left the USA and Japan.

²⁰⁸ The Island Institute, "Past Symposia | Island Institute."

²⁰⁹ 「遺跡か 未来像か

久し振りのチャコ・キャニオン。アメリカ・インディアンによる最大の居住跡。ホピやプエブロ諸族の先租と見なされる、アナザジが住んでいた。

日焼きレンガで築かれた5階建てに、5千人を収容。近くの岩壁には“ココペリ”などの岩絵が、見る人の胸に迫る。

これらの建築や画像は、人類の遺産の一つなのか、それとも未来への入り口の鍵なのか。

(9月27日)

Sakaki, 「砂漠には風のサボテンが・・・」, 149.

The above passage illustrates how Nanao thought that “primitive” cultures were, in fact, a “key to accessing the future.” Nanao’s description of the place suggests that “primitive” worlds are still alive, for example, in the way that rock paintings move modern humans’ hearts. Nanao’s drawing of the rock paintings shows many Kokopelli figures interacting with plants and animals. In Nanao’s view, the Kokopelli is a figure connected to a primitive yet alive spiritual world.

Kokopelli is an ancient flute player with zoomorphic features, widely represented in rocks and ceramics throughout a vast territory of the western region of the North American continent. Ekkehart Malokti, who has studied the iconography of ancient fluteplayers and its connection to the Hopi people, reports that this iconography seems to have originated in the Four Corners area (at the north of the present-day Hopi villages) between 800 and 1000 A.D.²¹⁰ It is known that representations of wanderer flutists appear in a wide area that includes the ancestral territories of the Pueblo, Hohokam, Mogollon, and Chalchihuites people, which are actually distributed across the United States of America and México.²¹¹ The name Kokopelli derives from the Hopi *Kookopölö*, the name of a katsina, or sacred spirit being, associated with fertility. Malokti sheds light on the fact that the flute player figures were mistakenly associated by early anthropologists and ethnographers with the katsina *Kookopölö*. In contrast, for Hopi people, those figures are typically referred to as *mahuu*, the cicada, an insect with a humpbacked appearance related to spring and germination cycles due to their “heating” powers.

Despite the Western misnaming of ancient flute players’ paintings and carvings as “Kokopellis,” the figure has become a cultural icon for people in the American Southwest. The

²¹⁰ Malokti, *The Making of an Icon. Kokopelli*, 6.

²¹¹ See, for example, José Luis Punzo’s exciting findings on the presence of the flutist iconography in Mexico in Punzo, “Camino Real de Tierra Adentro. Durango, el camino prehispánico” [Inland Royal Road. Durango, the Pre-Hispanic Road.].

aesthetic appeal of this walking and flute-playing figure has led to an ongoing massive appropriation that has eventually assigned varied (and often misunderstood) meanings to the so-called Kokopelli. However, this phenomenon has also contributed to a rediscovery by the West (and East) of the ancient native legacy. Now, let's consider Nanao Sakaki's own definition of Kokopelli:

The Kokopelli is a living spirit found among the native nations of North America, such as the Hopi. It is said that Kokopelli is incarnated as a humpback flutist cicada that uses its hump as a kind of rucksack. Carrying seeds and playing the flute while walking, Kokopelli appears painted in significant numbers on North America Southwestern cliffs and rocky walls.²¹²

Nanao's vision of Kokopelli is related to the Hopi understanding of flute players' iconography as portraying *mahuu*, the cicada, not merely as an animal but as a living spirit. Apparently, the varied iconography of Kokopelli seems to have motivated Nanao's own drawings of Kokopelli that appear on the cover of his book (figure 20). Nanao's book *Kokoperi* is not an ordinary poetry anthology but an eco-wandering manifesto of his spiritual awakening and reconnection with the living Earth. It is a mature wandering poet's book about becoming a follower of the ancient flute player. The book itself resembles a Kokopelli sack full of different kinds of texts and poetical seeds organized in sections by alphabetical order, from "A" to "K" as follows: poems (sections A-C), poems by his friends translated into Japanese (D), the script of a play (E), the *fudoki* diary (F), a record and map of the positions of the rising sun (G), two Gary Snyder prefaces to his work and life (H), an interview focused on environmental issues in Japan with the Japanese Environmental Monitor (I), Notes (J) and Nanao's bibliography (K).

²¹² 「ココペリ Kokopelli ホピなど、アメリカ原住民の間に生きる精霊。せむしの笛吹き、セミの化身と呼ばれる。背中のこぶは、リュックの代わり。種子を運び、笛を吹いて歩く姿は、北アメリカ南西部の岩壁に数多く描かれている。」 Sakaki (さかき), 『ココペリ』, 1.

In the section below, I will focus on the features and roles of Kokopellis in Nanao's poems and argue that there are at least three distinguishable features of these spiritual beings: practicing a meditative song in nature, associating with other spiritual beings to aid people, and connecting people while smuggling gifts.

6.3. Kokopelli and Walking Meditation

Kokopelli (by Nanao Sakaki)

“I'm a song
I walk here” —Ancient Hopi.

Here means
Where day break meets you.

Here means
Where a breeze meets you.

Here means
Where flowers meet you.

Here means
Where birds meet you.

Here means
where a song meets you.

I'm a song
I walk here.

April 1992.²¹³

²¹³ 「ココペリ

“私は 歌
私は ここを 歩く”
—古代ホピより

Nanao Sakaki and Gary Snyder related to Kokopelli as walker-poets following an ancient path of wisdom. Also, they associated their walking with ancestral meditations and pilgrimages. For example, in his poem “The Hump-backed Flute Player,”²¹⁴ Gary Snyder associates the Hump-backed Flute Player (the scholarly name for Kokopelli) with the travels of Hsüan Tsang, the Chinese Buddhist scholar who traveled to India in the seventh century. In particular, Snyder connects Kokopelli’s walking with “emptiness” and the practice of carrying “mind only” (*vijñaptimātra*). In this poem, he also associates Kokopelli’s load with the messages of Native American prophet Wovoka who appeared to Snyder in a vision. Similarly, Nanao Sakaki, in his poem “Kokoperi” (1992), introduces Kokopelli through an ancient Hopi song. It is worth noting that Nanao’s poem in Japanese employs wordplay to associate the sound *koko* (ココ) in the name *Kokoperi* with *koko* (ここ), the Japanese word for “here.” Through this sonic

こことは
夜明けが 君と出会う ところ

こことは
そよ風が 君と出会う ところ

こことは
花々が 君と出会う ところ

こことは
鳥たちが 君と出会う ところ

こことは
歌が 君と出会う ところ

私は 歌
私は ここを 歩く

1992年4月」

Sakaki, 24–25. Also, there exist a musicalized version of this poem sung by Iwate’s Prefecture singer Chihiro. I hear the musicalized version during the Maishin Matsuri in 2021.

²¹⁴ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, 81–84.

association, Kokopelli merges in her spirit the mindful walking and the living environment: day, breeze, flowers, and birds, transforming the poem into a testimonial song of being “here.” In the last stanza, “here” becomes the place for the synthesis of the itinerant voice and the song of nature into a non-divided existence expressed in the verses *I’m a song/ I walk here*. Thus, Kokopelli appears as a spiritual being awakening the consciousness of being “here” in humans’ hearts.

6.4. Kokopelli and Spiritual Association

As mentioned in section 6.2, for both Gary Snyder and Nanao Sakaki, Kokopelli appears associated with the Buddhist pilgrims and meditative practices. However, Nanao’s poetry also presents other features of Kokopelli. For example, Kokopelli seems to be associated with a range of spiritual and historical beings from Japan taking care of humanity. Here I am using the verb “to associate” in a double sense: first as the act of connecting two items in our mind or heart that share something in common, and secondly, as the act of establishing an alliance or making kin. For example, in the poems “Mitsuyu ningen” 「密輸人間」 [Me, a Smuggler] (1996), and “Ōkina fukuro wo kata ni kake Daikoku sama ga kikakaru to” 「大きな袋を肩にかけ大黒さまが来かかると」 [Doctor Big Black Coming] (1996), Kokopelli’s appears associated with Prince Ōkuni of Japan (Ōkuni nushi 大国主) and Doctor Big Black (Daikoku sama 大黒さま), illustrated in figures 21 and 22.²¹⁵

As is clear from the images above, Nanao’s Kokopelli can be associated with the pair Ōkuninushi / Daikokuten. Both are wandering spiritual beings with bulging backs. Moreover,

²¹⁵ “Prince Ōkuni of Japan” and “Doctor Big Black” are Nanao’s translations to refer to the syncretic spirit of Ōkuninushi/Daikokuten (大国主神/ 大黒様 or 大黒天) related to fertility and wealth in Japanese mythology and popular belief.

according to typical portrayals, Daikokuten is said to bear a sack full of grains, similar to Nanao's illustration of Kokopelli (figures 20, 21, and 22).

Kokopelli and Ōkuninushi/ Doctor Big Black are also associated as allies. In the poem “Doctor Big Black Coming” (1996), Kokopelli allies with other spiritual beings and characters to aid the Japanese people as they confront environmental issues such as species extinction, dam construction, and nuclear power plant operation. In this poem, Kokopelli joins forces as a volunteer with the Japanese spiritual beings of Ōkuninushi (Ōkuninushi no mikoto 大国主のみこと), Princess Kaguya (Kaguya hime かぐや姫), Pluto (Enma daiō えんま大王), Master Mason Three Five Jack (Sangorō Iwanaga 岩永三五郎), Bodhisattva Manjusri (Monju bosatsu 文殊菩薩), and himself in a sort of rescue team for aiding the Japanese people. In the first stanza of the poem, they gather on a bamboo raft in October 1995 at the Nagara River Dam.²¹⁶

One day, October 1995
A bamboo raft was floating
At Nagara River Dam site.
On the raft—
Doctor Big Black, Princess Kaguya,
Pluto, Master mason Three Five Jack,
Kokopelli, Bodhisattva Manjusri,
and Nanao Sakaki.

These seven wise people came
To an agreement that
Nagara River Dam should be preserved forever

²¹⁶ The image of the seven “wise people” gathered on a bamboo raft echoes the image of the treasure ship (*takarabune* 宝船) bearing the Seven Gods of Good Fortune (Shichifukujin 七福神). However, the specific localization of this new spiritual gathering on a “bamboo raft” is linked to the Nagara river and a specific environmental movement of the time: the protest movement against dam construction on the estuary of the Nagara river.

As a memorial to the monumental silliness
Of Japanese in the twentieth century.²¹⁷

In this poem, the wise spiritual beings appear to be environmentally conscious of ongoing issues around the Nagara river and Japan. Regarding the construction of a dam at the mouth of the Nagara River, they agree about the absurdity of this project being carried out by the Japanese government.²¹⁸ Further down, they also determined to help the Japanese people suffering from disaster, terrorism, and social issues during this particular year:

As a volunteer with Doctor Big Black,
The humpbacked flute player,
A spirit of North America, Kokopelli,
Who gives away cereals and songs
Will visit Japan soon
To cheer up Japanese who are suffering much
with Kobe earthquake,
Sarin attack in Tokyo subway,
A serious accident at fast breeder reactor Monju
and Nagano Winter Olympics.²¹⁹

As can be appreciated through the poem, despite belonging to different territories, these spiritual beings join forces to face ecological and socially challenging situations. In this way, the poem creates an effect of a spiritual or supernatural assembly. The association between

²¹⁷ Sakaki, *How to Live on the Planet Earth. Collected Poems*, 229–30.

²¹⁸ Richard A. Maher has noted that: “The environmental movements that opposed the construction of dams on the Nagara and Yoshino Rivers were especially dear to Sakaki. By the 1980s, the Nagara River was the last river on Japan’s main island of Honshu, whose flow had not been obstructed by a dam. The government sold the project to the locals as flood prevention, but its real intention was to supply water for industrial use. Although local conservationists and fishermen objected, construction began in 1988 and was completed in 1994.” Maher, “Sowing Seeds to Save the Planet: Environmental Issues in the Poetry of Nanao Sakaki,” 88.

²¹⁹ Sakaki, *How to Live on the Planet Earth. Collected Poems*, 230.

Kokopelli and its Japanese counterparts suggests the necessity of environmental collaborations in the spiritual, cultural, and emotional realms.

6.5. Kokopelli and Gifts

Another feature of Kokopelli (also shared with Ōkuninushi/Daikokuten) is abundance and fertility. It is well known that Hopi people link the cicada flute-player with abundance and fertility because the cicada's song is considered desirable as it said to raise temperatures and encourage the "growth and maturation of crops."²²⁰ The Kokopelli petroglyphs have also been interpreted by some anthropologists as portraying ancient merchants of what is thought to be an ancient cultural and economic corridor connecting the Mexican plateau with the American Southwest.²²¹ In Japan, Ōkuninushi, in the form of Daikokuten / Daikokusama, is commonly associated with merchant enterprises and commercial success. The bump or sack, an ideal tool for transporting richness in ancient times, reveals another feature of Nanao's Kokopelli: a wandering spirit bringing prosperity, joy, and wellness to the people. In his poem "Me, a Smuggler," Nanao portrays himself as a follower of Kokopelli and Prince Ōkuni as smugglers. In his poem, Nanao describes himself smuggling all sorts of small "souvenirs" such as insects, well-dried preserves, and fresh green leaves, as well as huge "souvenirs" such as stars, glaciers, and deserts:

- 3) Shrikes keep their left-overs
—butterfly, grasshopper, spider—
On sharp twigs as preserves.
One Autumn day in the hills outside Tokyo
I gathered these well/dried preserves
And carried them to San Francisco

²²⁰ Malokti, *The Making of an Icon. Kokopelli*, 66.

²²¹ See Punzo, "Camino Real de Tierra Adentro. Durango, el camino prehispánico."

As the best souvenirs I could imagine.

- 4) Twinkle, twinkle —to whom do all stars twinkle?
One summer night I offered the Southern Crown
To a graceful lady named Sally
Somewhere in the Southern Rockies.
Another summer night I presented the same constellation
To a bright-eyed woman named Kaya in Okinawa
Ten or twenty summers later
I visited two ladies living in California
Sally, blessed with many friends
Kaya, blessed with five children.
They are each constructing their own constellations.
- 5) Me, a smuggler!
Carrying an enormous backpack on my shoulders
Together with prince Okuni of Japan
And Kokopelli of North America
Someday I will smuggle
Coyote from the Rocky Mountains
Glacier from Alaska
Desert from Sahara
Virgin Forest from Tasmania
Blue Coral from Ishigaki, Okinawa
Fresh green leaves from Japanese forest
To a newborn constellation.
- 6) As lightly as the wind
As energetically as the sun
I smuggle my merchandise
Beyond all boundaries
Beyond the void.
- Don't call my trade-mark, "Poetry"!²²²

²²² Sakaki, *How to Live on the Planet Earth. Collected Poems*, 226–30.

The poem portrays traveling as a way to smuggle life and incommensurable souvenirs between territories. For example, in the third stanza, the poet carries living beings into new regions, a role similar to the one played by some birds, mammals, and other migratory beings. Also, there is a contrast between this smuggling of life and the smuggling of “merchandise” as the poet’s smuggling is moved by a spirit of respect for tiny living beings, gifts, and offerings. This spirit of generous smuggling permeates the vision of the wanderer poet. Each of these actions also appears connected through the wanderer poet’s path, creating a constellation of loving bonds. The poet’s wandering (following Kokopelli) becomes a way of weaving connections between people and territories. Creating these constellations is revealed as a cosmopolitan design of life and poetry on Earth.

6.6. Nanao, Kokopelli and the Earth: The Eco-poetic Patterns of Walking

Nanao’s walking wisdom, inspired by the spirit of Kokopelli, can be seen as the poet’s Eco-poetic Design for walking the Earth. This Eco-poetic Design of walking, writing, and smuggling weaves a meditative, spiritual, and affective network to bring self-awareness, support, and love. Thus, the literary eco-cosmopolitan dimension can be better rendered as an ecological and poetic practice of relationships made by wandering across the Earth. Furthermore, Nanao’s sensibility toward the walking spiritual beings reveals a spiritual sensitivity and a consciousness of his work beyond simply mixing traveling and poetry writing. This distinction is made clear in his rejection of the idea that his “trademark” is just poetry.

Nanao’s Eco-poetic Design for walking the Earth reveal the spiritual, epistemic, and ontological layers generated in the soils of practice. In Nanao’s style, the patterns visible in the design are walking on foot, observing nature with wondering eyes, opening his spiritual eyes

to ancient spiritual beings and cultures, and making bonds through friendship and love along the journey. This is the design of a mature poet who dedicated his life as a creator, environmentalist, and *homo sapiens* to a reconnection with a living Earth. These layers of practice and achievements echo Rebecca Solnit's vision of walking which considers walking travels as a way to explore both the world and the mind.²²³ Paraphrasing Solnit, journeys on foot show us ways to reconnect the body, the mind, and the Earth. Figure 23 presents a graphic representation of Nanao's Ecopoetic Design of ecocosmopolitan walking. The figure is a reinterpretation of Arthur Okamura's portrait of Nanao Sakaki titled "Nanao doing his thing," published in the book *Nanao or Never* (2000). This reinterpretation shows Nanao as a wandering poet carrying a flute and being accompanied on this path on Earth's surface by the spiritual beings of Prince Ōkuni / Daikokuten and Kokopelli.

The following ecopoem, "Kokopelli in Ōshika mura" is based on my trip to this village in the South Japanese Alps in Nagano Prefecture. During my stay, I visited Nanao's last house, in which Nanao's room is still preserved as a memorial place by his close friends. There I was able to meet the Kokopelli spirit.

²²³ She says: "Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord. Walking allows us to be in our bodies and in the world without being made busy by them. It leaves us free to think without being wholly lost in our thoughts." Solnit, "Tracing a Headland" in *Wanderlust*.

6.7. Ecopoem: Kokopelli in Ōshika mura

Preamble (figure 24)

I came back from Ōshika mura to Shinnosuke's house in Saitama. In Ōshika we spent the night with Bob Uchida and Midori-san. The three of us, Shinnosuke, Rei and I, went there in Rei-san's car. Midori's beloved cat Mu-chan lives in Bob and Midori's house. Midori told us about her latest experiences visiting a friend in Taiwan and some of her memories from her past. Speaking of memories of her generation that she calls Revolution + Dream, that day Bob also taught us the melody and lyrics of a song that goes: *Wandi wandi wandi*, inspired by the aboriginal peoples of Australia.²²⁴

I

God of compassion
take care of our lives
guide us with humility
without external
or internal vanities.
That's how we'll see your house,
our home
and our heart
beating deeply.

Since your heart is always here
there is no distance.
The water we drink
of the here and now
has dissolved all barriers of time
and space.

—If you go with the heart
your steps

²²⁴ *Wanji-wanji* or *laka*, is a song that is chanted in many territories and by several aboriginal peoples in the Australian continent, see Croft et al., “Aboriginal Australia’s Smash Hit That Went Viral.”

are like pulses,

latitudes—



私は歌

ここを歩く

Nanao, in your last house, the ramshackle one
there is a planet Earth
in an Australian poster
with the extinct animals from the Pleistocene.

There is a planet Earth in
the Tibetan? prayer flags
in the 平和 and Rock prints

「すべての武器を楽器に」

In the wooden animal sculptures.

In this rundown house
with an outdoor bathroom
there is room for Mother Earth
in a map of Yamaguchi Prefecture's islands
牛島馬島長島

and in the margins it says:

平和とはすべての生き物と友達になること

男たちの願い...核の無い空風光

女たちの願い...核の無い未来海島

In your dilapidated house
on the tatamis in your room
there is your altar that Bob and Midori care for,
with photographs, and a rainbow mandala

painted on the canvas of the sky.
Also, bags, necklaces, a wooden flute and
a sake offering.
A long bird feather
and two wooden canes.

From here, at 800 meters above sea level,
the snowy peaks of Nagano can be seen.
From your room I see Kokopelli on the summits
leading a procession of spirits
who walk across the snow.

—Walk in peace— you say
Walk, answers the Earth.

December 30, 2019. Ōshika mura.

6.8. Conclusion

This chapter offered an eco-poetic interpretation of Nanao's ecocosmopolitan wandering through the lens of Eco-poetic Design. Nanao's wandering can be interpreted beyond its literary significance to show a spiritual dimension underlying his practice and style of combining walking, ecological awareness, and forging relationships with people, spiritual beings, and territories. Nanao's unique way of charting his path was imbued with practices inspired by the flute player spirit of the cicada (popularly known as Kokopelli). Nanao's way to relate with Kokopelli was by forging an eco-poetic relationship sustained through his practice of walking the Earth.

This chapter showed that Nanao's eco-poetic vision of Kokopelli questions any attempt to interpret this figure metaphorically and, on the contrary, takes Kokopelli's existence seriously as a spiritual being with its own agility, will, and agency. In other words, it opens a

door into Nanao's "belief" to reveal that Kokopelli can be understood as a spirit guiding and aiding humans to reconnect with the Earth and live a life worth living. From a relationist perspective, Kokopelli's role in bringing ecological wisdom to humans exists in relation to nurturing awareness, care, and love toward nature and people. These practices enable the smuggling of incommensurable gifts and "merchandise" in the wandering poet rucksack. Also, Nanao recognizes that ancient spiritual beings continue their wanderings, meet other spiritual beings and associate with ancient wanderers, poets, merchants, and pilgrims. These spiritual beings are primarily worried about environmental issues and work to aid human people suffering from natural disasters and social issues.

Taken together, observing nature with wonder, opening his spiritual eyes to ancient spiritual beings and cultures, and making bonds through friendship and love along the journey comprise three fundamental layers of Nanao's ecopoetic relationship. This ecopoetic relationship reveals an Ecopoetic Design that achieved a reconnection between his life and the Earth, which was conceived by Nanao as both the "vast land" (*daichi* 大地) that was ecologically interconnected²²⁵ and a planetary mother calling on humanity to work toward an age of ecological and spiritual awareness. In his poems, we can sense this ontological and affective reconnection by looking at the unfolding of Earth as an Earth A, B, and C. This unfolding of many possible Earth scenarios is a direct call for ecological awareness and action. Furthermore, the cover of his book titled *Earth B* portrays a female figure cradling the planet Earth in her arms, stressing Nanao's sympathy for the conception of a planetary Mother Earth. In sum, for Nanao, Earth was not understood to be simply a planet on which humans dwell and

²²⁵ Traditionally this "vast land" (*daichi* 大地) has been conceived as the ground or earth in opposition to the sky (*ten* 天). It is likely that Nanao retrieved this word from Zen tradition, particularly through his friend the poet Gary Snyder. The word appears for example in Nanao's poem titled "Kagami warubeshi" 「鏡 割るべし」 [Break the Mirror].

travel, but as a ground for spiritual and poetic practice, a planet still traversed by spirits, and a planetary-scale mother wishing for humans of different nations to awaken their spiritual eyes.

Finally, this Eco-poetic Design approach to Nanao's walking poetics shows us that, paraphrasing Gary Snyder, a life lived for walking, joining the force of poetry, spiritual awakening, and ecological awareness results in a poetic work and way of living that can be considered an heir to ancient masters' wisdom. In other words, this "work," the Eco-poetic Design and not the "poetry," distinguishes a modern wandering poet walking the path of Chuang-tzu, En-no-gyoja or Saigyō from pale imitators of the journeys of the wandering poets. The Eco-poetic Design reveals to us that the ancient paths of the wandering poet are still charged with spiritual force in this Anthropocene age. They are just a modern iteration of ancient practices of weaving relationships through that bodily movement we call walking. Ecologically speaking, Nanao's walking is full of spiritual, ecological, and environmental impact connecting us with a living Earth and receive his incommensurable "smugglings." At a personal level, this means opening our eyes to see that we are not walking alone but with Nanao and the Kokopelli on a full of spirit Earth. In this way, I also experienced the force of the Eco-poetic Design, the bonds of love guiding my own steps, and spiritual beings on Earth gradually began to appear and speak in front of my eyes in the town of Ōshika-mura (figures 25 and 26).

Chapter 7

Island Wisdom: Sansei Yamao's Poetic Ecological Philosophy

Introduction

This chapter explores Japanese contemporary animist visions by examining the poet, farmer, and thinker Sansei Yamao's (1938-2001) poetic philosophy as it is introduced in his emblematic book *Animizumu to iu kibō* 『アニミズムという希望』 [A Hope Called Animism] (2000). The chapter opens with an ecopoem written during my visit to his cabin-studio called Gukaku-an in 2018. It then reads Yamao's biography and summarizes the main arguments of his book chapter by chapter. Through this succinct summary, I aim to outline Yamao's key notions of his ecological and poetic philosophy. I argue that Yamao's animist philosophy can be described as ecosophy born and grounded in Yakushima through an Eco-poetic Design that articulates an animist *kami*-world and establishes an ethics for human inhabitation of the Earth. Finally, this chapter includes an ecopoem inspired by Yamao's poem number XXIV from the “Birōha bōshi no shita de” 「びろう葉帽子の下で」 [Under the Palm Leaf Hat] series. This ecopoem brings to life the intense feelings that the animist ontological vision can stir in our hearts.

7.1. A Personal Encounter with Sansei Yamao's Philosophical Heart and Poetic Life

I visited Sansei Yamao's cabin studio called Gukaku-an (愚角庵) [The Fool's Hermitage] in the mountains of Issō in Yakushima in 2018. At the time, I had only read some of his poems, seen some of his pictures, and had in my heart an intuition that Sansei's life was

connected to the heritage of twentieth-century Japanese poet-farmers such as Kenji Miyazawa, Kiyoko Nagase, and Masanobu Fukuoka. Although I didn't know much about his philosophy of life yet, visiting his cabin studio opened my senses and my heart to feel a way of life I wanted to understand.

In the years after my visit, I encountered many of the books written by Yamao and attended an exhibition held in 2019 where I was able to encounter Yamao's work in person—for example, through the number of published books: I could count more than 40 titles.²²⁶ However, when it comes to Japanese articles, reviews, and essays about his work, there is a surprisingly small amount of analysis and commentary available, compared to his vast bibliography and the multiple editions of his books. However, I also became aware that Yamao's philosophy and poetry lives in memory, particularly in all the memorial events carried out by his family, friends, colleagues, and the people in Yakushima. There can be no doubt that Yamao's philosophy and poetry of daily life in dialogue with the island's living beings has become part of the contemporary cultural heritage of Yakushima. This may suggest the slowness with which scholars tend to incorporate poetic philosophy into academic discourse. In contrast, village people had easily absorbed this kind of philosophy precisely because of its poetic beauty and congruity with their way of life, a significant poetry-life.

Yamao's poetic philosophy of an ecological way of life was developed carefully in an almost isolated life in the mountains of Yakushima, where he moved with his family in the seventies. His philosophy was rooted in his daily-to-day experiences as a farmer, yet it maintained a cosmopolitan transcontinental dialogue.²²⁷ Yamao's style employs poetic

²²⁶ The exhibition was held in 2020 in the Title bookshop in Ogikubo, Tokyo. According to a note in a local newspaper, the exhibition presented 63 books written by Sansei. Murayama (村山), 「No. 59. 三省の樹」 [No. 59. Sansei's Tree].

²²⁷ Sansei was an avid reader of European and Asian philosophy. In the spirit of cosmopolitan reflection, near the end of his life, Yamao visited Gary Snyder in his house in the Sierra Nevada. (Yamao had met and spent time with Snyder during the Buzoku years in the sixties). As a result of this visit, the transpacific environmental, poetic, and philosophical dialogue between Snyder and Yamao was published as a book, see Yamao (山尾), Snyder (ゲ

language. His message is not presented through rationalist argumentation but with the words of experience and sensibility toward nature. His philosophical language flows through beautiful poems, personal history, and spiritual accounts. That said, this chapter is not meant to be an explanation, but rather a sort of writing in companionship, a personal encounter with Sansei's philosophical heart and poetic life to be found in his book *Animizumu to iu kibō*. The first stop on my personal journey to connect with Yamao's work begins in his Gukaku-an, which is now a memorial place managed by Yamao's family.

7.2. Ecopoem: Preserving a Day in the Heart

Preamble

三光鳥を聞いたら私を覚えだしてください

Akihiko and Haruko Yamao came to pick me up at my inn, the Tomarigi motorcycle hostel (とまり木 raider house). We left together heading inland toward the island's northern zone. Near the town of Issō there's a road that climbs into the green mountains, and 4 km up that road is the Yamao house. That's where Sansei's younger brother Akihiko Yamao lives with his wife. Just a few meters further you come to the ruins of the abandoned home where Sansei and his wife lived — a humble wooden house that nature is steadily reclaiming. Out front is the cabin-studio (*yamagoya* 山小屋) which is preserved as a small museum-memorial to the poet, philosopher, devotee, and farmer. The cabin-studio is called Gukaku-an, 愚角庵, literally something like the Fool's hermitage.

Inside the shrine there are books — many books about Buddhism, about India, Tibet, books by Milarepa and Rumi in Japanese. I hear the stream running out back. I see Sansei's collection of stones, small shells, some bodhisattva sculptures, and on the altar at the back of the room, a beautiful sculpture of the Amida Buddha (Amida Nyorai). The wooden figure of the Buddha was sculpted by the father of Haruko, Sansei's sister-in-law.

ーリー), and Yamazato (山里), 『聖なる地球のつどいかな : Great Earth Sangha』 [A Gathering of the Sacred Earth: Great Earth Sangha].

Sansei and his family migrated here from the Kanto region forty years ago, and ten years later his younger brother and his family followed him. They were part of a Japanese movement of people abandoning the cities (Sansei was born and raised in Tokyo) in search of the peace and light of vegetation and agrarian life. Here, they grow yams and potatoes, and there are also mandarin trees and a purple *mokuren* (magnolia) that was in bloom when I arrived.

I

I visited the cabin all afternoon.

Strong presence, the heart beating where
wisdom still flows.

Strong time, Snyder and Milarepa,
Rumi and farming books,
books about Yakushima,
and the Jōmon Sugi.

Poems to squash,
to squash blossom
and the flowers that open after the typhoon.

Photographs,
memories of his friends and relatives.

His smile, happy beneath some big leaves.

I sensed the plants, the world's conversation,
—there's only life—

and this day is a flower in my heart.

After giving thanks and spending a long moment alone,
I heard this song:

*Be in all times
with the heart,
friend.*

*Be in all times,
listening with the heart
singing with the heart
celebrating with the heart
being born with the heart
with the heart,*

friend.

Buddha of Paradise,
radiant.

I saw Sansei and we sang:

植物の子供である *shokubutsu no kodomo de aru* I am a plant child

動物の子供である *dōbutsu no kodomo de aru* I am an animal child

海の子供である *umi no kodomo de aru* I am an ocean child

雲の子供である *kumo no kodomo de aru* I am a cloud child

愛の子供である *ai no kodomo de aru* I am a love child

島の子供である *shima no kodomo de aru* I am an island child

休みの子供である *yasumi no kodomo de aru* I am a rest child

And for a long time before me

I felt the jungle

and the song of the jungle,

I remembered Pedro and his family with gratitude,

I felt the loving and pure force

that erases pain, that dispels evil

and cleanses the soul

with its clear water

Clap, clap clap

The Amida Buddha applauds

and his applause is a gift

of his endless compassion.

—Before being born your soul comes from paradise—

Akihiko told me that night.

II

That evening I met Shinkai (known as Kyappu), a member of the Tribe (Buzoku).

At dinner, we ate shrimp, spinach, a stew with potatoes from the kitchen garden (*hatake*), and we toasted with wine. Te-chan (which is what they call Tatsuya) also came, another *ex-sarariman* (white-collar worker) who has found refuge on the island. I read my poems for them, and we talked about songs, animals, birds and insects, flowers, and trees. They told me that

Sansei used to like listening to Atahualpa Yupanqui. Then Akihiko showed me the record Sansei used to listen to: *El hombre, el paisaje y su canto*, the Japanese edition, recorded when Yupanqui was in Sapporo. Then I found myself thinking about Peru again.

Te-chan was happy when he read my poem written in the Amazon. It's the poem from Hatun Mayu that I heard in a dream in Santa Clara two years ago. Maybe it will inspire me to write a song— he told me, —I, too, am looking for rest.

I hear these words crossing tongues
I spoke of the Nahuatl poetry of flowers
and of the gardens and birds of the poets
of in xochitl in cuicatl.
Then, they told me about
the sankōchō, the bird of paradise
on the island.

Someone thanked me that night
with a deep sleep.

March 15, 2018.

III Poem of Yamao I found in his mountain hut (figure 27)

Squash

When autumn comes we'll eat squash
We'll eat the golden fruit of the squash
Covered by a greenblack skin
Wrinkled ancient aliment we'll eat the squash
Drinking fully of the summer sun
while it's on the ground
when it's transformed into its own sun we'll eat the squash
We'll eat the golden squash
Ah when autumn comes we'll eat squash

(Translation by Ryan Greene)

7.3. Sansei Yamao's Short Biography: From Anarchist to Devout Buddhist and Poet-thinker

Sansei Yamao (1938-2001) was a poet, philosopher, peasant, and devout Buddhist born in Tokyo (in the Kanda neighborhood). After finishing high school, inspired by Kierkegaard's philosophy, he began studying philosophy at Waseda University. As a student, Yamao became an activist and joined an anarchist faction of students that organized the student protests of the 1950s and 1960s. However, disillusioned by the movement's disarticulation and the leaders' co-optation by political parties, he gradually distanced himself from the student movement.

In the 1960s, Yamao met Nanao Sakaki, Kenji Akiba, Tetsuo Nagasawa, and other young poets and wanderers in the Shinjuku area, and he soon became one of the founding members of the so-called Bum Academy in 1965. In 1968 Yamao was a founder of Buzoku (The Tribes), the group that emerged from the Bum Academy for pursuing a "tribal" way of life. Then he actively organized the Buzoku's communes, the publication of Buzoku's newspaper, and ran small food businesses. In 1973 he undertook a year-long pilgrimage trip with his wife and children to India and Nepal, and in 1977 settled permanently on the island of Yakushima, in Kagoshima prefecture. Indian spirituality, particularly the Upanishads and the poetic teachings of the Tamil master Ramana Maharshi on finding the true self, had an enduring impact on his work.

In Yakushima, Yamao and his family settled along the riverside of the Shirako River (白川) on the slopes of Mount Shirako (白川山 or 白河山), in what were the remains of an abandoned pre-war village. He built a house with his family and devoted himself to peasant life, writing poetry, Buddhist and Advaita Vedanta faith, translation, and philosophical reflections on animism, poetry, and spiritual and ecological paths. Yakushima Island, famous for its millenary sugi trees (such as the so-called Jōmon sugi), became his "final abode," his

life-long land of spiritual practice, poetic inspiration, and philosophical reflection. Yamao's philosophy is permeated by his daily life on the island and the encounter with the voices of its exuberant nature. Thus, we can call it a relationist philosophy of living with the Island's people and nature.

During his life in Yakushima, Yamao also participated in the Japanese poetic and religious tradition and was especially interested in Animism as a way of forging a Japanese spiritual and poetic perspective in dialogue with other traditions. For example, he wrote a book about the poet, agronomist, and Buddhist Miyazawa Kenji, and another on the haiku writer Kobayashi Issa, in which he links haiku with Animist thought.²²⁸ It can be argued that Yamao adopted the Animist perspective as a way to examine the Japanese notion of God and its historical and community-based relationship with nature. The previously mentioned collection *Animizumu to iu kibō*, which is a transcription of oral lectures he gave at the University of the Ryukyus, has become a well-known title for contemporary scholars of Animist thought.

Yamao was a prolific writer who explored different styles and genres including diary, testimony, poetry, prayer, and essay. In fact, many of his books combine multiple genres. Some of his representative books are: his diaries, including *Indo junrei nikki* 『インド巡礼日記』 [*The pilgrimage diary of India*] (2012) and *Neparu junrei nikki* 『ネパール巡礼日記』 [*The pilgrimage diary of Nepal*] (2012); his books of poetry, including *Birōha bōshi no shita de* 『びろう葉帽子の下で』 [*Under the Palm Leaf Hat*] (1993) and *Mizu ga nagarete iru* 『水がながれている』 [*The Water Is Flowing*] (2001); his collections of testimonies and essays, including *Seirōjin* 『聖老人』 [*The Holy Old Man*] (1988) and *Genkyō he no michi* 『原郷

²²⁸ These books are *No no michi Miyazawa Kenji zuisō* 『野の道—宮沢賢治随想』 [*The field way: Essay on Miyazawa Kenji*] from 1983 and *Kami wo yonda Issa no haiku: kibō toshite no animizumu* 『カミを詠んだ一茶の俳句: 希望としてのアニミズム』 [*The haikus of Issa who wrote the kami: Animism as hope*] of 2000.

への道』 [*The Path to the Original Land*] (2003); and his book of prayers, *Inori* 『祈り』 [*Prayer*] (2002). As a translator, some of his books include: *Ramu Purasado. Kari sanka* 『ラムプラサードー母神讃歌』 [*Ramprasad Hymns to Kali*] (1982) a translation of the poems of the bhakta poet Ramprasad Sen with the poet Nagasawa Tetsuo; *Ramana Maharishi no oshie* 『ラマナ・マハリシの教え』 [*The teachings of Ramana Maharishi*] (1993); and *Koyote no rōjin to tomo ni. Amerikan no zoku monogatari* 『コヨーテ老人とともにーアメリカインディアンの旅物語』 [*Along with the Old Coyote. The Tales of the American Indians*] (2005), a selection of Native American stories collected by Jaime de Angulo.

These days, the Yakushima Island community and his relatives carry out an annual poetry award for primary and secondary school students called the Orion Belt School Poetry Award (Orion Sansei Shō オリオン三星賞) created in his honor. His cabin studio, a modest mountain cabin, still stands as a place for the remembrance and dissemination of Yamao's work.

7.4. A Hope Called Animism: *Animizumu to iu kibō*

Animizumu to iu kibō is the transcription of a seminar Yamao taught at the University of the Ryukyus in Naha, Okinawa, from July 12 to July 16, 1999.²²⁹ The seminar consisted of a daily lecture of 90 minutes for one week and was meant for students of different fields enrolled in undergraduate courses. Yamao states in the “Epilogue” (Atogaki) of the book that the motivation for publishing the entire content of the seminar as a book lies in a desire to bring its message to all university students in Japan and the general public.²³⁰ The transcription of these

²²⁹ Yamao's presentation at this University was possible thanks to the invitation of professor Katsunori Yamazato, who has specialized in Gary Snyder and the transpacific exchange around his work. Gary Snyder is also well known for popularizing the term Turtle Island, the name of the North American continent given by some Native American Peoples, and the title of one of his most renowned books.

²³⁰ Yamao (山尾), 『アニミズムという希望』 [*A Hope Called Animism*], 394.

lectures allows us to encounter the oral expression of Yamao's poetic and ecologic philosophy. The lectures were carried out along with Yamao's reading of poems and the distribution of written poems to the students.

In the lectures, Yamao intertwines poetry reading, reflections made in the moment, stories from daily life, interpretation of his poems, and presentation of philosophical ideas. The feeling when reading the book is similar to that of hearing somebody telling wise stories around the fire. This imbues Yamao's ecological thought with some "primitive and ancient" flavor that makes it unique, as he employs a non-conventional way of bringing ecological reflection into the University setting. Poetry reading creates a particular atmosphere that doesn't diminish philosophical argumentation; instead, it fosters the transmission of philosophical-poetic wisdom. I propose approaching Yamao's Island Wisdom as an eco poetic philosophy that unfolds the contents of an Eco poetic Design rooted in the soil and nature of Yakushima Island. In other words, Yamao's eco poetic philosophy articulates a life design, showing how human beings can become attuned to a living Earth. Yamao's eco poetic sensibility can guide our characterization of an Island Wisdom.²³¹

In the section that follows, I will present a summary of the book, highlighting the main ideas, arguments, concepts, and poetic images of each lecture (in the book, they are divided into chapters). Ultimately, I will synthesize these ideas in an eco poetic diagram of Yamao's Island Wisdom.

1. *A Kami Called the Land (Tsuchi to iu kami 土というカミ)*

²³¹ Island Wisdom is a phrase I found as a slogan of the University of the Ryukyus (Ryūdai), which literally says: "Island Wisdom, for the world, for the future." Unfortunately, I didn't find any other mention on the University home page; however, it clearly manifests a vision of a certain kind of wisdom locally articulated, which is seen as participating in a significant global dialogue for constructing the future." University of the Ryukyus, 「琉球大学創立70周年記念誌の発刊について」 [Publication of the 70th Anniversary Commemorative Journal of the University of the Ryukyus].

In this chapter, Yamao defined “animism” as the way of thinking (*kangaekata* 考え方) in which a spirit or soul (*anima*) resides in all things in nature. Sansei asserts that animism is not just a religious vision but also a way of life (*seikatsukeitai* 生活形態) and a vision of the world rooted in a specific culture. He also insists that animism is a type of “sensitivity” (*kanjusei* 感受性) that can be found in the arts. For example, Sansei sees animation as an animistic way human creativity connects to the world of the *anima* through images. Furthermore, he considers that artistic expressions like reading poetry to an audience, for example, to university students, acts similarly.²³² It is worth noting that, although he employs the Latin term *anima*, Yamao’s vision of animism as a particular sensitivity towards the animated world does not only rely on a Western perspective; he significantly connects animistic sensitivity to the Japanese notion of *kotodama* (言霊, literally the spirit residing in a word)²³³ and the origins of the term *uta* (歌, song).²³⁴

After introducing his own transcultural conception of the term animism. Yamao explores animism in Japan, contrasting two notions of *kami*, commonly translated as “gods.” He distinguishes between *kami* when written with the kanji character [神] and when written in the katakana syllabary as [カミ]. For Yamao, the first *kami* is equivalent to the idea of “God”, as it is understood in Western monotheistic religions. In contrast, the second notion of *kami*, refers to “god” (written in lower case), as those spiritual beings or *seirei* (精霊) that inhabit all things that bring comfort to human existence. These *kami* (in lowercase) would exist in all things and

²³² Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 12–16.

²³³ According to the *Encyclopedia of Shinto*, *kotodama* refers to the spiritual power (霊力) that lies inside words or to the understanding that through the recitation of words, this spiritual power can be manifested. It is considered part of the perspectives of those faiths in spiritual beings or an explanation of their effect of moving peoples’ hearts-minds as it has been articulated characteristically in the Japanese culture. “Kotodama 言霊”, 384.

²³⁴ Sansei bases his conception of *kotodama* and *uta* on Shizuka Shirokawa’s (白川 静) research of the history of Chinese characters. Yamao states that according to this author, the Japanese word *uta* would come from the ancient word *utaki* or *ataki*, which refers to the song or call that was anciently used for hunting, see Yamao, *ibid.*, 17–18.

phenomena of the universe including the soil and human beings.²³⁵ According to Yamao, animism as a path to realizing the ultimate truth can be achieved by orienting ourselves toward God, written as [神] and “god” written as [カミ].

kami { **Kami [神] God**
kami [カミ] god (spiritual beings)

2. *Heading to the mountain (Yama ni mukatte 山に向かつて)*

In this chapter, Yamao reflects on his conception of place and identity. For the poet, “place” cannot be reduced to a physical location, but instead should be considered a spiritual training ground. He states, “earth is an infinite *dōjo*, and poetry is our *seiza* position.”²³⁶ Furthermore, poetry creation is described as a practice of “living” (*ikiru koto*) and “breathing” (*iki wo suru*).

Regarding the connection between human lives and the Earth, Yamao retrieves the word *makoto* or *magokoro* (まこと, 真心, sincerity) and attaches it, in an old-fashioned way, to the modern meaning of identity (*aidentiti* アイデンティティ).²³⁷ For Yamao, *makoto* is

²³⁵ 「 (...) 漢字の「神」ももちろんぼくの中にありますけども、これは英語で表現すれば「God」、片仮名のカミは小文字で「god」と表記する神なんです。小文字の「god」という英語表現はないんですけども、これはぼくが勝手に作りました。小文字のカミでもいいですね。人間に慰めを与えてくれるものがカミであり、善いものが何でもカミです。美しいものはなんでもカミですし、喜びを与えてくれるものは何でもカミです。それを丁寧にひろっていくと世界の内にはカミガミがふれている。真理万象の内には精霊が宿っているというカミガミの世界。」 [(...) Of course, the "Kami" expressed in the kanji 「神」 resides in me, but in English, this would be “God,” and the katakana “kami” would be written in lowercase as “god.”

We don’t have an English expression for “god” in lowercase, so I made it myself. I find that this lowercase *kami* (god) is also good. This *kami* gives comfort to human beings and exists in anything good for us. This is also the *kami* of all beautiful things and everything that brings us joy. If you can embrace these beautiful things within yourself, the *kamis* will overflow your world. The phenomenal world [*shinrabanshō* 森羅万象] is the world of the *kamis* where all these spiritual beings reside.], Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 25–26.

²³⁶ 「土は無限の道場、詩はそこに正座する」, Yamao, *ibid.*, 32.

²³⁷ Yamao, *ibid.*, 35.

conceived as the sense of essence in each person as well as their sense of identity. Yamao states that though *makoto* (as identity or sincerity) tends to be conceived as something enclosed in the self, it can also mean relationship (*kankeisei* 関係性). The case in point is when *makoto* is used to describe the fullness felt inside a human relationship. In Yamao's view, the path of *makoto* lies not only in the person herself but simultaneously in her relationship with nature and the universe.²³⁸ Following the path of his own *makoto*, Yamao shares the story of his personal encounter with the emblematic millenary tree called Jōmon sugi or “The Old Saint” (*Seirōjin* 聖老人, as the tree is named in the poem with the same title).²³⁹ Yamao shares his experience of hearing one night the messages of the *kami* residing in the Jōmon Sugi. For him, this experience became evidence of the existence of a personal *kami* that can communicate with the natural world of *kami*. Based on this proof, Yamao states that he professes a “personal religion” (*paasonaru na shūkyō* パーソナルな宗教). For him, it is based on personal experiences that shape our identity and from which we derive our capacity to experience the world of *kami*.

Identity = makoto → relationship → world of kami

3. Smallness and Love (*Kūsa kanasa* 小さな愛さ)

In the third chapter, Yamao reflects on the social spirit of the sixties and the aspirations of Buzoku, the group of poets and commune members he founded along with Nanao Sakaki, Kenji Akiba, and Tetsuo Nagasawa, among others. For Yamao, the core of Buzoku's spirit was the popularized idea among some young people in the sixties of achieving a social revolution

²³⁸ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 40.

²³⁹ Yamao, *ibid.*, 49–50.

not by directly confronting the government but by creating small communities within the dominant society. This “strategic” vision had an important influence on Buzoku’s vision of transforming society. Nevertheless, Yamao also considers that Buzoku’s revolution had the particularity of an aspiration to build a communal lifestyle respecting nature.²⁴⁰

Later in this chapter, Yamao further develops his conception of *kotodama* by affirming that the Okinawan proverb *kūsa kanasa* 小 さ 愛 さ (literally meaning smallness and love), which connotes the meaning of “life is a treasure,” can be considered a modern example of the use of *kotodama*. In line with the ancient Japanese visions of words’ effects, Yamao claims that some words, “profound words,” possess a spirit or *reikon* (霊魂). Yamao argues that, for example, these Okinawa proverbs have accompanied Okinawan people in their songs and culture through the many difficult episodes of their history. Therefore, these words are profound words that possess a spirit with the power to change a person’s life.²⁴¹

In words (kotodama = a spiritual force) → Change of life

In the end, Yamao introduces the connection between a sense of place and ecology by adopting the bioregionalist approach and his own concept of “Life-territory regionalism” (*seimeichikishūgi* 生命地域主義). Furthermore, Yamao affirms, along with Gary Snyder, that by destroying ecosystems, human beings destroy themselves. Conversely, by taking care of the environment, people benefit their communities directly. Also, Yamao introduces the concept

²⁴⁰ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 63.

²⁴¹ 「この言葉の中には、もしその言霊を感じるならば、人生を変えるほどの力が宿っています」
[Within these two words resides a force that can even change people’s lives when their *kotodama* can be felt], Yamao, *ibid.*, 70.

of *shinrabanshō* (森羅万象), which refers to the universe that encompasses all things and phenomena.

4. *On Family (Kazoku ni tsuite 家族について)*

In chapter 4, Yamao remarks that Japanese bioregionalism can be found in grassroots activism, such as the local movements along Japanese rivers. Yamao states that those movements have adopted a “thought based on watersheds” (*ryūiki no shisō 流域の思想*) and have focused on recovering concretized and polluted spaces for communal human activities.²⁴² According to Yamao, in Japan, rivers, mountains, and the sea are the main features of the archipelago’s *shinrabanshō*, which spiritual beings inhabit.²⁴³ He also affirms that through grassroots activism, people can find ways to reconnect with the world of *kami*. At the end of this chapter, he reflects on the political and social issues that arise in the relationship between communities and regions. Yamao claims that he doesn’t view Japan as a nation-state but as a territory consisting of the Japanese islands and their people.²⁴⁴ In Yamao’s view, any bioregional sense of belonging to a particular region must be complemented by a sense of belonging to a family. Finally, he states that family is the source of *kami*, as *kami* is connected with gratitude, happiness, goodness, and beauty.²⁴⁵

Life-territory regionalism { **Shinrabanshō 森羅万象**
River, mountains, and sea 川山海
Family 家族

²⁴² Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 88.

²⁴³ Yamao, *ibid.*, 91.

²⁴⁴ Yamao, *ibid.*, 96.

²⁴⁵ Yamao, *ibid.*, 99.

5. *The Myth of a New Nature* (*Atarashii shizen shinwa* 新しい自然神話)

In this chapter, Yamao questions the modern civilizational paradigm of the so-called developed countries like Japan from an existentialist point of view. Sansei argues that developed societies live immersed in modern myths such as the economic and scientific development myth that have reached a “dead end” (*tachiōjō* 立往生) in which many people’s lives are being conducted in a nonsensical way like the Sisyphus myth. This existential senselessness is directly reflected in the environmental problems caused by developed societies due to their belief in unlimited economic and scientific development and a simultaneous loss of the sense of happiness in small things. For Yamao, the state of our world acts as a mirror reflecting the state of our heart.²⁴⁶ In order to face this existential-ecological problem, Yamao proposes a return to our hearts to find the joy that fills life with meaning (the example he gives is that of a road worker named Kawabata in Yakushima). The return to simplicity proposed by the poet rests on the assumption that humans are beings who seek and create meaning in their lives, regardless of difficulties or adverse conditions.

Yamao affirms that creating meaning within a society is closely related to myths because “the substance of a myth is nothing more than an accumulation of the desires of each person.”²⁴⁷ Also, he highlights that myths are like “the illusions that we share together” (*kyōdō gensō* 共同幻想), and in which we assign value to specific things above others. This vision implies that myths create not only meaning, but also hierarchies of importance. At this point, Yamao introduces the idea of generating the myth of a new nature, which could also be understood as the “myth of a new Earth” (*atarashii chikyū to iu shinwa* 新しい地球生まれという神話),

²⁴⁶ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 114.

²⁴⁷ Yamao, *ibid.*, 121.

to direct our personal desires. For Yamao, this myth would start by creating a new sense of beauty, happiness, and life satisfaction while maintaining a sense of belonging to nature.²⁴⁸

Myth = The illusions that we share together 共同幻想



The myth of unlimited economic and scientific development

Vs.

The myth of a new Earth

6. *Who am I (Watakushi wa dareka 私は誰か)*

In this chapter, Yamao outlines his vision of the individual self (*jikojishin* 自己自身) and society. For him, the individual is the point of departure to the path of self-realization. This path can be found in various religions and philosophical traditions. Regarding culture, Yamao observes two main ways human beings communicate their individual self as part of society. The first one is via discussion and the second one is via silent “heart-to-heart communication” (*idendenshin* 以心伝心).²⁴⁹ While communication through discussion has been the privileged mode of communication in Western cultures, heart-to-heart communication, a type of telepathic and subtle communication without words, has been a central part of Eastern traditions such as Zen. Yamao argues that this silent communication is often misinterpreted as “shyness” by Western cultures when, in reality, it is just another communicative mode based on the notion that there are essential aspects in human relationships that are not communicated through words. Yet, due to Western influence, the first has been prioritized over the second in

²⁴⁸ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 121–22.

²⁴⁹ Yamao, *ibid.*, 129.

the Japanese education system, encouraging extroverted personalities while punishing “shyness.” Yamao claims that this is part of the globalization phenomenon that ignores the characteristics of the East’s cultures and leads to the development of a complex of cultural “shyness” in Japanese people. In his view, the complementation between the two ways of communication should lead to a system of education that privileges the simultaneity of both forms of understanding.

In this chapter, Yamao also explains the relationship between the heart and dwelling place. Humans are similar to plants in that they “belong to the place they inhabit,” making it crucial for them to feel comfortable with the place where they live. Therefore, it is important to reflect on the type of places we feel comfortable in order to build our awareness of the place(s) we inhabit. In Yamao’s opinion, the reflection on where we live should also include a personal search for “one’s final abode” (*tsui no sumika* ついの栖か), an expression taken from a haiku by Issa Kobayashi. Here, the concept of the final abode consists of the feeling of having found a place where one could die.²⁵⁰ Yamao quotes the following haiku from Issa:

Kore ga maa tsuhi no sumika ka yuki go shaku

是がまあつひの栖か雪五尺

Well, here it is,
my final abode?
five feet of snow.²⁵¹

Yamao continues this chapter by developing his vision of “the inner mirror.” By commenting on his poem “Kodomotachi he” 「子供たちへ」 [To My Children], Yamao

²⁵⁰ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 132–33.

²⁵¹ Translation of David G. Lanoue in Lanoue, “Kobayashi Issa – Haikupedia.”

illustrates the idea that each individual has a unique inner mirror that reflects the world's truth in a particular way. In the poem, this inner mirror is seen as a personal "lake" through which each person reflects the world while awakening deep emotions.²⁵² Moreover, this lake is itself a *kami* (カミ) that resides in our hearts.²⁵³

Inner mirror = *kami* in our heart

In the final section, Yamao addresses the concept of religion by claiming that religious traditions are the deep root of culture and civilization. Based on this conception, he proposes building a new spiritual approach to avoid confrontations between religions.²⁵⁴ For Yamao, animism is the fertile ground to grow a new religious sense. Yamao's animism is based on his own personal path. Moreover, he proposes the existence of a unique and personal path as the principle of all religious paths, for example, when stressing that it is by following this individual path that one can find their own inner temple.²⁵⁵ This vision of the path to discovering the personal self is explored in the poems "Jūnanaya no ame no yoru" 「十七夜の雨の夜」 [The rain of the seventeenth night] and "Ramana Maharishi" 「ラマナ・マハルシ」 which form part of a series titled "Watashi ha dareka" 「私が誰か」 [Who am I]. In these two poems, the truth of self is revealed to Sansei when the "egoic self" (*jiga* 自我) vanishes. This particular vision of the personal path to revelation, not reserved for saints but available to ordinary people, is directly inspired by the teachings of Ramana Maharishi.²⁵⁶

²⁵² Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 135.

²⁵³ 「すべての人の胸の内にはカミという湖が宿されているということが言えると思うんです」 [I believe that it can be said that there exists a lake named kami inside the heart of all people], Yamao, *ibid.*, 136.

²⁵⁴ Yamao, *ibid.*, 143.

²⁵⁵ Yamao, *ibid.*, 143.

²⁵⁶ In these poems, Yamao's experience of the revelation of self is related to the Yakushima mountains, echoing Maharishi's life closely linked to Mount Arunachala.

According to Yamao, for Ramana Maharishi, the purpose of human life is realizing the “true personal self” (*atman*) and integrating the self with the “universe” (Brahma).²⁵⁷ This search can be done through introspection to ultimately realize that the essence of “self” (*jiko* 自己) is the essence of the “entirety of life” (*seimei sonomono* 生命そのもの). As a follower of Maharshi’s teachings, Yamao claims that following the path of inquiring “who am I” calms the heart and destroys other types of thoughts.²⁵⁸ In summary, the diligent search for the true self opens a “personal path” (*watashi no michi* 私の道) that will lead to a complete transformation of one’s existence. This change involves a shift in the relationship that the individual maintains with the world.²⁵⁹

Recognition of the egoic self (*jiga* 自我)



(180-degree change)

True self (*jiko* 自己, *atman*) = All things in the universe (*shinrabanshō* 森羅万象)



wisdom of *kami*

7. The Wisdom (Prajna) of the Existent Things (*Sonzai suru mono no chie* 存在するものの智慧)

²⁵⁷ This belief can be traced to the ancient equation Brahman = atman, a fundamental notion in the Upanishads. According to Subodh Kapoor, through centuries, Indian philosophers have researched “what have we to consider our Self, as our atman.” It seems that Sansei’s vision is akin to the answer offered by the Chhandogya Upanishad, that in a sort of pantheism, sustains the thesis of the identity between the universe and the atman. Kapoor, “Atman,” 223–24.

²⁵⁸ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 150–51.

²⁵⁹ Yamao, *ibid.*, 152.

In chapter 7, Yamao further develops his conception of the individual self and the path toward wisdom. His poem “Hitotsu no jijitsu” 「ひとつの事実」 [A Truth] tells his personal experience of recognizing the original self during a night on a mountaintop in Yakushima. At that time, Yamao recognized his egoic self, along with its filth (*nigori* 濁り) and loneliness (*kodoku* 孤独), just before realizing that the true self is in the entirety of the universe. When reflecting on this awareness, Yamao states that this understanding is not limited to religious language. For example, it can be found in the form of scientific truths, as when it is said that “We are made of stardust.”²⁶⁰

In the chapter, Yamao then contrasts humans’ knowledge and genuine wisdom by reading and interpreting his poems “Kama” 「鎌」 [Sickle] and “Sarunokoshikake” 「サルノシカケ」 [Mushroom Sarunokoshikake]. Here, Yamao distinguishes between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is cumulative and belongs to the history of the civilization, and usually, it is preserved either in writing or through memory. By contrast, wisdom only occurs within one’s individual life and is not cumulative. This means that when a person dies, her wisdom dissipates. This is why the path of wisdom is always a personal path that must be built throughout one’s life. He also argues that although knowledge accumulates through generations, it loses its strength over time when it begins losing its significance. For example, the rotation of the Earth was once a discovery full of meaning, but today it no longer amazes us. On the other hand, though wisdom isn’t cumulative in the same way knowledge is, it doesn’t decay. Its significance today is the same as two thousand years ago and continues to shine on us.²⁶¹ Yamao notes that knowledge is the type of truth that belongs to scientific disciplines, but

²⁶⁰ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 154–60.

²⁶¹ Yamao’s vision of wisdom as a kind of understanding of truth that doesn’t age is shared by contemporary scholars of the “wise ecological thought” under the concept of sustained relevance. “Sustained relevance means that the breadth and depth of a particularly wise ecological thought remain novel today. The sustained longevity

wisdom is the genuine truth deposited in our grandparents, and neither is superior to the other. Finally, Yamao affirms that the 23 years of his life spent in Yakushima have introduced him to the living wisdom of islanders (through their culture). This wisdom is the treasure given to him by all the years of living in Yakushima.²⁶²

At the end of this chapter, Yamao introduces some general ideas of his personal wisdom attained in Yakushima, which he calls the “earth way” (*tsuchi no michi* 土の道) and articulates some differences between this wisdom and scientific knowledge and modern civilization. The series of poems titled “Hatake” 「畑」 [The Field] describes his workdays in a field near the sea. These poems try to express the feelings of happiness he experienced during the daily labors of rural life. The poems suggest that closeness to the soil becomes one condition for human happiness.²⁶³ Also, Yamao comments that the “way of earth” can be a practical guide for city life, for example, by inspiring the creation of irrigated urban parks called *shinsuikouen* (新水公園) that were constructed during the 1990s in Japan. These parks would be illustrative of how modern civilization, or at least one of its aspects, urbanization, can return to the wisdom of earth while revitalizing cities.²⁶⁴

knowledge (stored within civilization). For example science 科学



truth



of ideas, tenets, and strategies of ecological wisdom often predates their time, by decades, if not centuries.” Yang and Young, *Ecological Wisdom*, 38.

²⁶² Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 166–67.

²⁶³ 「土と一緒にあるというのは、人間の根源的な幸福の条件といえますか、そのひとつだいうんですね。」 [Being next to the soil is one of the conditions of man’s original happiness or at least it can be said that it is one of them.] Yamao, *ibid.*, 173.

²⁶⁴ Yamao, *ibid.*, 174–75.

wisdom (stored during personal life). For example way of earth 土の道

8. *The Yūna Flower* (*Yūna hana* ユウナ花)

In this chapter, Yamao analyzes and interprets Kenji Miyazawa's thoughts in *Nōmin geijutsu gairon kōyō* 『農民芸術概論綱要』 [*The Outline Survey of Peasant Art*].²⁶⁵ According to Sansei, in this work, Miyazawa develops a personal metaphysics that became the foundation for his morals and ethics. A prime example of Miyazawa's metaphysics can be found in its introductory poem, which says: "Living truly and firmly means being conscious of the Galaxy within yourself and acting accordingly."²⁶⁶ Miyazawa's metaphysic is simultaneously philosophical and aesthetic. For Yamao, the expression "the Galaxy within yourself" suggests the principle of all life in which the Japanese author rooted his ethics of dignity. According to Yamao, for Miyazawa, "only the truth of life is the supreme dignity." Furthermore, Yamao considers that Miyazawa's contribution consists of both knowledge and ethical principles that this civilization can inherit as wisdom.²⁶⁷ Regarding Miyazawa's connection with an alternative vision of civilization, Yamao points out that the poet was conscious of the impossibility of returning to the past, and the only way left was to continue the Western-style modernization undertaken by Japan since the Meiji era. Therefore, throughout his life, Miyazawa sought to incorporate the wisdom within the *fūdo* (風土, natural and cultural features of the landscape) into the Japanese civilizational project.

In this chapter, Yamao recognizes the influence of Miyazawa's work on his own vision, especially regarding the connection between spirituality and science. Yamao asserts that the

²⁶⁵ This chapter outlines the arguments of his more extensive essay on Miyazawa titled *No no michi Miyazawa Kenji zuisō* 『野の道—宮沢賢治随想』 (1983) [*The Field Way: Essay on Miyazawa Kenji*].

²⁶⁶ 「正しく強く生きるとは銀河系を自らの中に意識 しこれに応じていくことだ」 Miyazawa Kenji quoted by Yamao. Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 183.

²⁶⁷ Yamao, *ibid.*, 187.

spirit of the Earth is something that can be felt through poetry and, at the same time, measured by the sciences. For example, the geological study of regions brings us an awareness of the mineral components that form human beings. Consequently, through scientific understanding, humans can also be aware of the fact that their lives and deaths are connected to the history of change and transformations of the Earth.²⁶⁸

In the final part of this chapter, based on exploring Miyazawa's philosophy, Yamao articulates a personal vision about the "original land" (*genkyō* (源郷)). In his poem "Genkyō no michi" 「源郷の道」 [The Path of the Homeland] he conceives that the path connected to a sense of home is a road that leads us to our true selves. According to Sansei, *genkyō* can be defined as "the roots of one's true self."²⁶⁹ Yamao's vision of *genkyō* also incorporates Miyazawa's ethics expressed in the famous poem "Ame ni mo makezu" 「雨ニモマケズ」 [Not Losing to the Rain]. For Yamao, this poem describes the ideal of the bodhisattva Sadaparibhuta (常不輕菩薩) and the practice of reverence for all living beings followed by Miyazawa. Furthermore, Yamao puts forward the idea that this bodhisattva ideal can be polished through practicing respect for all the *kami* of the Earth.

9. A *Kami* Called Water (*Mizu to iu kami* 水というカミ)

In the first part of the chapter, Yamao deepens his particular vision of love from a Japanese perspective. He points out that the Okinawan word for love, "kana," written with the kanji 愛, can be translated as affection but also encompasses other positive and negative

²⁶⁸ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 195.

²⁶⁹ 「原郷というのはそのまま自分の根の場所である。」, Yamao, *ibid.*, 200.

nuances. For example, it also evokes sadness (*kanashisa* 悲しさ), reminding us that love implies both joy and sorrow and therefore is a feeling that has its own particular harmony.²⁷⁰

Next, Yamao introduces his vision of the *kami* of water. He gives particular importance to Thales of Miletus' view of water as the essential principle in nature. Yamao says that, admittedly not knowing much about the principles underlying Thales' reasoning, he surmises that Thales' intuitive wisdom could be based on his observation of rivers. Following this intuitive wisdom, Yamao states that water is the intermediary between the living and non-living world, which runs within our own bodies.²⁷¹ Yamao's approach to ancient Western philosophy lies in his vision that all philosophical principles are linked to affection and experience. Considering his life near the Shirokawa River in Yakushima, he identifies his own philosophy with the notion of water as the essential principle expounded by Thales. At the end of this reflection, Yamao states that philosophy begins when one finds the words one likes to live with.

10. *The Final Abode* (*Tsui no sumika* ついの栖)

In this chapter, Yamao highlights Issa Kobayashi's life in connection with his homeland, a small village in the mountains of Shinano. As it is well known, Issa returned to his birthplace when he was 50 years old, after an extended period of living in the capital (Edo) and across Japan. For Yamao, this moment of return to his homeland represents Issa's birth into an authentic life connected with place. Therefore, the meaning of Issa's expression "my final abode," used in his famous haiku, would represent the moment of Issa's heart opening to an animistic view.

²⁷⁰ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 210.

²⁷¹ Yamao, *ibid.*, 222.

Following his analysis of Issa's life, Yamao proposes that seasonal words employed in haiku writing, called *kigo*, point to the animist view of *kami*.²⁷² Thus, Issa's life would stand out in haiku literature as an example of an encounter with the *kami* world precipitated by a return to one's homeland. In Yamao's view, the haikus Issa wrote in his hometown are representative of what he called "hometown existence" (*kokyōseisonzai* 故郷性存在), a term that could be related to the English phrase "sense of place."²⁷³ For Yamao, Issa's sense of place was also connected to his awareness of class, for example in his proud affirmation of belonging to the "lower" peasant class, and through his faith in Shinran's Pure Land Buddhism doctrine.²⁷⁴ Finally, Yamao considers that through the animistic approach to Issa's poetics, we can show that *kami* are just ordinary beings that dwell in front of our own eyes. In this way, when our lives are rooted in simplicity, we can perceive everyday beings as blessed.²⁷⁵

Seasonal words (季語) = *kami* + "hometown existence" (故郷性存在)

11. A *Kami* Called "Event" (*Dekigoto to iu kami* 「出来事」というカミ)

In this chapter, Yamao introduces new aspects of his sense of place in Yakushima. First, he discusses temporality's relationship with place. He recovers the lunisolar calendar called *taiintaiyōreki* (太陰太陽曆) and argues that this calendar system has notable benefits for attuning humans' rhythms to the Earth and increasing awareness of the cyclical nature of the

²⁷² Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 239.

²⁷³ Yamao, *ibid.*, 244–45.

²⁷⁴ *Jōdo Shinshū* 浄土真宗, literally the true Pure Land school, is a type of Buddhist faith founded in Japan by the monk Shinran (1173-1262). It is characterized by a more liberal attitude toward monastic rules and fostering the recitation of nembutsu, the invocation of the name of Amida Buddha (in Sanskrit *Amithāba*), and emphasizing faith in the grace and salvific power of Amida Buddha.

²⁷⁵ Yamao, *ibid.*, 252.

seasons and living beings. Moreover, he argues that living attuned with Earth increases happiness in our lives.

Next, Yamao introduces the notion of a landscape as an “event” or something “happening.” Yamao retrieves this notion from Native American peoples as they are portrayed in a novel titled by Katsusuke Miyauchi (宮内勝典). According to Yamao’s interpretation, the passage of Miyauchi’s book shows that Native American people know that a landscape is not an external setting serving as a backdrop to human life, but rather a reflection of a person’s heart itself, something “happening.” This “happening”, or “event” can lead to an encounter between individuals and landscapes that reveals their existential truth. This poetic, spiritual and philosophical notion explains the profound experiences of self-encounter when facing a landscape and transforms this type of experience into a way to approach one’s heart.

They told him this rocky mountain was not a landscape but an “event.” This is a profound word. Generally, we go somewhere and see the so-called landscape, but the landscape is not really just a landscape. The essence of the landscape is the “event” evoked in our hearts. When you look at a landscape as a landscape that exists outside of you, it is only a landscape, but when you think of it as an entity that reflects your consciousness, as a mirror image that reflects your interior, it will become an “event.” (...) Another way of perceiving the landscape as an “event” is that the event will become an encounter if you delve into it.²⁷⁶

Landscape = Event, happening, encounter (出来事)

²⁷⁶ 「あの岩山は風景ではなくて「出来事」なんだ、というふうに言ったというんですね。これは、深い言葉です。ぼく達は、一般的にはどこかへ出掛けていっていわゆる風景を見るわけですが、風景というのは本当は単なる風景ではないんですね。風景の本質は、ぼく達の胸の内に呼び起こされて来る「出来事」なんですね。風景を自分の外側に存在する景色として眺めている時には、それは単なる風景に過ぎないけれど、自分の意識がそこに映し出された存在物、つまり自分の内側が映し出された鏡像ととらえると、それは「出来事」になります。（...）風景を「出来事」として受けとめるもうひとつの感受の仕方、それを深めていくと出会いというものが出来事として出会いになります。」 Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 272–73.

12. The Peaceful Heart (Shizuka na kokoro 静かな心)

In this chapter, Yamao further explores the Indian philosophical and spiritual tradition of the Upanishads and suggests how it can be related to the Japanese “tradition of sensibility” (*kansei no dentō* 感性の伝統).²⁷⁷ Yamao focuses on the concept of Brahman as exposed in the Rig Veda and the Chhandogya Upanishad. He states that in the Rig Veda, there are three basic meanings of Brahman, which can be translated into Japanese as follows:

$$\mathbf{Brahman} = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \mathbf{1. Truth 真理} \\ \mathbf{2. True existence 真実在} \\ \mathbf{3. All things in universe 森羅万象} \end{array} \right.$$

Extrapolating the teachings of the Chhandogya Upanishad, in which it is theorized that *Brahman* (the truth) is *atman* (the self), into the Japanese conception of *kami* and world, Yamao proposes the following equivalence.

$$\mathbf{Truth (Shinri) = Kami/kami (神/カミ) = Shinrabanshō (森羅万象)}$$

Yamao also observes that the idea of an animistic/pantheistic Brahman can be found in the Japanese animistic notion of the “eight million gods” (*yaoyorozu no kami* 八百万の神), a conception of the world in which each being is the dwelling place of a particular *kami*.²⁷⁸ Further, Yamao suggests that the Indian notion of Brahman as “hidden in the world” can be

²⁷⁷ Yamao wrote some books linking Japanese sensibility to some Indian spiritual understandings. For example, *Yakushima no Upanishaddo* 『屋久島のウパニシャッド』 (1995) [*Yakushima Upanishad*].

²⁷⁸ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 295.

related to the etymological definition of the word *kami* as those hidden beings that dwell in the world, embedded in the term *kuma* “the hidden” explained by Kenichi Tanikawa (谷川健一).²⁷⁹

In the final part of the chapter, Yamao explains his vision of fire as “truth.” He connects the Heraclitan notion of fire to his experience of observing the fire and feeling its unique and ancient nature, which, according to the poet, can connect people’s hearts with the ancient Jōmon period. This vision of fire is also presented in a series of poems titled “Irori wo taku” 「いろりを焚く」 [Igniting the Irori]. Yamao states that cultivating a calm heart when igniting a fire can nurture a path toward understanding reality. Moreover, according to the particular cultural context, this path can unfold differently (i.e., *logos*, *kami*, or *brahman*, etc.) Thus, learning how to ignite an *irori* (the traditional sunken hearth) can be as important as understanding the philosophy of Heraclitus. For Yamao, Heraclitus likely understood that fire was the principle of reality only after a long and careful observation of the fire itself. Here again, Yamao highlights the importance of focusing on philosophical traditions’ experiential and practical foundations to understand their truths.²⁸⁰

13. *Under the Palm Leaf Hat (Birōha bōshi no shita de* びろう葉帽子の下で)

At the beginning of this chapter, Yamao relates yoga with the Japanese notion of way or path (*michi*, *dō* 道). He introduces the 5 traditional schools of Yoga in India²⁸¹ and connects them with particular notions of Japanese Buddhism and modern Japanese corporal-spiritual techniques such as the “*seitai* method” developed by Haruchika Noguchi. Then he relates the

²⁷⁹ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 296. The conception of *kami* as “the hidden” can be found in the work of the folklorist Nobuo Origuchi which affirmed that “*kami*” originally meant “hidden” or “unseen.” Yoneyama, *Animism in Contemporary Japan*, 183.

²⁸⁰ Yamao, *ibid.*, 297–306.

²⁸¹ These 5 paths are Jnani yoga, Bhakti yoga, Karma yoga, Kundalini yoga, and Hatha yoga.

idea of yoga as a way to cultivate the mind and body to the Japanese term *shinshin issō* (心身一如) meaning oneness of heart and body. In Sansei's vision, wherever there are yoga paths or the Japanese corporal-spiritual paths, these paths must complement each other to realize the truth rather than compete against one another.

In the second part of the chapter, Yamao proposes a new vision of the word *kuni* (country or land) which he unfolds into two different ideas: the nation-state and the country-territory, each written with a different kanji. For the first concept of *kuni* as national-state, he uses the kanji 国, which is the standard way to represent the word country, while for the second concept of country-territory, he uses the kanji 郷, which is usually employed to refer to a village, hometown, or the countryside. For Yamao, the composition of the first kanji suggests an artificial border surrounding a land ruled by a king at the center. Thus, while both representations imply an idea of belonging, they differ politically. The first vision has historically been used to occupy and dispossess Indigenous villages and rural peoples from their territories. One example would be the Japanese nation-state's historical occupation of the Ryukyus' Islands. Given the history of the word, Yamao proposes transforming the meaning and writing of *kuni* from nation-state into "territories" to challenge these nationalistic practices and make visible alternative ways of belonging to the territories of the Japanese people. A second critique to the national-state ideology is the lack of cultural diversity, which, according to Yamao, is generated by "the mechanistic and standardized civilization" (*tani tansō no kikai kagaku bunmei* 単一単相の機械科学文明), which persists in the vision of many national-states, including Japan.²⁸²

²⁸² Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 323–24.

kuni 国 ≠ *kuni* 郷

In the third part of this long chapter, Yamao develops his vision of the relationship between poetry and *kami* by affirming that poetry is something buried in everyone's heart, like potatoes under the earth, and like a sort of *kami* that can be unearthed and harvested. He states: "I want to bring poetry back to everyone. That is my heartfelt wish. Poetry should dwell in everyone's chest, just as a *kami* dwells in everybody's self-open chests. I want to make digging for it, like digging soil, a lifelong job."²⁸³

Finding poetry = unearthing the *kami* in the heart

Finally, in the last part of the chapter, Yamao reads and reflects on his long poem, "Number XXIV," from the "Biroha no bōshi no shita de" series. In this long narrative poem, Yamao weaves places, ancient trees, and historical data with his impressions and feelings during one of his climbing journeys to visit and worship the Jōmon Sugi cedar. The poem ends with images of love expressed by the people who visit the Jōmon cedar as a spiritual pilgrimage. Love becomes the final revelation of the pilgrimage embodied by the author's poetic voice. In Yamao's formulation, "love, *kāma*, and work-effort, karma, are the same thing."²⁸⁴

Love (*kāma*) 愛 = 業 work, effort (*karma*)

²⁸³ 「詩をもう一度、万人のものに取り戻したい。それが私の、心からの願いである。万人の胸に開かれた自己としての神が宿っているように、万人の胸に詩が宿っているはずである。それを掘ることを、土を掘ることと同じく、自分の終生の仕事としたい。」 Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 325.

²⁸⁴ 「愛(*kāma*)と業 (*karma*)とは同じものという一行を皆さんに心からさしあげたいと思います。」 Yamao, *ibid.*, 344.

14. *The Time that Returns* (*Kaikisuru jikan* 回帰する時間)

In this chapter, Yamao continues the exploration of the concept of love from an intercultural approach. He adopts the conception of love as a force based on relationality and a feeling of sympathy and affinity. His vision is thus based on particular ways in which beings establish a relationship with each other. Yamao retrieves the Romantics' idea of "elective affinity" (*shinwaryoku* 親和力) from Goethe's novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* [Elective Affinities] (1809) as a keyword to bridge scientific and cultural understandings of relationships and bonds. In Yamao's view, this notion of affinity can also refer to those relationships that one consciously chooses (chosen kinship).²⁸⁵ Inspired by Goethe's vision of this kind of love as an attractive force in nature, Yamao proposes that this force of elective affinity can be called the structuring force of the universe. This force would be a force existing not only between human beings, but also between different species. Sansei also affirms that by consciously practicing this elective affinity, our lives can reach their most full relationality, and thus, yield happiness.²⁸⁶

According to Yamao, the notion of love as an elective affinity creating bonds of kinship between people is closer to the Japanese idea of love (*ai* 愛) rather than the Western notion of love as a sort of expression of one's romantic feelings, such as in the phrase "I love you." Furthermore, the idea of love in Japanese also contains the sense of belonging to the same class or group, which enforces the bonds between people in a similar way that the bonds of blood do

²⁸⁵ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 350–51.

²⁸⁶ 「ですからそれをもう少し抽象化していくと、森羅万象の中にはある親和力が働いていて、その親和力によって、この森羅万象は成り立っている、地球というひとつの大きな生態系は、ある意味でこの親和力の総合によって成り立っている、あるいは太陽系というひとつの系でさえも・・・・・・ということが言えると思うんです。」 [Therefore, being a little more abstract, this elective affinity works in the world encompassing all things and phenomena. Moreover, it could be said that this enormous ecosystem that includes the Earth, and even the Solar System, takes its shape by integrating this energy.], Yamao, *ibid.*, 352.

within a family.²⁸⁷ In addition, elective affinities can be extended beyond the limits of humankind and ego in any direction. He states that by honing our awareness (our antennas), it is possible to penetrate the midst of nature-human relationships. Polishing this awareness would be one feature of the new animism envisioned by Yamao.²⁸⁸ This vision of love as the relationality that one chooses to become part of the same class or group (*dōrui* 同類) is related to what Yamao thought to be the Native American phrase “I kin ye”²⁸⁹ and brings an understanding of the interconnection of our life with all life.²⁹⁰

ai* 愛 = *wahlverwandtschaften* (*shinwaryoku* 親和力) = *I kin ye

Finally, at the end of this chapter, Yamao introduces his vision of a “time that returns” (*kaiki suru jikan* 回帰する時間), which is in dialogue with Gary Snyder’s vision of cyclical times (*junkan suru jikan* 循環する時間) and Nietzsche’s “eternal return.” According to Sansei, there exist two kinds of times: Civilization Time, which is a “linear progressive time” (*chokushin suru jikan* 直進する時間), and Nature Time, which is a cyclical time. This second time would be a time that includes the times of the Solar System, human physiology, and family. Unlike civilizational time, this natural time cannot be envisioned as a time of progress, but rather as a time attached to the cycles of life and death. Yamao argues that this time brings us

²⁸⁷ Sansei provides the example of two Japanese expressions with this similar meaning of “love” as “elective affections”: *anta to dōrui da yo* あんたと同類だよ [I’m the same as you] and *ruī ha tomo wo yobu* 類は友を呼ぶ [kind calls friend] that implicitly contain the force of a feeling that brings together people by ties of affection.

²⁸⁸ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 354.

²⁸⁹ Apparently, Yamao took this phrase that combines the English expression “I love you” with the supposedly Cherokee word “kin” from Forrest Carter’s (Asa Earl Carter) book titled *The Education of Little Tree* (1976), a supposed autobiography of Carter’s experiences when growing and learning from his Cherokee grandparents’ wisdom. However, it has been demonstrated that the story is actually a fiction work written by author Asa Earl Carter, a Ku Klux Klan organizer, and rabid segregationist. Furthermore, the novel has been accused of inventing Cherokee words, see Richman and Freemark, “The Artful Reinvention Of Klansman Asa Earl Carter.”

²⁹⁰ Yamao, *ibid.*, 353.

a real sense of safety and home because it is embedded within our feelings of stability that shelter us as we face the rush of civilization.

Yamao claims that one main issue of our modernity is that civilizational times have alienated us from our relationship with cyclical times. In addition, the current global civilizational time has been designed based on Eurocentric ideas that have historically represented other civilizations, such as those of East Asia, as stagnant civilizations. Challenging this civilizational vision, Yamao proposes that Asian civilizational models can contribute to a more fertile harmony between the two times:

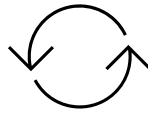
Elements once called Asian stagnation have come to be recognized as Asian fertility. I would like people to acknowledge that at the bottom of what is called Asian stagnation, or fertility, there is the temporality that returns to eternity and circulates. I believe that creating harmony between these two aspects of time will be the most profound theme for the next century and the next era.²⁹¹

Yamao believes the arts play an essential role in shaping our relationship with cyclical times. He says that the world of art, literature, and crafts clearly belongs to Nature Time. Yamao argues that, for example, haiku and tanka have become unprecedentedly popular in modern Japanese society because they “sing mainly about the seasons and the seasons are exactly a time that returns. Looking at seasonal plants and animals, our mind and body enter into the returning time of nature, and there is healing and joy.”²⁹² This particularity would not be limited to the classical genre; modern literature such as Kenji Miyazawa’s also brings a vision for reconciling nature’s and civilization’s times using the energy of beauty and poetry.

²⁹¹ 「かつてアジア的停滞と呼ばれていた諸要素が、逆にアジア的豊穡として認識されるようになってきたんです。アジア的停滞、あるいはアジア的豊穡というものを形成している底には、永劫に回帰し、循環する時間性というものがあることを、深く認識していただきたいと思います。その二つの時間の相の調和を作り出していくことが、次の世紀、次の時代の最深のテーマだと思うんです。」, Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 365.

²⁹² Yamao, *ibid.*, 366.

Civilization Time



Nature Time

15. *The Nichigatsutōmyō Buddha (Nichigatsutōmyō Nyorai 日月燈明如来)*

In this chapter, Yamao underscores his reformist view of Buddhism. Facing the growing religious apathy of the new generations, Yamao seeks to breathe life into Buddhism by searching for new interpretations. For example, he suggests interpreting the tathāgata as everything that exists and buddha as a *kami* that gives us joy in our encounters with everything that exists. Further, Yamao reinterprets a Buddha (in Japanese *Nyorai*) named Nichigatsutōmyō Nyorai (日月燈明如来) in whose name the kanji of the Sun and the Moon appear. Here, Yamao reads this name literally, rather than symbolically, as a way to refer to the Sun and the Moon themselves.²⁹³ This buddha appears in the influential Lotus Sutra as a buddha who reappears with the same name in various eras. For Yamao, this reference in the sutra points to the cyclical times of the return of nature. In addition, Yamao proposes that the concept of Buddha Nature can be matched with the existence of *kami*.

Buddha Nature = *kami*

In the final part of this chapter, Yamao reflects on the crisis of the current civilization paradigm. Then, based on Japanese sociologist Munesuke Mita's idea of five social stages and

²⁹³ Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 384.

a necessary ecological reform, Yamao proposes that the work of thinkers and poets consists of articulating new visions capable of changing society.²⁹⁴ In addition, he argues that this reform should aim to satisfy three necessary conditions for a new paradigm of social cooperation:

1. Free community
2. Open community
3. Deep community

In proposing these three conditions, Yamao also emphasizes the importance of individual freedom that allows for each person to seek depth and meaning in their own life.²⁹⁵

Epilogue (Atogaki あとがき)

In this final section, Yamao recognizes the current problems of religion and calls for us to seek a new interpretation or reform within them. For example, *kami* can be translated as Buddha Consciousness for many people in East Asia. Yamao asserts that building an East Asian version of animism may be possible based on *kami* and Buddha and considers his book as an invitation to young people and all the Japanese society to confront the spiritual impasse of modern hedonism and consumerism.

7.5. Animism for Describing Yakushima's Wisdom.

For wisdom, on the other hand, everything is connected and interrelated; the whole contains the part, and the part contains the whole. However, the perception of totality is not possible from fragmenting and fragmented epistemic frames but from a totalizing vision of wisdom; because wisdom does not only seek to rationally know a world populated by isolated objects. Wisdom

²⁹⁴ Building on Munesuke Mita's vision of reform based on forms of life on Earth, Yamao adds that that the reform must consider forms such as planets and the Solar System, or what in Japanese Buddhism is called *dharma* and *kami*. Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 388–89.

²⁹⁵ Yamao, *ibid.*, 391.

knows that understanding is not outside experiencing the totality of our existence. What for epistemology is simply a worldview, that is, a cognitive way of seeing the world; for wisdom, it is a cosmoexistence, cosmo-living (*cosmovivencia*), a knowledge that is formed through the concrete experience of our existence as part of this infinite cosmos, and woven into our daily territories of life.²⁹⁶

Patricio Guerrero Arias

In this series of lectures collected in *Animizumu to iu kibō*, Yamao articulates animism as a methodology for reforming society based on the practice of a personal spiritual, philosophical, scientific, and artistic path. Yamao states that the main objective of his proposal was to present animism as one methodology to face environmental problems based on individuality and the feeling of joy and connection with all the things in the universe.²⁹⁷ His explanation of the faith in *kami* as a twofold belief that includes the notion of “God” and “god” suggests a way to bridge Japanese animism with the monotheistic belief in God. In my view, it represents a spiritual attempt to build a Japanese understanding of God rooted in the Earth while retrieving the Japanese popular spirituality of *kami*.

Given the didactic nature of Yamao’s vision and the fact that this book is a transcription of a course held at a university, the points and arguments presented in this vision on animism have both an educational dimension and a heart-forming dimension. Yamao’s methodology,

²⁹⁶ “Para la sabiduría en cambio, todo está conectado, interrelacionado con todo, el todo contiene a la parte, y la parte contiene al todo, pero la percepción de esa totalidad no es posible desde los marcos epistémicos fragmentadores y fragmentados, sino desde la visión totalizadora de la sabiduría; pues esta no se busca solo conocer racionalmente un mundo poblado de objetos aislados, sino que sabe que el conocer no está fuera de la experiencia, de la totalidad de nuestra existencia, por eso lo que para la epistemología es simple cosmovisión, es decir, una forma de ver cognitivamente el mundo, para la sabiduría es cosmoexistencia, cosmovivencia, un conocimiento que se hace en la vivencia concreta de nuestro existir como parte de este infinito cosmos, y se teje en nuestros cotidianos territorios del vivir.” Guerrero Arias, “Corazonar desde el calor de las sabidurías insurgentes, la frialdad de la teoría y la metodología,” 208.

²⁹⁷ 「森羅万象に向き合う個人が、その中の一象に意味性や喜びとしてのカミを見いたし、それを他者と共有していく新しいアニミズム思想は、個人が個人でありながらそれを越えていく自由を内蔵していると同時に、環境問題という私達に突きつけられてある必須の課題を解決していく、小さいけれども重要な方法論である。」 [This new animist idea, which I’m sharing with other people, of the individual who faces all the things in the universe and sees Kami as meaning and joy in the phenomena of the universe, simultaneously including the liberty that surpasses the individual-self while being an individual and going in the direction of resolving the essential issues posed to us by the environmental problems is just a small but significant methodology.] Yamao, 『アニミズムという希望』, 394.

though, is not a proposition for forming a curriculum based on animism theories. Rather, it is an invitation to embrace the personal path of wisdom that every person must walk. In this book, Yamao offers us a glimpse into the dialogue and practices which opened his heart to an alternative understanding of the world and himself. This understanding bears witness to Yamao's wisdom, achieved through 23 years living in Yakushima as a farmer, poet, and believer. This wisdom is intertwined with different memories, anecdotes, and poems, creating an embroidered work of theoretical reflection and artistic creation that became Yamao's *Ecopoetic Heart*. Yamao's dialogue with Yakushima was his own form of *Ecopoetic Design* and it was grounded in spiritual contemplation, daily farming work, philosophical reflection, and poetic composition.

Among the philosophical and spiritual understandings intertwined in the book are pantheistic conceptions of the world from India and Japan, the East Asian ancient calendarization of time, presocratic philosophies, alternative understandings of love from Japanese, European, and Native American cultures, a bioregional vision of Japan. At first glance, his animism is woven as a collage of modern, ancient, globalized, and regional views of civilization. However, Yamao's animism should not be viewed as a patchwork assemblage of individual pieces of knowledge. Instead, it reveals an integrated poetic and philosophical work transversal to various "world-visions." What integrated all of these "world-visions" into an onto-epistemic framework was animism, not only as a theoretical reflection, but also as an intimate dialogue with Yakushima Island.

That said, I don't mean to situate Sansei Yamao's animistic ideas within the vast literature on animism in Japan, nor do I suggest that it is exemplary of a Japanese animist tradition. At best, it may be representative of a trend of animism in Japan, based on popular beliefs in *kami* and articulating an ecological-affective response to the Japanese contemporary society's consumerism and spiritual stagnation. Yamao's animist proposal is grounded in an Island

Wisdom, because as he converses with the *kami* and weaves together daily life, poetry and philosophy, Yakushima Island unfolds her ecologic wisdom in the form of fundamental messages.

Seen through the lens of Yamao's animism, an Island Wisdom is a set of messages received through a dialogue with an island's land and sea. Yamao shows us that this conversation is based on a daily development of perception, affectivity, and consciousness. In addition, the conversation implies a spiritual transformation, as far as it involves an intimate dialogue with "God" and "gods." Yamao weaves an example of Yakushima's Island Wisdom into his animist ecosophic and ecopoetic proposal for guiding Japanese society through the Anthropocene.

7.6. Patterns of the *Kami*-world

An island wisdom is not only a set of messages, but it also comprises a conception of a sacred world. Yakushima Island wisdom, through Yamao's animistic perspective, can be displayed in the form of a world diagram. Figure 28 is an attempt to present a picture of the world as seen through Yamao's animist view. This diagram is inspired by Shoko Yoneyama's diagram for depicting notions of "life-worlds," which she created to visualize the philosophy of the fisherman, activist, and philosopher Masato Ogata (緒方正人).²⁹⁸ This exercise of diagramming Yamao's Yakushima wisdom reveals some common threads between Ogata's and

²⁹⁸ Masato Ogata (1955) is a fisherman and activist that has actively preserved the memory of the Minamata disease accident. In her study of four contemporary authors, Shoko Yoneyama depicts Ogata as the creator of a unique, profound knowledge based on his harsh experiences as a victim and activist and his wisdom as a fisherman. This wisdom is what she calls Ogata's philosophy of the life-world: "Ogata Masato is a Minamata fisherman who has long been involved with the Minamata disease incident, first as a victim, then as an activist, and finally as a philosopher, although he may not use the term to describe himself. He is the least privileged of the four individuals socially, economically, and physically as a Minamata disease sufferer, and yet he has been recognized by leading scholars in Japan as the most creative leader within the Minamata community who can create new knowledge." Yoneyama, *Animism in Contemporary Japan*, 30.

Yamao's philosophies or wisdom. For both authors, the world itself is based on the conception of a living world, and this worldview stands in response to modern Japanese society. This diagram attempts to present an image of the world based on Yamao's lectures and the key concepts guiding humanity's wise inhabitation of Earth according to the Yakushima Island wisdom he articulates (figures 28, 29 and 30).

1. All things in the universe (*shinrabanshō* 森羅万象).
2. Nature's cyclical time (*kaiki suru jikan* 回帰する時間).
3. Civilization's progressive time (*chokushin suru jikan* 直進する時間).
4. Love = elective affinities (*shinwa ryoku* 親和力).
5. Mountain (*yama* 山).
6. River (*kawa* 川).
7. Sea (*umi* 海).
8. Jōmon Sugi *kami* (*Jōmon sugi no kami* 縄文杉のカミ).
9. The final abode (*tsui no sumika* ついの栖).
10. Community (*comyuniti* コミュニテイ).
11. Vegetable garden (*hatake* 畑).
12. The force of song/poetry, kotodama and kigo (*uta, kotodama to kigo no chikara* 歌、言霊と季語の力).
13. Family (*kazoku* 家族).
14. Irori, fire (*irori, hi* 囲炉裏, 火).
15. Inner self (*mizukara no naka ni* 自らの中に), the personal *kami* as mirror, lake, inner temple, inner galaxy, hidden *kami*.

16. The process of realization of the true self (*jiko* 自己).

The first aspect of Yamao's *kami*-oriented onto-epistemology is its conception of the world as *shinrabanshō* (森羅万象), [1] which refers to the infinite assemblage of things and phenomena arranged between heaven and earth. According to the anthropologist Keiji Iwata (岩田慶治), Animism can be defined as “the religion of Shinrabanshō” or “the religion of grass, tree, insect, and fish” (*sōmokuchūgyō kyō* 草木虫魚教) in which *kami* abode.²⁹⁹ Iwata's definition also suggests that the Western “universe” is less like an enormous “container” where Earth and human life exist as specks of light in the darkness and more like an infinite mesh of uncountable living beings which are protagonists of all existence.

The next aspect in the diagram of Yamao's Animist view is time, which unfolds as two times: nature time [2] and civilizational time [3]. At first glance, this division seems to rely on the division between civilization and nature. Nevertheless, Yamao observes that the modern Eurocentric culture has pushed humans to adopt a problematic conception of dialectic-time in which civilization time represents a progressive time that must control the cyclical times of nature. In response to this belief in the linear progress along which the locomotive of Modernity must advance toward the future, Yamao claims that civilization doesn't need to push forward any dialectic, but rather should promote a harmonic relationship between these two times.

²⁹⁹ 「アニミズムは普通、精霊信仰と呼ばれているが、草木虫魚教と言ってもよいし、森羅万象と名付けてもよいだろう。身のまわりの、万物のうちにひそむカミと出会い、そのカミと対話する。そういう宗教を私はアニミズムと呼ぶことにしている。」 [Animism is usually called a belief in spiritual beings, but it can also be called the grass-trees-insects-and-fish religion or the all-things-in-universe religion. The religion I have decided to call animism is meeting and conversing with the kami aboding in all things around you.] And later he says: 「アニミズムの根本は何か。それは木にも、石にも、虫にも、鳥にも、もともと、木は木として宇宙の主人公になり、山は山として主人公、人は誰もかも一人ひとりが主人公になる。自分も、また、その仲間になって、風景が生き生きしてくる。これがアニミズムの本質なのだ。」 [What is the root of animism? It is when trees, stones, insects, or birds become the protagonist of the universe and a mountain, and every person becomes its protagonist in the same way. Along with me, or by becoming companions, the landscape comes into life. This is the essence of animism.] Iwata (岩田), 木が人になり、人が木になる。—アニミズムと今日 [Trees Become People and People Become Trees. Today's Animism], 14–15.

Yamao underscores that ancient Eastern Asian civilizations were more linked to this view, and we can still find this alternative civilization time in the traditional Sino-Japanese calendar system. Furthermore, in Yamao's vision of the cyclical time of nature, the Sun and Moon are not mere "astronomic bodies," but rather two *kami* and Nyorai (如来, the *Tathāgata*) that manifest themselves to humans in the sky.

Number [4] illustrates Yamao's vision of interrelationship and interdependence. The *kami*-world is a world of interrelation, and relations are mainly established by the principle of love. Love for Yamao is not simply a principle of attraction that is moved by personal desires or passions, but the bonding principle or force that drives individuals to come together, moved by a sense of commonness, familiarity, and empathy. This principle is expressed in Goethe's term "elective affinity" (*shinwaryoku*) and the expression "I kin ye," which Yamao employs to exemplify the kind of love underlying the life-web of interrelation. The triad of mountain [5], river [6], and sea [7] form part of Yamao's Japanese bioregionalist view of Yakushima Island. Yamao called his bioregionalist view "life-territory regionalism" (*seimeichikishūgi*). In his view, Japan is portrayed as a mosaic of local territories or *kuni* (郷) marked by geography and not as a supra-territorial nation-state (国).

Number [8] indicates the *kami* of the Jōmon Sugi, which is connected with Yamao's pilgrimages to visit the "Holy Saint," an experience expressed in his long poem "Under the palm tree no. XXV." The path to the Jōmon Sugi opens the encounter of humans and non-humans with the *kami* world. For Yamao, the pilgrimage to the ancient tree in Yakushima is a practice that combines love and effort. From a scientific perspective, an attunement to *kami* fosters in humans' hearts the ecological awareness of our destructive relationship with the forest and the richness brought by biodiversity.

Figure 29 illustrates several aspects of attaining a final abode [9] implied in Yamao's conception of a "hometown existence" (*kokyōsei sonzai*). The concept of a final abode, which Sansei retrieves from a haiku by Issa, means living in a place where one can experience a daily life full of attention and feelings of simplicity in communication with the *kami* world. Yamao's vision asserts that attaining and cultivating a sense of place is related to achieving a sense of true happiness. For Yamao, the sense of happiness in Yakushima was connected to the community [10], the cultivated field [11], poetry and arts [12], family [13], and the sacred fire [14]. It is worth noting that for Yamao, it is through fire that humans could reencounter the ancestral memory of our species.

Figure 30 illustrates the poet under his palm-leaf hat (*birōba no bōshi*). Number [15] represents the inner *kami* inside each human being (the profound inner side of our existence). Yamao explains this inner *kami* using metaphors: it is like a mirror, an inner lake, or a potato in the soil. The image of the inner lake, which echoes the Buddhist metaphor of enlightenment as a clear mirror, also signifies the equivalence between Brahma and *Atman* / Self and *Shinrabanshō* world. Finally, the arrow in number [16] stands for the whole process of realization of the true self (*jiko* 自己, *atman*). In Yamao's own experience, this realization implied a 180-degree shift in his understanding of the world and how he conducted his life. The experience of revelation can be connected to episodes with life-long significance, or "moments of the Big Bang of life," as Shoko Yoneyama calls them. This experience is described in Yamao's poem "Watashi wa dareka" 「私は誰か」 [Who am I] when he, on the verge of tears, recognized his own egoic self and the true self that is attuned with the universe. Yakushima wisdom would imply that these 180-degree transformations of the inner self were incited by the contact with the *kami*-world. These varied experiences are attached to practices that combine love and effort, like ascending a mountain, singing a song, igniting a fire, or

cultivating a field. In these practices leading to a reconnection with the land and the universe we can find the patterns of Yamao's Ecopoetic Design.

Yamao's Ecopoetic Design calls for an expanded existential frame, or a "cosmoexistence," as Patricio Guerrero Arias calls it. Yamao's own path shows that, even when people lack a personal history of connection with the land (Yamao came to settle in Yakushima without any prior relationship to that island), the land itself has the agency to sprout a complete ontology and epistemic framework for existence (cosmoexistence) based on the principle of habitation, understanding, and sensing the interconnection with the earth. This an example of the poetical, philosophical, and spiritual agency of islands and can exemplify how Mother Earth's love has the power to grow wisdom inside human lives. However, Island Wisdom does not seem to appear all at once. For Yamao, it took several years before it was eventually articulated as a series of talks prepared for university students.

Over the course of 23 years, and until his death, Yamao created a beautiful and wise ecosophy based on his dialogue with Yakushima Island and employed his animist investigation to interweave a philosophical and poetic dialogue between East and West and East and South.

7.7. Ecopoem: I Go Up and Down Mount Tsukuba in my Acrylic and Polyester Hat

I

Love erases customs,
erases laws,
makes the world appear
and us appear in her story.
What is the life of the human being?
I want to ask the mountain.

II

I don't have a palm leaf hat,
but rather this acrylic and polyester hat,
but within it live my geological ancestors
who protect me from the cold.

III

Sitting like a mountain
I walk, I take a bus
toward the mountain.

IV

Lord 主
Mountain 山
Who are you?
—*Feeling God by being the creation itself*—

V

People gather at the entrance of the Jinja
Sansei, work is personal,
but the path is collective?

VI

Kashiradaga Bird,
I'm already climbing the Mizukigahara trail
I'm halfway to the top.
I'm dancing, following the paths
of water between the stones and roots.

VII

I arrive at the source of the stream called Mina no gawa.
I rest, I sit, I pray.
These unnamed *sugi*
have a name that God knows.

VIII

The mountain's *kami* is drenched in water.
Oh, this is a water mountain that drinks light.

A woman comes down with two hiking poles —*konnichiwa*—
A group of teenagers laughs as they descend
and the water's *kami* fills with happiness
and happiness runs down in the torrent of the brook.

IX

I climb to the top of the mountain
why go up?
—To see the earth, creation.
but you'll come down to meet yourself—

Even if we don't say it,
it's always the same.

X

Earth made of man and woman.
Earth made of fertility,
made of heart and flesh.
This is also love, isn't it
愛 = 業

XI

Eating dates on the way down I think of my father.

I stop in a clearing of rocks,
grasses and bushes near Tsutsujigaoka.

XII

Sitting there are three pine trees before me
and the afternoon goes by.

The heart of the mountain

grows bigger
within herself.

December 3, 2021. Mount Tsukuba.

7.8. Conclusion

Yamao believed that poetry could be a valid method of transmission of wisdom and a channel for an intimate dialogue with the *kami*-world. His animist ecosophy was inspired by anthropologist Keiji Iwata's theory of "personal animisms" (*dokuji no animizumu ron* 独自のアニミズム論). Yamao also retrieved from Iwata the distinction between *kami* (カミ) and *kami* (神), and the interpretation of *kami*'s original meaning as "hidden" presences.³⁰⁰ However, Yamao's ecosophy was rooted in his own spiritual and poetic conversation with the island *kami* during his daily life in Yakushima as well as the learnings from the Upanishad, Advaita, Native American, Japanese Zen, and Pure Land traditions. Consequently, it can be understood as a transcontinental ecosophy rooted in Yakushima Island wisdom.

As shown by the summary of the book *Animizumu to iu kibō*, this particular ecosophy is woven by a deep philosophical reasoning that harmonizes philosophic argumentation, reflection, and poetry. In this book, Yamao presents not only his own ecosophy based on Yakushima's island wisdom but a didactic methodology that continually bridges scientific facts with poetic images and personal experiences. In addition to highlighting/presenting Yamao's ecosophic arguments, this chapter has explored his conception of a sacred world. Namely, I

³⁰⁰ According to the ethnologist Nobuo Origuchi (折口信夫), *kami* originally meant "hidden" or "unseen life." Yoneyama, 183.

have created a series of world diagrams to illustrate the key elements of Yamao's conception of the world as seen through his ecosophy.

This chapter has argued that Yamao's dialogue with Yakushima was his own form of Eco-poetic Design, and it was grounded on an eco-poetic relationship with the layers of spiritual contemplation, daily farming work, philosophical reflection, and poetic composition. Yamao's Eco-poetic Design achieved a reconnection between his life and the Earth, which was conceived as a *kami*-world. For Yamao, Earth was not understood simply as a place for dwelling or an environment, but as a sacred Earth inhabited by *kami* in which one encounters his final abode and spiritual self-realization. For Yamao Earth was treated as a place of spiritual practice to realize that we are one with the phenomenal world (*shinrabanshō*), the *kami*, and the Buddha Nature. In addition, for Yamao, our planet Earth is not an inanimate world ruled exclusively by mechanistic laws, but an animated planet directed by the force of love, understood as the relational force he called *shinwaryoku* (elective affinities). For Yamao this conception of Earth doesn't argue against the validity of scientific investigation but offers a complement to the Modern world's ontology.

Finally, this chapter has shown that Yamao's ecosophy tackles the current ecological crisis by locating the origin of the problem in the heart, which has stagnated in not searching out the meaning of life. Thus, he proposes paying close attention to the worlds' spiritual paths for transforming the inner self and realizing our true nature, embodying a personal dialogue with the land through our works, and embracing a sense of poetic wonder as we move through our daily lives.

Chapter 8

The Agroecological Song: El Xastle Loving Community and their *Milpa* Poetics

Introduction

This chapter examines poetic and environmental affectivity in contemporary agroecological life projects by telling the story of Mexican El Xastle loving community and exploring their Eco poetic Design activities through their calendar of reconnection with “Mother Earth.” El Xastle was the artistic and farming community that Carlos “Tito” Barraza and Sandra Araujo carried out in the countryside of Puebla, Mexico, in the years between 2017 and 2018.

This chapter opens with an introduction to El Xastle’s urban and creative background linked to the Transdisciplinary Poetry and Journey Center and the Chuleles collective. It continues with an account of the birth of El Xastle as an agroecological and artistic project in 2016. The following section analyses El Xastle through Carlos’ and Sandra’s posts on Facebook expressing their agroecological and poetic views while practicing the traditional agricultural method called *milpa*. Through their Facebook timeline, I reconstruct an image of their agropoetic cyclical calendar. I argue that this agropoetic calendar reveals an artistic and agricultural arrangement that follows the cyclical temporality of the *milpa* and agave fields. The analysis of the calendar highlights some characteristics of their Eco poetic Design as well as some challenging aspects of their alternative projects of life. Finally, the chapter includes an ecopoem, which was written during my ecopoetic journey to Mexico in the early spring of 2022 to spread an ecopoetic message and seek the ways of life that inspired Carlos and Sandra in the

rural landscapes of Central and Southern Mexico. This ecopoem offers a window into the meaning of “love,” “care,” and “friendship,” which were keywords for El Xastle.

8.1. The Loving Community

But the *milpa* is much more than a cornfield:
It is the space where thousands and thousands of years ago
the Indigenous worldview understood that life
interweaves like the *petate* mat.³⁰¹

Corina Salazar Dreja

El Xastle was the “loving community” that the textile artist and poet Sandra Araujo created with the poet and DJ Carlos “Titos” Barraza near the town of Santa María Zacatepec in the state of Puebla, Mexico.³⁰² The community lasted from the fall of 2016 up to the fall of 2018, when Carlos died in an unfortunate accident during a stay in Canada.³⁰³ During this period, these two artists adopted a new lifestyle based on agroecological farming and artistic activities. The connection between agroecological practices, arts, and poetry appeared in a poetic manifesto written in 2017, which proclaims El Xastle’s main aspiration: “to make our

³⁰¹ “Pero la *milpa* es mucho más que un maizal: es el espacio donde hace miles y miles de años la cosmovisión indígena entendió que la vida se entreteje como el *petate*.”

This epigraph in Susana Pérez Díaz’s master thesis dissertation highlights the traditional view of the *milpa* in the Mexican Plateau, see *Agricultura tradicional: “La milpa del Santo” en Tepoztlán*, [Traditional agriculture: “La milpa del Santo” in Tepoztlán], 2018.

³⁰² The town lies approximately 150 km from Mexico City. It is located on the Mexican Plateau at 2150 meters above sea level, near the Iztaccíhuatl-Popocatepetl mountain range between the city of Cholula and the town of Huexotzingo.

³⁰³ Carlos “Titos” Barraza (1988-2018) was born and raised in the state of Mexico and graduated in Communication and Electronic Engineering at the National Polytechnic Institute of Mexico (Instituto Politécnico Nacional de México). He was a Sonidero music DJ, poet, and cultural promotor who founded the Poetry and Journey Transdisciplinary Center (Centro Transdisciplinario Poesía y Trayecto). Sandra Araujo (1991) studied Intercultural Development and Management in the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México). She is a textile artist, poet, cultural promotor, and founder of the Chuleles Collective.

food sprout with fieldwork, musical creation, illustration, poetry and other manifestations of creativity.”³⁰⁴ During the time they lived in the loving community, they also used the internet and social media, specifically Facebook, to share their work with a broader community. On their Facebook timeline, they promoted their home-made products, crafts, and farmed vegetables, their artistic activities and workshops, and their own thoughts, poems, pictures, and reflections about loving and growing a traditional *milpa*.³⁰⁵

El Xastle was not the first nor the only artistic community in which Carlos and Sandra participated. Therefore, it is worth mentioning their other projects in order to more fully explore their paths as artists and to grasp the influence that urban aesthetics, artistic social commitment, and artisanal practices had on their agropoetic paths.

8.2. Sonido Mamalón and the Mashup of Poetry and Music

While completing his bachelor’s degree in the early 2000s, Carlos Barraza began to explore the intersection between fine arts, music, electronic media, and literature through a project he called Physics of Poetry (Física de la poesía). Mexico City’s suburbs are characterized by neighborhood dance parties with DJ sets by so-called *sonideros*. *Sonidero* music is primarily for dancing and is based on mashing up musical pieces of popular genres such as *cumbia*, *salsa*, *norteño*, and *baladas*. Carlos’ first compositions were pieces mixing *cumbia*, rap, and poetry reading recordings.³⁰⁶ Around 2013, Carlos founded Sonido

³⁰⁴ Barraza and Araujo, “El Xastle | Facebook,” 28/03/2018.

³⁰⁵ *Milpa* is a traditional agriculture system originally developed by the ancient Mesoamerican cultures. It is still a widely practiced agricultural system in Mexico and it can be defined as a field for growing maize (*Zea mays*) in association with other plants, especially with beans (*Phaseolus* spp) and squash (*Cucurbita* spp). It is an agroecosystem which facilitate polyculture, while tries to imitate natural diversity and its interactions, and which can be adapted to different topographies and ecosystems. Additionally, the *milpa* is the heart of the Mexican traditional peasant life, and its cycles have a strong influence in Indigenous people’s ways of life, ontologies and epistemes. Pérez Díaz, “Agricultura tradicional: ‘La *milpa* del Santo’ en Tepoztlán” [Traditional Agriculture: “La *Milpa* Del Santo” in Tepoztlán], 6–7.

³⁰⁶ Carlos began composing and playing on stage his own compositions in parties named “*tocadas*.” In an interview he stated: “Lo que yo hice no fue nuevo, sino que se trata de un movimiento de mezclar la *cumbia* con

Mamalón,³⁰⁷ his personal DJ project, inspired by *sonidero* music, where he composed and played live music mixing Latin American popular genres, poetry, and recitations from contemporary Indigenous poets, rappers, and slammers.³⁰⁸ Carlos' Sonido Mamalón was one of the projects which contributed to the Poetry and Journey Transdisciplinary Center he founded along with a group of poets, artists, and cultural promoters based in Mexico City.

8.3. The Poetry and Journey Transdisciplinary Center

The Poetry and Journey Transdisciplinary Center (Centro Transdisciplinario Poesía y Trayecto) is a cultural collective and civil association founded in Mexico City that promotes creative writing, poetic experience, and neighborhood artistic activities.³⁰⁹ It was founded in 2010 by the poets Karloz Atl, Cynthia Franco, Carlos "Titos" Barraza, and Galo Whitaker. Poetry and Journey was born as a group of friends engaged in creating art and performances (which they call poetic interventions) in public space. For instance, they carried out several

rap, tecno, sonidos tribales, etc. que ya se encontraba desde la década los noventa" [What I did was not new, but rather joining to a movement of mixing cumbia with rap, techno, tribal sounds, etc. which had already been around since the nineties.] "Sonido Mamalón, Poesía y Trayecto A.C."

³⁰⁷ Sonido Mamalón, is a wordplay that would literally mean Badly-bad Soundsystem. The musical style was defined by Carlos as: "Música para el baile, música para el brindis, música para el riddim, música para el barrio, música para el breakdance, música y ritmo con una pizca de poesía" [Music for dancing, music for toasting, music for the riddim, music for the neighborhood, music for breakdancing, music and rhythm with a pinch of poetry.] Barraza, "Sonido Mamalón | Facebook."

³⁰⁸ Among the compositions incorporating poetry in Indigenous languages are: "Bachabé Kó (Antes que nada)" [First of all] (May 2017), "Nuestra Energía" [Our energy] (May 2017), "Nuga Ra Rap" (May 2017) made in collaboration with Winrappers, a collective of rappers who sing in the hñähñú language and "Xooch' (Briceida Cuevas Cob/El Búho)" [The Owl] (Jul 2017) which incorporates a recording in Yucatec Maya and Spanish of the poem "El Búho" by the poet Briceida Cuevas. Published in Sonido Mamalón BandCamp webpage. "Sonido Mamalón."

³⁰⁹ Poetry and Journey defines itself as an organization dedicated to exploring poetry and promoting reading and writing, see "Poesía y Trayecto (@poesiaytrayecto) / Twitter." According to Karloz Atl, one of the founders, their mission is "the promotion of reading and writing by facilitating workshops and presenting shows; as well as the creation, research, documentation, and dissemination of poetry in its relationship with other artistic and scientific disciplines, through organizing cultural festivals, seminars, exhibitions and publishing printed, audiovisual, and multimedia works based on creative processes." See Atl, "Voces para intervenir la realidad" [Voices to Intervene Reality: Transdisciplinary Poetry and Journey Center A.C.].

poetic interventions in public buses, the subway, and on the streets of Mexico City and nearby cities.

Nowadays, Poetry and Journey Transdisciplinary Center is an artistic and cultural civil association which organizes poetic activities with a transdisciplinary approach. Their activities are characterized by encouraging the participation of local people in city “*barrios*” (neighborhoods) through poetry readings, workshops, and interventions in public and private spaces. Many of their activities include collaborative creative writing, reciting poems using a megaphone, distributing home-printed poems, and participating in book fairs and poetry festivals. They have also published their poetry collections and other books under their own publishing label of the same name.

One key feature of this group is their detachment from the idea that poetry is something essentially based on and in books. Instead, as Karloz Atl, one of its founders, explains, they consider orality and embodiment as a way for the group to root their own poems and poetry in reality: “Since the beginning, we have always been fond of detaching ourselves from the poetry that inhabits the book, because since the beginning it is through our corporality that we live our poems. Our philosophy is that there is no place where poetry can’t happen.”³¹⁰ Moreover, the collective has characterized their vision as promoting “voices for intervening reality.” Their approach to poetry has been especially welcomed by working-class people and youth who find an open space to express their thoughts and feelings in their interventions. It is worth noting that their interventions and activities offer an opportunity for empowerment to people who are usually not privileged with the economic resources needed to access other cultural activities.

As a registered nonprofit, Poetry and Journey has received funds from public and private organizations to support some of their interventions and cultural projects. However, they

³¹⁰ “Une sonidero poesía y cumbia” [Sonidero Merges Poetry and Cumbia], 2:28.

identify themselves as an independent collective and cultural association.³¹¹ Some of the projects they have carried out are: The National Poetry Slam Circuit, “Voces flamantes,” an artistic scholarship program for young people between 14-21 years of age called “Beautiful Words and Powerful Lives,” a program for promoting poetry among children from vulnerable places, and “Making books and Neighborhood,” a neighborhood publishing program for conducting oral history research and collecting stories and testimonies of the residents of Santa María la Ribera.³¹² Also, they have created poem-machines, portable libraries, and a converted food vendor bicycle with speakers which serves as an “open mic” for members of the neighborhood to use while the collective distributes poetic pamphlets.

Their openness to the city’s diversity has led Poetry and Journey members to overcome the traditional segregation between “high” and “popular” culture in Mexico City. They have performed activities with a wide range of participants, including street vendors, nonliterate people, and renowned writers. Transversality is one main feature of their approach to poetry and can also be found in their multilingual events with the participation of Indigenous-language artists, musicians, rappers, and poets. Until his death in 2018, Carlos was part of this collective and contributed actively to the group’s transdisciplinary spirit. He performed musical sets with his DJ project Sonido Mamalón, organized Poetry Slam circuits, and later, as an agroecological

³¹¹ One of the most substantial claims of Poesía and Trayecto is an economically sustainable life as poetry creators and promoters or, as they say, “living from poetry.” According to Cynthia Franco, one of the founders, affirming their identity as poets implies having the guts to carry out poetical events while not disdaining funds, scholarships, or governmental resources. She feels that poets in Mexico often lack this spirit of resistance against uncertainties and the determination to wade through cultural bureaucracy, the competitiveness of scholarships, and economic hardships. Not being defeated by all these adversities is what she sees as the path to becoming a happy poet, see “Independientes - Colectivos II (22/04/2017)” [Independent - Collectives II (04/22/2017)].

³¹² Since then, they have actively participated in the local cultural scene, performing public performances and workshops for the neighborhood’s people, and carrying out projects with artists based in that area of Mexico City. Due to this active participation in the community, they have gained a strong sense of place in their visions and projects, and their meeting place, named Locatl, has become one of the main cultural reference points in this part of Mexico City. Santa María la Ribera is an emblematic neighborhood of Mexico City known for its old constructions and countercultural artistic atmosphere.

artist, contributed with works on agroecological consciousness and brought products from his farm to the city.

8.4. The Chuleles Collective and Their Philosophy of Weaving the Vital Force

The Chuleles Cooperative is a cooperative of women weavers founded around 2011 in Merida City by Gabriela Amor (Gaby), Lourdes González (Lulú), and Sandra Araujo, who learned to shoe weaving from Nadia Mucchiut, an Argentinian weaver. The collective's handmade shoes are called "chuleles" and are crafted using a crochet technique with cotton yarn (figure 31).³¹³ They sell their products on the Internet and promote alternative ways of exchanging them (i.e., via barter). In addition, their members have facilitated several workshops focused on weaving techniques, natural dyeing, and herbal medicine. The name "chuleles" comes from a combination of the Yucatec Maya word *chuyel*, meaning "to weave", and the word *ch'ulel*, a polysemantic term referring to "the primary essence of life which is shared by all the beings in the world" in the Tsotsil and Tseltal Maya languages.³¹⁴ According to Sandra and Carlos' interpretation, the chulel is "the ether of life that all matter possesses, we human beings, rocks, plastic, everything."³¹⁵

Chuleles members see weaving as a formative spiritual practice that can resist modern capitalist values and help to establish alternative relationships between people. According to Sandra Araujo, since the beginning, Chuleles members have perceived that they are not only weaving objects but a network of souls.³¹⁶ This view aligns with their own aspirations for

³¹³ Chuleles Cooperative, "Chuleles | Tumblr," n. 2016/11/4.

³¹⁴ López Intzín, "Sp'ijil O'tanil. Saberes/ Epistemologías del corazón" [Sp'ijil O'tanil. Knowledge / Epistemologies of the Heart]. (28:00). Chulel can be broadly summarized as "vital energy" a notion that may be similar in some of its meanings to the word *ki* (気) in Japanese.

³¹⁵ Barraza and Araujo, *Proyectos de los Colectivos Chuleles y El Xastle* [Chuleles and El Xastle Collectives' Projects].

³¹⁶ Sandra Araujo says: "En Chuleles no estábamos tejiendo no sólo un objeto sino el alma de muchísimas cosas que se dieron para que pudiéramos hacer unos zapatitos o una bufanda (...) después pensamos que la idea de

seeing weaving as a path for creating satisfactory imaginative jobs while promoting socially committed trade practices and self-employment.³¹⁷ In addition, transdisciplinarity has been a natural way for the members to connect their professions as weavers with their other activities. In an interview, Sandra stated that Chuleles was born with a lesson of putting the values of collaboration and collective creativity before competition, property, and authorship.³¹⁸

Weaving has become a powerful metaphor for Chuleles' vision of establishing solidarity networks and has become part of their identity. For example, they have explored weaving and embroidery as a technique for expressing themselves through making embroidered self-portraits. It is worth noting that El Xastle's spirit was closely interwoven with Chuleles' project. When Sandra and Carlos founded El Xastle in Santa María Zacatepec, Sandra continued weaving and doing workshops as part of the Chuleles collective. These activities didn't compete with El Xastle's, but rather coexisted symbiotically in a mutually beneficial relationship. Weaving also facilitated their relationship with the local community because it became a natural way for Carlos and Sandra to interact with the women and children of their neighborhood. This interaction with the other residents of Santa María Zacatepec contributed significantly to El Xastle's learning of *milpa* cultivation and marketing their products.

producción de tejido era como armar redes.” [In Chuleles we were weaving the souls of so many things that came together for bringing the opportunity for making a particular pair of shoes or scarf (...) we began to think that our production of fabric involved also creating networks.] Barraza and Araujo. (02:55).

³¹⁷ Their Facebook page states that Chuleles' aim is to provide them with: “a decent and satisfactory job that allows us to let our imagination fly and meet other people and groups interested in local crafts, fair and solidarity trade, and self-management.” “Chuleles | Facebook.”

³¹⁸ According to Sandra Araujo, in addition to learning Nadia's technique and personal templates, Chuleles founder also received an important lesson: “Ella sacó unos moldes con mucho esfuerzo y nos compartió esos moldes y cómo hacerlo, sin pensar nunca en que podríamos ser una competencia, sino compartiendo su gracia. Creo yo que hay que luchar contra esta idea de que las cosas nos pertenecen o son nuestras como autores.” [She carefully created some molds and shared those molds and how to make them with us, never thinking that we could be a competition, but sharing her grace. I think we have to fight against this idea that things belong to us or are ours as authors.] Barraza and Araujo, *Proyectos de los Colectivos Chuleles y El Xastle*. (7:20).

8.5. The Neo-Rural Desire for Another Life

El Xastle was Sandra and Carlos' loving community. It was also an agroecological and artistic project that lasted from 2016 to 2018.³¹⁹ Sandra and Carlos founded their community near the town of Santa María Zacatepec in the Mexican Plateau in 2016. The Cholula valley of the Mexican Plateau is characterized by its ancient tradition of corn growing using the agricultural system called *milpa* and the agriculture of *maguey* (*Agave salmiana*), a succulent plant which is the source of a popular fermented beverage called *pulque*. The traditional cultivation of *maguey* and the preparation of *pulque* influenced the foundation of El Xastle. In fact, "Xastle" is a Nahuatl word that means the bagasse left after the alcoholic fermentation process. Agroecological cultivation of agave and corn following the traditional Indigenous method called *milpa* set the pace of life that the couple adopted when moving from Mexico City to the rural landscape of the State of Puebla.

The decision to move to the countryside was motivated by circumstance. Lulú, one of the founder of Chuleles collective, used to live in Cholula and introduced Sandra and Carlos to her friend Chucho, a traditional *maguey* farmer (*tlachiquero*). Carlos, who had always liked cacti and succulent plants, was captivated by Chucho's way of life as a *tlachiquero*.³²⁰ Shortly thereafter, motivated by Sandra, Carlos decided to become Chucho's apprentice. Then the couple decided to look for a place to live near Chucho.³²¹

³¹⁹ Unfortunately, Carlos died in 12th august 2018 when the couple were traveling and working as harvesters in Canada.

³²⁰ *Tlachiquero* comes from the Spanish word *tlachique* a derivative of the Nahuatl *tlachiqui* which means "the one who scrapes off" ASALE and RAE, "tlachique | Diccionario de la lengua española." The *tlachiquero* is the person in charge of the process of scrapping the core of the agave plants (called *maguey*) for collecting and extracting the plant juice or nectar called *aguamiel* which is the essential ingredient for preparing the traditional alcoholic beverage called *pulque*.

³²¹ "One day Sandra asked me why we didn't go there so that Chucho could teach me how to scrape the maguey. I really like cacti and made an impulsive decision. So, we found a place to live, and I became a student of the *tlachiquero*, and I started learning about artisanal pulque production." [Un día Sandra me preguntó por qué no íbamos allá, para que me enseñara Chucho a raspar el maguey. A mí me gustan mucho los cactus y fue una decisión al momento. Entonces encontramos un lugar dónde vivir y yo comencé como alumno del *tlachiquero* y comencé con el pulque.] Barraza and Araujo, Proyectos de los Colectivos Chuleles y El Xastle.

In 2016 they rented a house and a field in Santa María Zacatepec and decided to work to sustain themselves by following the traditional methods of growing corn, beans, squash, and other vegetables (the *milpa* method), while Carlos would be learning the traditional work of the *tlachiquero*. Also, they decided to continue their personal artistic activities. Stimulated by this turn in their lives and the decision to become agroecological farmers and artists, they founded El Xastle on November 28, 2016.

El Xastle was the agroecological and artistic platform for building their new lives. It became the union of their sustenance and artistic way of life. Simultaneously, it became their brand for selling organic products grown and made by themselves, for facilitating workshops, for promoting their artistic activities, and the name of their fanzine press. They created a Facebook profile called “El Xastle” for posting their pictures, reflections, poems, and experiences from their daily life on the farm and for advertising their products and events. El Xastle represented a 180-degree shift from their lives as urban-raised artists. It was the beginning of their journey into the agroecological and traditional methods of *milpa* farming in the volcanic landscapes of the Mexican Plateau. During those years, they experienced a new awareness of being in nature, understanding themselves as connected to the living Earth, which they wisely referred to as Mother Earth. Nevertheless, they also maintained the relationships with their previous artistic collectives, and Carlos continued developing his personal musical project as a DJ (Sonido Mamalón). It could be argued that this was a transition period. However, the fact is that they established a new relationship with the city’s artistic life, and through this new relationship they used their previous network of friends to promote and sell their agroecological products and offer artistic workshops. They also sought to contribute to their own artistic collectives with their poems, songs and crafts inspired by the countryside, thereby fostering a new rural-urban dialogue within their own artistic communities.

8.6. The Poetic Footprints of the Novice Peasants: The Design of an Agro-Poetic

Calendar

The traces of human habitation testify to their passage through the world. By stopping at the footprints, it is possible to reveal a body, an existence that has shaped it. They record moments and places charged with symbolic content that make up the human and living experience. Traces, or faces, or remains, or rumors.³²²

Jhonnatan Curiel

In light of Curiel's characterization of traces, I would like to follow El Xastle's footprints as novice peasants to see the patterns of their affective eco-poetic relationship with the Earth. These traces are the words, works of art, and gestures toward life that permeated the space they used to live in.³²³ Needless to say, this understanding implies a body that intervenes in reality through habitation. Of course, footprints reveal the many layers in which humans arrange and project their lives in a territory, and, as Curiel highlights, they possess an affective dimension. Footprints, which imprint a pattern, can be another way to approach an exploration of Eco-poetic Design. Carlos and Sandra's digital footprints reveal the aesthetic and environmental dimensions of their activities.

My way to approach their digital traces is through their Facebook profiles. Facebook was the social media platform that Carlos and Sandra used as a window into their lives, similar to a diary and an advertising tool. As a follower of their profiles for two and a half years, I noticed that the content of their posts was imprinted with a creative rhythm attuned to the natural cycle of the *milpa* field, agave cultivation, their farm animals, and the volcanoes. Below, I propose

³²² "Las huellas del habitar humano dan testimonio de su paso por el mundo. Al detenerse en las huellas es posible revelar un cuerpo, una existencia que la ha plasmado. En ellas se registran momentos y lugares cargados de contenido simbólico que conforman la experiencia humana y de lo vivo. Rastros, o rostros, o restos, o rumores." Curiel, "Geopoéticas del habitar en Tijuana. Huellas de la sensibilidad juvenil," 17.

³²³ Curiel, 11.

analyzing the shapes and textures of this cycle as the one-year course of footprints to see the spiritual, artistic, and ecological one-year composition in which their affectivities became synchronized with the land. This is what I call El Xastle's agro-poetic calendar of 2017.

In order to analyze the calendar, Table 1 divides 55 selected posts into colors according to their content (the name of the account on which the post was originally published is written between parentheses).³²⁴ These colors are as follows:

Blue for songs and prayers.

Gold for advertising and marketing of products.

Green for agroecological learnings and practices.

Pale green for educational activities and workshops.

Orange for contemplation, reflection, and snapshots of their daily life.

Grey for published material (with their publishing label).

Pink for participation in artistic events, installations, and performances.

Table 1 selection from El Xastle's 2017 timeline renders visible their attunement with the cycle of the *milpa*. El Xastle's entries interweave daily experience and agroecological information with poetic and artistic sensitivity, revealing a personal way of knitting knowledge with affectivity. From the content of the table, it is possible to feel El Xastle's footprints as new farmers in their learning process of agroecological knowledge and the formation of an eco-poetic perspective. Regarding the agroecological learnings, these appear in three main ways. First as the process of learning the cultivation of the *milpa* [entries 7, 11, 15, 16, 19, 27, 30, 32,

³²⁴ I have chosen to focus on specific representative posts from the El Xastle account and, sometimes from Chuleles, Carlos, and Sandra's personal accounts, to render their flow of activities visible. I'm summarizing the content of some extended posts, and when they are accompanied by several pictures, I'm just presenting a personal selection. I have been granted the corresponding permission by Sandra Araujo to publish these posted texts and photographs. I have made slight orthographical and typographical corrections that do not change the original meaning in Spanish.

38, 43], second as Carlos's learning in the cultivation of agave [3, 5, 14], and third as learning about raising animals [36, 37, 41].

Growing a *milpa* in the Mexican Plateau required them to sow in May [7], attend workshops on seed varieties in early June [11], face the difficulties of weeding in June and July [15, 16, 19], try natural pest control [16], face natural disasters in August [27, 30] and harvest in September and October [38, 43]. During the cycle, Carlos also practiced grasshopper hunting and preparation in late August [32]. The table also reveals the importance of the economic aspects of their agroecological way of life. El Xastle accompanied their rural lifestyle with the advertising of their products. These advertisements can be divided into farm products such as pumpkins, grasshoppers, *pulque* [31, 39], handcrafted products such as chuleles, scarfs, gloves, hats, and warmers [13, 52], fanzine publications [17, 22], bazaars and product fairs [47, 49] and workshops or presentations [22, 23, 24, 25, 42]. This practical knowledge of self-advertising must not be underestimated, and El Xastle's timeline makes clear that they had carefully considered the aesthetic dimension of their promotions. For example, their logo, flyers, and posters were created by artist friends [34], and pictures of crops and other products clearly show high sensitivity for spatial composition, colors, and textures [13]. In addition, they also promoted a path for sharing or teaching their knowledge to other people, especially children, as can be observed in the entries marked in light green. For El Xastle, the knowledge they gained was something they thought needed to be put into circulation, highlighting the idea that learning can transform into teaching. This is in line with the notion of a "circulation of wisdom" described by Ingrid Toro and Omar Felipe Giraldo as part of agroecological relationships between people.³²⁵

³²⁵ Giraldo and Toro, *Afectividad Ambiental. Sensibilidad, Empatía, Estéticas Del Habitar*.

Figure 45 shows El Xastle's agroecological and artistic activities through a year of farming their *milpa* and agave spanning from January 2017 to January 2018 (table 1. At first glance, it is possible to observe a concentration of specific activities in certain months. For example, the prayer asking for a good harvest of nectar appeared just after the agave scrapping season in February [3 and 4], and the one asking for rain accompanied the sowing of seeds [6 and 7]. Agroecological learnings are especially condensed in June and July, the rainy season in the Mexican plateau, which is also a busy season for preparing agave shoots, weeding, and pest control [14,15,16,17]. Later on, in the second half of July and the first half of August, Carlos and Sandra focused on facilitating workshops with children [22-25] taking the opportunity for interaction provided by school summer vacations. In late August came the beginning of the grasshopper hunting season [32], while September became a significant month for reflections and commentaries as the *milpa* grew and matured, and some of the animals of the loving community perished [35-38]. At the beginning of autumn, the end of the rainy season, they completed the initial harvest of fresh corn cobs (*elotes*) [43]. The harvest season extended through October [45,46], during which they were especially active in their efforts to sell their harvested crops. During November and December, characterized by the beginning of the cold season in the Mexican Plateau, they concentrated their selling activities and participation in bazaars, markets, and festivals.

It can be said that figure 45 also represents El Xastle's agropoetic wisdom of life and the footprints of their environmental affectivity. The acquisition of practical knowledge became the occasion for reflections on the identity and direction of their life project as a loving community. Agroecological experiences were the occasion for reflecting on topics such as unfair practices in the countryside [3], the use of agrochemical herbicides and pesticides [15, 16, 17], animal mistreatment [37], cultural heritage [28], work dignity [32], and identity [35]. As we can note, most, if not all, of these reflections are articulated with affective language, for

example, their gratitude toward the *milpa* [35] or sad feelings related to animal mistreatment [37]. Their experiences support the inseparability of knowing and feeling in agroecological vernacular wisdom, an argument developed by scholars Ingrid Toro and Felipe Omar Giraldo's theory on environmental affectivities.

The agropoetic timeline also gives a glimpse into the identity of the loving community. This identity is closely connected with: an agroecological ethical frame that includes organic farming as opposed to agrochemical farming; an animalist and interspecies perspective of “companions of existence” as opposed to the vision of animals as commodities [35, 36]; the notion of being actually connected through the land and their ancestors, which they call their “grandfathers and grandmothers” [28]; a firm belief in the force of “prayer” [24, 30]; and artistic interdisciplinarity [12, 26]. This multifaceted identity, full of ethical consciousness, contrasts with the folkloric vision of farmers' lives as dull and thoughtless, which is a view mainly held by people in urban areas.

El Xastle's timeline reveals that the role of the arts in the process of reconnection to the Earth is crafting an affective language and an aesthetic grammar for articulating a mesh between ecological knowledge, identity, reflection, and work. Following Ingrid Toro and Omar Felipe Giraldo, we can affirm that the development of an aesthetic grammar is accompanied by a refinement of the sense of proportionality, color combination, and composition.³²⁶ This aesthetic grammar can be identified in at least four eco-poetic patterns that overlapped through

³²⁶ Ingrid Toro and Omar Felipe propose that proportionality is a sense embodied in vernacular knowledge and contributes for designing environments for life, as Ingold has suggested: “La proporcionalidad es un sentido bien encarnado, corporizado, en los saberes vernáculos, y que ofrece confianza de que algo marcha bien cuando se *ve bien*, cuando se *escucha bien*, cuando *huele bien*, cuando *sabe bien*. Diseñar ambientes para la vida, como diría Ingold (2012), no se trata de adaptarse a un lugar dado de antemano, sino hacerse un lugar. Y para ello no hay mejor guía que los sentidos, la sensibilidad y el orden afectivo.” [Proportionality is a sense that is well embodied in vernacular knowledge, and that offers confidence that something is going well when it *looks good*, when it *sounds good*, when it *smells good*, when it *tastes good*. Designing environments for life, as Ingold (2012) would say, is not about adapting to a given place beforehand, but making a place for yourself. And for this there is no better guide than the senses, the sensitivity and the affective order.] Giraldo and Toro, “Saberes ambientales afectivos” in *Afectividad Ambiental. Sensibilidad, Empatía, Estéticas Del Habitar*.

the year cycle: vignettes, manifestos, prayers, and songs. Table 2 offers an example of each one.

Table 2 shows Carlos and Sandra's eco-poetic patterns, some of their footprints, when growing the *milpa* and farming the *maguay* for producing *pulque*. These "footprints" demonstrate that projects of reconnection, such as their project of living from the earth, demand not only the acquisition of ecological and practical knowledge but what Ingrid Toro and Omar Felipe Giraldo call an "aesthetic-affective reorganization."³²⁷ Thus, their aesthetic grammar contributes to reconnecting heart, soil, voice, and work by nurturing a mesh of affectivity toward the environment and the agroecological cycle of life. The aesthetic grammar developed when living together with the *milpa* field can be called the grammar that articulates a *milpa* eco-poetics.

8.7. *Milpa* Poetics

For two years, Carlos and Sandra practiced an Eco-poetic Design for growing their *milpa* and set their loving community in motion. In other words, they learned how to love the *milpa* way of life by rooting this love in the love they had for each other, for the many species in their loving community, and for Mother Earth. Through working with soil, paper, fabric, and their computer, they shaped this Eco-poetic Design from which a *milpa* and a *milpa* poetics was grown.³²⁸ Eco-poetic Design was practiced as their particular agroecological way of life attuned to the Earth while nurturing agricultural, ecological, and affective messages. Thus, a *milpa* poetics would be the poetic messages and reflections born from a Eco-poetic Design based on

³²⁷ Giraldo and Toro, *Afectividad Ambiental. Sensibilidad, Empatía, Estéticas Del Habitar*.

³²⁸ Ingrid Toro and Omar Felipe highlights that environmental wisdom are arts of life that are acquired through life and that awake when walking, feeling, touching, eating, crying, singing, smelling, and hearing a territory, see Giraldo and Toro, "Saberes ambientales afectivos" in *Afectividad Ambiental. Sensibilidad, Empatía, Estéticas Del Habitar*.

agroecological and artistic engagement with the land. For example, Carlos and Sandra, the word *xastle*, which means the “leftover of fermentation” or “bagasse,” had an important significance for their own vision of an agriculture cycle where nothing is wasted. In an interview they expressed:

[Carlos:] Generally, people don't use it [the xastle], but we began to put it in the field, and it is a great fertilizer. The xastle is the leftover, but it is not lost. It is part of the cycle. People also use the word “xastle” for some drinks' bagasse. [Sandra:] This has its depth because it entails an idea of what is left. But almost always, what is left is either medicine or can be useful for something. For example, the xastle is also given to cows, and they give more milk. It reminds us of those things that maybe we have left behind, thinking they are leftovers, just because we concentrate on the final product. But the xastle reminds us of things that we forget, which could be our nourishment.³²⁹

El Xastle's *milpa* poetics was based on love as its main affective principle. In fact, they defined themselves as a loving community. Love was not only seen as the romantic love between Carlos and Sandra but also as a kind of empathy toward animals, ancestors, their neighbors in Santa María Zacatepec, and the land. Their *milpa* poetics also transmitted a message of spiritual weaving. In fact, they had a weaving perspective of their own lives for crafting a network of art and soul attuned to the Earth and an alternative way of life. In light of this awareness, El Xastle's Facebook profile did not represent an uncritical life, but rather part of a self-conscious attempt to use the forum of social media to extend this fabric of art and soul. The informative descriptions, poetic reflections, and sharp criticism, along with the continuous

³²⁹ “[Carlos:] Generalmente no le dan uso, pero nosotros comenzamos a meterlo en el campo como un gran abono. El Xastle es lo que sobra, pero que no se pierde, es parte del ciclo. También se le dice Xastle a la gabaza de las bebidas y así. [Sandra:] tiene su profundidad porque es esta idea de lo que sobra. Pero casi siempre lo que sobra o es medicina o sirve para algo. Por ejemplo, el Xastle también se les da a las vacas y dan más leche. Como que son esas que cosas que a lo mejor hemos dejado atrás porque creemos que son sobrantes porque nos concentramos en el producto final. Pero el Xastle es como eso que olvidamos y que podría ser nuestro alimento” Barraza and Araujo, *Proyectos de los Colectivos Chuleles y El Xastle*.

dialogue with friends' replies and commentaries, amplified the messages of other agroecological movements, Indigenous peoples, and alternative artists while situating them under the growing shell of Mexican artistic agroecological communities.

El Xastle's *milpa* poetics was agroecological. This means that it grew from some fundamental ethical principles of the agroecological movement such as: living and working in the same place, growing our own food (walking the path of food sovereignty), not producing more than needed, helping, building solidarity with neighbors and friends, breaking with consumerist consumption habits, fostering a new consciousness of value and trade, attuning our activities to a ritual time of land and nature, and establishing a new mode of relationship with animals based on respect and care.

8.8. Ecopoem: My Brother Shinnosuke

I

Then we set off on our journey through Mexico
which is the journey of the leaves gathered by Shinnosuke:
Mango: Cuernavaca, Casona Spencer.
Lime and coffee: La Tlacuacha, Tepoztlán.
Magnolia and carrot: From Rodrigo's house and garden in Cholula.
Maple: A gift at the El Abedul bookstore.
Cacao: In Oaxaca, at the house of Antonio, Celeste, and Panchita.
Bougainvillea: From Mexico City, at a poetry reading with Fabricio, *yoeme*.
Rubber: From the Church of San Simón Ticumán.
In these places we also read poems and talk about:
Clavellina
Primavera amarilla
Bougainvillea
Jacaranda
Guaje
Colorín

Peyote
Nopal
Yolloxochitl
Cacao
Tobacco
Salvia
Dahlia
Cazahuate
Tunillo
Tobalá
Chivichío
Copal
Huizache

On this journey, Shinnosuke asks the audience: Do you know where the water you use comes from?

Ayum Yuma, Marina and Gonzalo's little daughter, answers us.

Emiliano, the son of Zyania, answers us.

Abi and the Nahua poets Óscar, Xuany and Irma, answer us.

El Iztaccíhuatl, Popocatepetl, La Malinche, Citlaltépetl,
speak to us and talk.

They are the volcanoes who Shinnosuke greets at Rodrigo's house every morning
(close to the house where Carlos and Sandra lived 4 years ago).

The first day Shinnosuke greets Malinche

—Good Morning—

On the second day, he asks

—Why do men build buildings?— but she doesn't answer,

— Just watch— she tells him

The third day, Malinche speaks

—In my eyes, this is just a game of human beings, a fascinating game,
but when it becomes too much, I can erase this game with an eruption.

And I remember that for volcanoes, cities also come and go like waves.

II

We walk along old paths

through avocado forests
and stone walls
together with Héctor and Mauricio, our guides, we contemplate the Calamatlán valley.

Shinnosuke says that the heart is the path that leads from one to oneself 自覚
Then I think that the heart
Is Rodrigo's transcriptions
of Jesus' words
and the songs inspired by the pines and volcanoes:

*Under the pine tree I sing
The world is a good place
The world is a good place
Don't look at it with vanity
Don't look at it with vanity
You will see how wonderful it is
You will see how wonderful it is*

I think that the heart's wisdom
inhabits the nursery of native seeds in Cholula:

“The plant adapts,
The idea of rich and fertile soil
It's a human idea” says Hierson.

III

We travel to Oaxaca
for the reading with Enna
to meet Antonio and hear about the “cacao agenda”
and the history of the Mokayas and the Chontalpa
where cacao became chocolate
alongside to humanity.

We travel to Santa Cruz Papalutla

with Ismael Ángeles Cruz, “Zykno”
poet of rhyme and rap
He introduces us to his aunts and uncles
and the art of the *carrizo* and the *tejate*
and the road to Las Canteras and La Bichana.

In Santa Cruz Papalutla, the paths join
Uncle Edmundo’s feet
Aunt Veronica’s tortillas
and the wise working hands of Uncle Alejandro
who remixes Nanao’s verse 口にほほえみ (smile for the mouth)
in Zapotec:

Par rua gestil – For the mouth, the bread
Par rua get – For the mouth, the tortilla

We walk through adobe houses, Yu’u in Zapotec
To the center of La Bichana
where there is a place to celebrate mass surrounded by the prickly pears.

So, when the journey ends I tell my Mother and my Father:

Round is the tortilla like the Sun.
The masa is roasted on the comal,
hands turned to food.
The angel has sent the hummingbird
to the cactus flower in the morning.
The Sun roasts this land on the comal
the seed opens after rain
and sings.

I look to my side and
someone walks by
perfumed by the cornfields of life
地球生まれ

the Earth is being born.

February-March 2022. Mexico City, Cuernavaca, Tepoztlán, Puebla, Cholula, Oaxaca, and Santa Cruz Papalutla.

8.9. Conclusion

This exploration showed how agroecology can form an alliance with arts and poetry in a Eco-poetic Design that grows an agropoetic mesh of farming and artistic creation reconnecting people with the Earth. In the case of El Xastle, this combination created a complex agropoetic mix of ecological knowledge, critical reflection, artistic creation, and emergent wisdom. Complexity, however, didn't imply disorder, but new arrangement of their time and activities by following the natural cycle of the *milpa* and the farming of *maguey* plants for producing *pulque*. This arrangement took a cyclical shape in which El Xastle's different activities were well distributed throughout the year, showing that modern artistic lives actively using technological devices and platforms can be integrated with traditional farming methods. Furthermore, this balance between artistic creation and farming shows that Eco-poetic Design can be an inspiring way of reconnection while embracing interdisciplinarity.

This exploration also showed that agroecology, in alliance with arts and poetry, nurtured an aesthetic grammar exemplified by El Xastle's *milpa* poetics. This grammar not only imprinted its marks on the soil and paper, but also on the internet and social media. In addition, the *milpa* poetics became El Xastle's aesthetic language to establish a network for their products and activities. El Xastle was never defined as an eco-brand, nor did Carlos and Sandra consider themselves eco-producers. However, they were environmentally aware of their products and faced ethical dilemmas regarding growing the *milpa*. For those unaware of Carlos and Sandra's artistic activities, their *milpa* poetics showed that El Xastle was more than a brand.

It was a story of care and love for the land with the appeal of poetry, DJ music, and artisanal goods. Therefore, *milpa* poetics is the grammar for incipient wisdom that built a different meaning of the agricultural “product” and invites us to conceive of an ear of corn as more than just corn, and of pumpkins and chickens as more than just food, but rather beings belonging to a vibrant and animated Earth. *Milpa* poetics is the aesthetic language of an Eco-poetic Heart weaving a complex ontological and existential mesh through which not only knowledge and techniques but also love and the poetic feeling of being alive circulate.

The cyclical arrangement of life and creating an aesthetic grammar of the land (while using the latest technology and social media) comprise two fundamental layers of El Xastle’s eco-poetic relationship. This relationship reveals an Eco-poetic Design that achieved a reconnection between Sandra and Carlos’s lives and the Earth, conceived as a woven and cyclical “Mother Earth.” We can sense the ontological and affective reconnection to a relational ontology in Sandra’s vision of soul weaving and her view of leftovers as part of a major nourishment cycle that contests the consumerist perspective that tends to focus on the final products. For El Xastle’s loving community, Earth was not conceived only as a dwelling place or an environment but as a major fabric of souls, which includes animal souls, vegetable souls, ancestor souls, volcano souls, product souls, and human souls. Mother Earth and artists’ reconnection was understood to be regulated by cycles that naturally arrange artistic production and their activities. In other words, artistic production is not something made at the Earth’s expense but woven into the big fabric of a creative Mother Earth. Furthermore, contesting the egocentric perspective, their view suggests that artistic works are not the final products of the artistic activity but the leftovers of an artistic process of weaving our lives together.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

9.2. Ecopoem: Mother, Father

Mother, Father,
It's been seven years since I started down this path
the past two living in this panicked
world of COVID-19.

But today the cherry trees
blossom again
and the long path is only a few short meters.

Oh!
“When a flower opens, the world appears.” *

Streams of ecology
like a flood of clouds:
“Consider how the wildflowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even
Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.” **

It's raining again:
“It's heard, it reverberates, my song,
my word's field sprouts,
our flowers spring up in the times of rain.” ***

You tell me
—Everything will be fine
because every crisis, which is suffering, ends.
The Earth is the womb of peace, the future, and hope

to be born again.—

Autumn Equinox of 2022. University of Tsukuba.

2 and a half years after the first emergency period due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

* The first quote is from Prajñātara, quoted by Dōgen.

** The second quote is from Jesus of Nazareth, quoted in Luke 12:27 (New International Version).

*** The third quote is from an ancient Nahua song, compiled in *Cantares Mexicanos*.

9.1. Conclusions

This study has explored the manner in which artists attain an eco-poetical reconnection to the Earth through a creative activity I call Eco-poetic Design. The findings shed light on the role of the arts in contemporary ecological transitions by revealing a process for giving birth to an “Eco-poetic Heart,” which is necessary to effectively embody a relational ontological framework and an affective language of relationship capable of overcoming the pitfalls of Western mechanist ontology and epistemology. This process of “cardiogenesis” is fostered by the artistic and poetic composition of patterns of relationship (love) which seek a reconnection between human life and the Earth.

I have presented five case studies to explore *how these reconnections were achieved and expressed* by artists in Japan and Mexico and *how I could actualize and express these reconnections* with my own body. I have also attempted to develop a framework of reconnection based on artistic lives from the East and South of the global civilization and a heart-inclusive methodology for conducting qualitative artistic research. Therefore, this study has attempted to present a theoretical and affective framework of Eco-poetic Design through the lens of Eco-poetics, more specifically through the lens of a Poetics of Relationship.

Regarding *how these reconnections were achieved and expressed*, this study reveals five patterns: a “fluid human-animal” pattern of self-identity embracing the Earth, a “spiral” pattern building a new society on the Earth, a “Kokopelli’s footprints” pattern of walking the Earth, a “*kami*” pattern of world articulating a philosophy in dialogue with the Earth, and a “cyclically arranged” pattern of artistic life attuned to the Earth. Table 3 summarizes more concretely the Eco-poetic Design explored in each case study and the conception of Earth itself through the Eco-poetic Heart.

In each case, the reconnection achieved illuminated a conception of a living and spirit-filled Earth, though each particular vision was characterized according to its own ontological framework. In all cases it is also worth noting that the Earth ceases to be merely an environment, instead being understood as a being with person-like characteristics. Through this anthropomorphization, Earth often becomes an embracing being, such as a mother, or a community, and a communicative and talking spirit. Another common point is that these patterns were inspired by traditional perspectives, especially those based in Indigenous and non-Western ontologies and ways of life. For example: Frida Kahlo’s animalist pattern of identity was inspired by a nahualist view of the human persona; Buzoku’s spiral pattern of constructing an alternative society was inspired by “tribal” modes of life; Nanao Sakaki’s ecocosmopolitan pattern of walking was inspired by Kokopelli; Yamao’s animist pattern of island wisdom was inspired by Vedanta philosophy, Buddhism and the popular notion of *kami*; and El Xastle’s cyclical pattern of artistic life was inspired by an agroecological way of life rooted in the *milpa*. In sum, all the reconnections achieved a common recognition of living and spirit-filled Earth while maintaining diverse ontological perspectives.

Regarding *how I could actualize and express these reconnections*, this research has tackled this question through the development of a “heart-inclusive” eco-poetic methodology. By incorporating elements of artistic creation, this “eco-poetic methodology” has attempted to

underscore that the kind of knowledge explored in each case study requires an embodied integration through artistic and poetic expression. This methodology was developed according to an academic ethics of embodiment for overcoming the epistemic shortcomings of dichotomous rationalist thinking in most methodological frameworks of academic disciplines. Therefore, ecopoems were used to craft a significant experience surrounding the research.

Through recounting life stories, analyzing works of art, and pursuing poetic immersion and creation, I intended to shed a new light on the ecocriticism of each of these artists and their works while rendering the relevant places, humans, and sentient beings more “tangible.” Still, I’m aware of the “roughness” that may be felt in the contrast between the theoretical and the poetic language used in this research. In fact, this “roughness” points to the need to further develop a personal ecopoetic language capable of navigating smoothly between the exigencies imposed by the rigor of academic research and the linguistic plasticity required by poetic language. This limitation is likely even more stark given that English, the language in which I chose to write this dissertation, is not my mother tongue, nor a language in which I had prior experience writing creatively. Therefore, this research poses an additional question of how to develop an effective ecopoetic language when writing in a second language, especially when this language is one initially learned for academic purposes. One’s second language can become a straitjacket for this kind of ecopoetic exploration, and our own biased construction of academic languages demands putting into practice alternative ways of academic writing. This is a question that must be tackled in future research, and which has relevance for conducting ecopoetic research in a multilinguistic environment.

Another limitation stems from the fact that this ecopoetic approach included immersion in places and direct interaction with people: in other words, ethnographic “fieldwork.” However, though it is desirable, it is not always possible to visit all these places or practice ethnopoetic fieldwork. Some places may have disappeared long ago, and people connected to

those stories may be difficult to reach or already dead. Additionally, other financial, political, and health circumstances, such as COVID-19, may limit our capacity for this type of immersive exploration. While it might be tempting to say that we must proceed with what we have at hand, such as texts and audiovisual materials, this kind of ecopoetic research suggests that we should not proceed on a journey of knowledge production at all costs. This is of particular importance when the lives and works being studied are not speaking to their interlocutors in terms of mere rational knowledge, but in terms of wisdom, perception, and poetic or artistic experiences. In sum, the lives I am researching demand to be engaged with in the context of their world of relationships. If we cannot embody at least something of that wisdom, nor be in contact with their relational world, then we would be merely replicating the onto-epistemic framework that tends to objectify reality and dismiss the importance of affective knowledge. This introduces the question regarding the kinds of relational abilities we must develop for this kind of embodied fieldwork. In other words, we must consider what types of physical, emotional, and linguistic skills are necessary. My present research made it essential to practice attentiveness to the relationships between places, people, and their histories and my own perceptions, feelings, and thoughts. Moreover, it required a particular poetic sensitivity to be able to notice significant connections emerging despite limitations of place, time, and language. Future research must consider the importance of interdisciplinary skills, such as:

- Ecological knowledge of regions (Bioregional familiarization with the place).
- Physical ability for walking into territories and exploring places.
- Artistic abilities to communicate our findings via academic writing or other methods.
- Contemplative abilities to perceive nature.
- Communicative abilities to hear, interview, and talk with people.
- Experience with different languages, including translation abilities. Formation in a culture's literary and artistic traditions.

Despite these limitations, the present study's findings can help identify how art and poetry from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is playing an important role in reconnecting the civilizational onto-epistemic order to the relational order of a living Earth. More precisely, my present research helps to illuminate how this reconnection is taking place in those areas on the "margins" of the Northern and Western discourses and how arts and poetry contribute to the ecological care necessary for solving environmental issues. This understanding can provide important lessons for the configuration of ecological-change frameworks themselves. On the one hand, this study's findings stress that a single formula doesn't exist to pursue ecological transitions. On the other, they underscore that the arts and poetry have a role in framing an ecological and affective ontology that must be considered when designing, in Escobar's terms, civilizational or autonomous transitions.

The results of this study may be helpful in preparing transitional and autonomous designs by providing a theoretical framework for including the arts based on examples of whole-hearted commitments to reconnection. This research can also help scholars, activists, management officials and educators to become more aware of stories of ecological reconnection rooted in artistic lives and can inspire them to construct strategies and programs within an ecological-oriented perspective. In addition, the present study can make students and readers more familiar with the ecological aspects of their contemporary artisanal, artistic, and literary traditions. It fosters an interdisciplinary awareness of the arts as not confined to the works included in galleries and books, but as works connected to *living beings*. In short, it positions artists as people embracing, building, walking, articulating, and organizing patterns of ecopoetic relationship, thereby affectively (and effectively) connecting *beings* with *beings*. Finally, this research also contributes to a shift in the characterization of the ecological and cultural path in our Modernity. I will list the ten main ideas challenged by this study.

1. *The ecological-cultural reconnection with the Earth can be disconnected from cities.*

The case studies suggest that ecological artistic projects of life often begin in urban contexts. This fosters the idea that the eco-poetic direction (the reconnection journey) is precisely what emerges from a continuous contact between urban and non-urban worlds. Therefore, instead of promoting disconnection from cities, it underscores the ethics of contact between lifestyles in cities with non-urban lifestyles. The case studies also stress that urban dynamics matter because they can foster the necessary interpersonal relationships that will later sustain artistic projects of life in rural areas. Although living in cities was perceived as restrictive and challenging in many aspects, artists were still connected to and dependent on their networks with the cities when they moved to the countryside. In other words, there is no such thing as an eco-poetic path of disconnection from the city. On the contrary, eco-poetics precisely points to affectively and ecologically reframing the relationship between the countryside and cities.

2. *The ecological-cultural reconnection can maintain the division between traditional and countercultural movements in arts.*

The case studies included in this dissertation reveal that the eco-poetic reconnection builds a new complexity between tradition and “rupture” movements. The result is a complex artistic movement of revolutionary disconnection and reconnection that positions the Earth as a new center that connects and disconnects simultaneously traditional views and “rupture” discourses. This can be envisioned as a back-and-forth interplay that overcomes the so-called dialectic between tradition and rupture by bringing a new center: the Earth. This suggests that the eco-poetic direction follows the “third” direction of embracing both tradition and rupture and/or abandoning the dialectic struggle between tradition and rupture. The case studies show that the sense of innovation and originality comes from finding

radical new connections to ancient ontologies and innovative approaches, including the use of technology, to disconnecting from the myth of “progress.” In other words, the eco-poetic direction implies re-establishing a discourse of art history rooted in Earth’s cycles rather than in a linear dialectics of arts and civilizational progress.

3. *The ecological-cultural reconnection necessarily implies permanently dwelling in a single place or that permanent dwelling is the path for attaining a more profound reconnection with Earth.* The case studies show that time and permanent dwelling can build relational ontologies and open the door to embody particular bioregional wisdom (i.e., Sansei Yamao’s connection to Yakushima Island’s wisdom). Nevertheless, itinerancy can also build relational ontologies and open the door to embodying another kind of wisdom, planetary wisdom (i.e., Nanao Sakaki’s connection to Earth’s wisdom). Eco-poetically speaking, both are forms of building relationships and giving birth to a reconnected heart.
4. *The ecological-cultural reconnection implies embracing regionalism and rejecting cosmopolitanism.* The case studies show that cosmopolitanism can invigorate and nurture regionalist projects. In fact, most of these life stories are traversed by transnational movements of people, trends, and ideas. The Tribes’ communes are an excellent example of how transpacific currents can become the stream in which the seed of a new spirit of reconnection is able to sprout and how this spirit can work in different regions and places simultaneously. The case studies show that regional eco-poetical understandings are connected by cosmopolitan flows and that building a new language of reconnection is highly dependent on the ideas and spirits of these currents.
5. *The ecological-cultural reconnection can be compatible with decontextualized notions of work.* The case studies show us that ecological and affective reconnection

means performing work that inhabits the transversality between artistic exploration, ecological consciousness, and daily life. In other words, the patterns should move across layers in a process linking poetry and arts, hearts, and lives. Also, these patterns underlying individual or communal projects are part of a broader construction pattern, represented by a shared spirit crossing between regions and generations. The ecopoetic discourses explored in this dissertation are like transversal nodes revealing their participation in a vast fabric of transformation and reconnections.

6. *The ecological-cultural reconnection is ecologically formative rather than ecologically transformative.* The explored case studies stress the idea that the ecopoetic direction sparks a 180-degree transformation of “ourselves.” This means that poetry and arts are not only a path to *form* us ecologically but to *transform* us into humans with a new sense of ecology. The arts and poetry can transform the ecological reality in which we are immersed by contributing to changes in our ontological foundation, our lifestyle, and our identity. This transformation results from positioning our relationship with a living Earth at the center of an intimate poetic and artistic sense of life. The case studies show us that poetry and art can transform “ecologies” by igniting the radical transformation of the “logos”-centric sense into a poetical understanding of ecology.
7. *The ecological-cultural reconnection can be understood separately from love.* All the case studies reveal the triumph of love as the ontological and relational force that recomposes our relationships with other beings. These cases set a precedent for imagining an ecology of love based on the arts and poetry to transform the current civilizational ecologic trajectory. The triumph of love means that humans can still cling to an inexhaustible source capable of stopping the toxic wars of the head against

the heart, nature against culture, local against global, and care and responsibility against the sense of happiness and fullness. This study shows how love triumphs over dichotomies through the heart born from loving a living and spirit-filled Earth and its beings.

8. *The ecological-cultural reconnection involves achieving sophisticated plans to be effective.* The victory of love exemplified by these lives and their works brings hope into the Anthropocene sense of crisis by saying that powerful patterns of reconnection naturally results from simple daily life decisions made to become closer to Earth. The poetics of relationship revealed by these artists from the South and East of “the globe” show us how the humble paths of taking care of other beings, living together, walking with attention and generosity, learning to dwell in a place, and living attuned to the cycles of Earth, reconnect us with the common wisdom shared by people around the world: we are one with nature, and therefore when we damage nature, we damage ourselves. These are good examples of what it means “designing environments for life.”
9. *The ecological-cultural reconnection can disregard the notion of a pluriverse.* This study shows that poetry and arts compose and recompose worlds of reconnection with Earth by connecting the reality of *this* world in crisis with *other* worlds of relationship. Moreover, this worlds of relationship are worlds existing beyond the conventional view of a “variety” of cultures living on a unique world (a view sustained by the Western conception of world). This study shows that the modern world is not an isolated world, but that has doors and entrances to *other* worlds for synchronizing alternative visions of modernity and civilization. This study showed that arts and poetry open those entrances, currents, and synchronizations with alternative visions

of Modernity by transforming our notion of “cultural diversity” into the notion of a “pluriverse of worlds.”

10. Finally, the ecological-cultural reconnection in frameworks aiming to achieve ecological societies or communities, such as the Ecological Transition frameworks, can disregard the artistic and affective reconnection. This study reveals that ecopoetic research can be a path for resisting the standardization and instrumentalization of intelligence, language, and creativity championed by “progressists” frameworks claiming the disappearance of the Humanities. Given the “transhumanist” and “scientificist” horizons within environmental academic research, Ecopoetic Design is a notion stressing the ecological importance of things such as our bodies, our love, and our heart for designing our ecological societies. This study shows that the artistic *poiesis* can reveal, foster, and sustain an ecologically relevant understanding of the connections between human beings and the Earth. Moreover, there is a loving and poetic way to explore this human ecology that can be compatible with academic activities. This dissertation is an academic offering to the ecopoetic heart that has received the incredible ecological gift of loving this world.

Diagrams

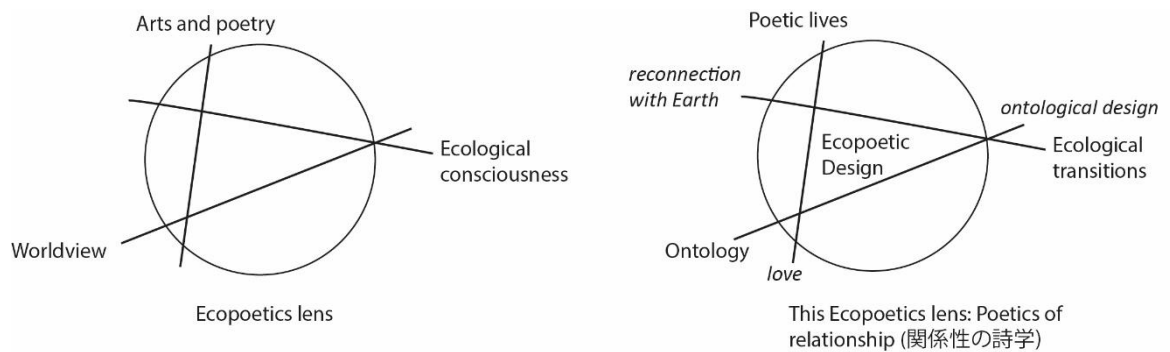


Diagram 1. The Eco-poetic lens as Poetics of relationship.

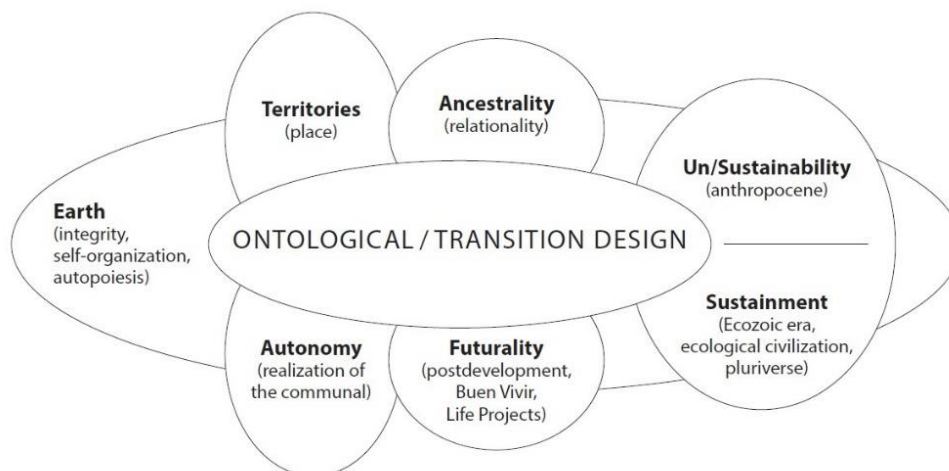


Diagram 2. Arturo Escobar's framework for ontological design. "Autonomy, Transition, Sustainment. A framework for autonomous design and design for transitions." In Escobar (2018, 189).

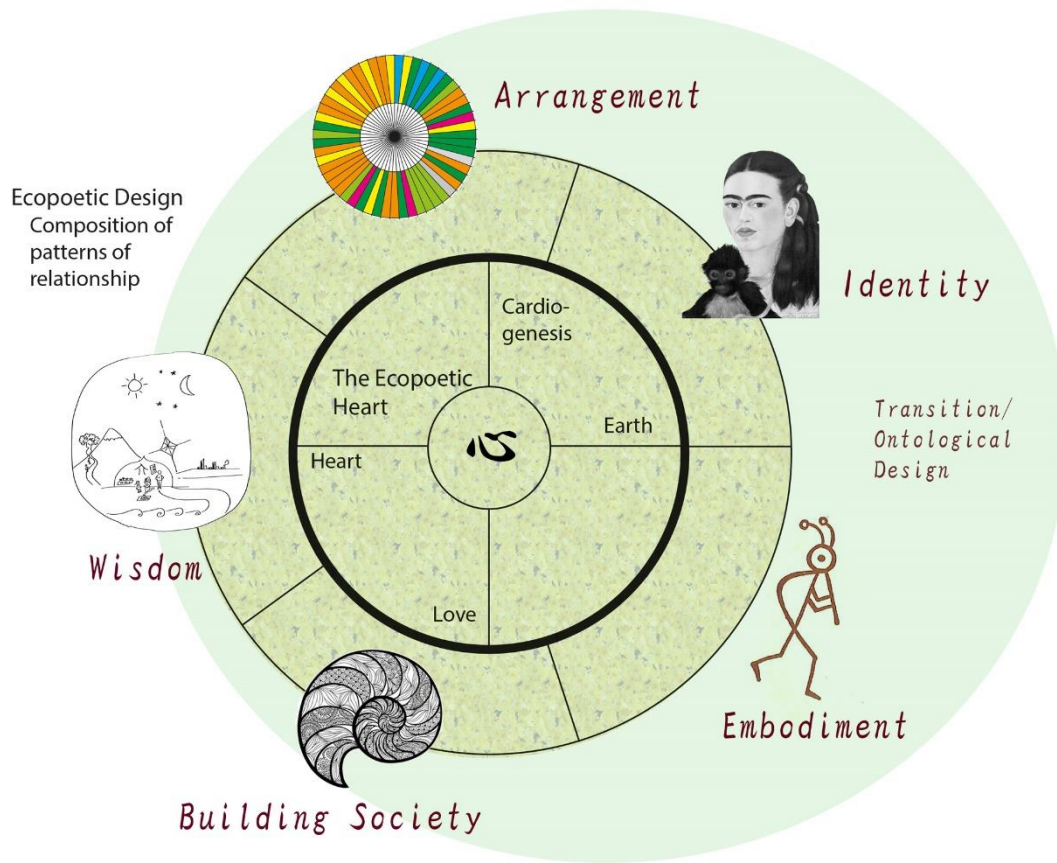


Diagram 3. Eco-poetic Design: Patterns of love. An East-South Approach to Arts of Onto-epistemic Reconnection.

Figures

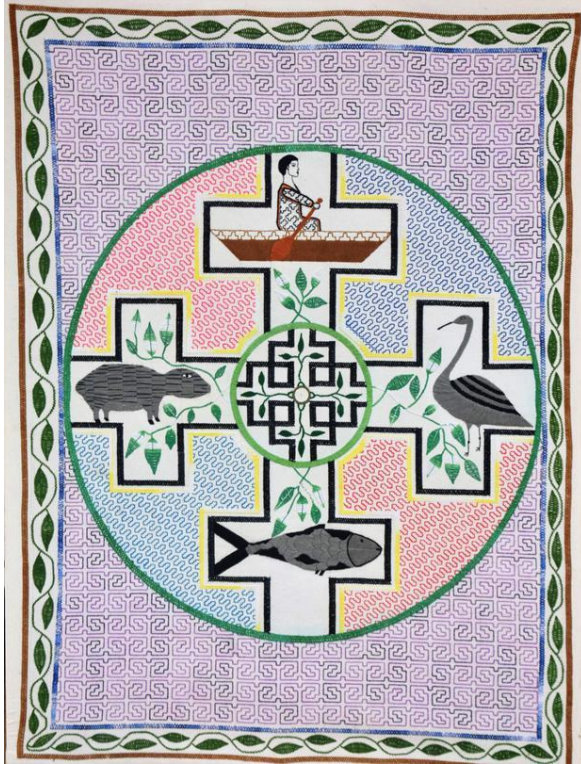


Figure 1. Chono Bensho's work of art based on traditional *kené* designs. *Koros kené* (2022). Embroidery on cloth. 35" x 47". Siwarmayu. <https://siwarmayu.com>

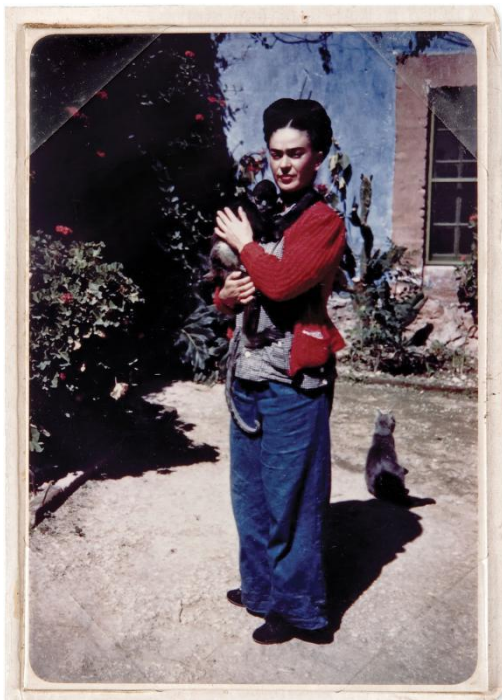


Figure 2. Frida Kahlo in the "Casa Azul" with Fulang Chang, circa 1938. By Florence Arquin. (LaRue Huget, 2012).



Figure 3. Frida Kahlo in 1948. By Gisèle Freund. (*Gisèle Freund, "Frida Kahlo, Mexico City, 1948."*, n.d.)



Figure 4 (left). Alexandre-François Desportes. *Self-Portrait in Hunting Dress*. (ca. 1699). Oil on canvas. 64" x 77". Louvre Museum Collection.

Figure 5 (right). Analysis of *Self-Portrait in Hunting Dress*. All the animals' lines of sight are oriented toward the human figure composing a hierarchical triangle.



Figure 6 (left). Frida Kahlo. *Fulang-Chang and I*, 1937 (assembled after 1939). Oil on masonite 15 ¾” x 11”. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)’s collection.

Figure 7 (right). Analysis of “Fulang-Chang and I.”



Figure 8 (left). Frida Kahlo. *Self-Portrait with Small Monkey*, 1945. Museo Dolores Olmedo Patiño collection.

Figure 9 (right). Analysis of “Self-portrait with Small Monkey.”

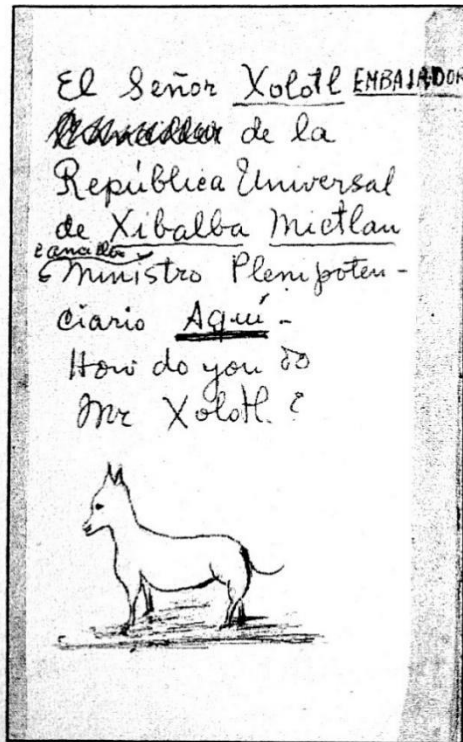


Figure 10. Frida Kahlo. Page 123 of Frida Kahlo's Diary. Frida's companion dog Mr. Xolotl is depicted as Ambassador of the "Universal Republic of Xibalba-Mictlan" (the underworld realm of death).



Figure 11 (right). Kikujirō Fukushima. Fugetsudō's first floor shows the coffee and music atmosphere of the sixties and seventies. (1981, 55).

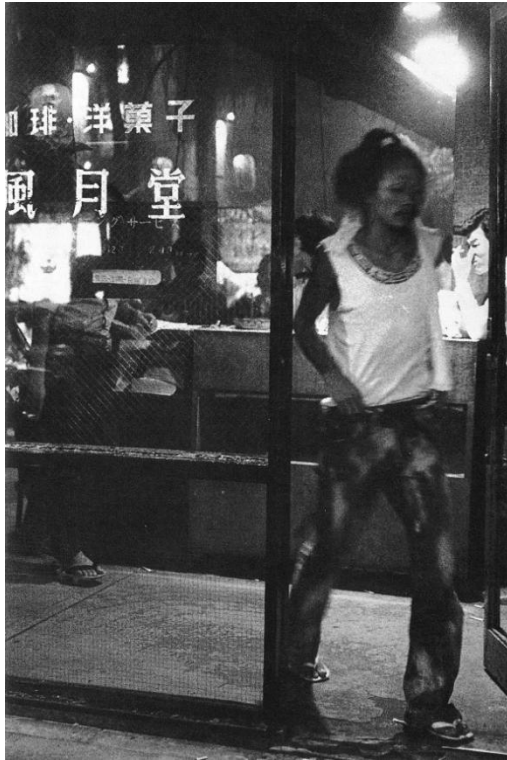


Figure 12 (left). Kikujirō Fukushima. A customer at the entrance of Fugetsudō. (1981, 54).



Figure 13. Kikujirō Fukushima. Member of the Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe. (1981, 111).

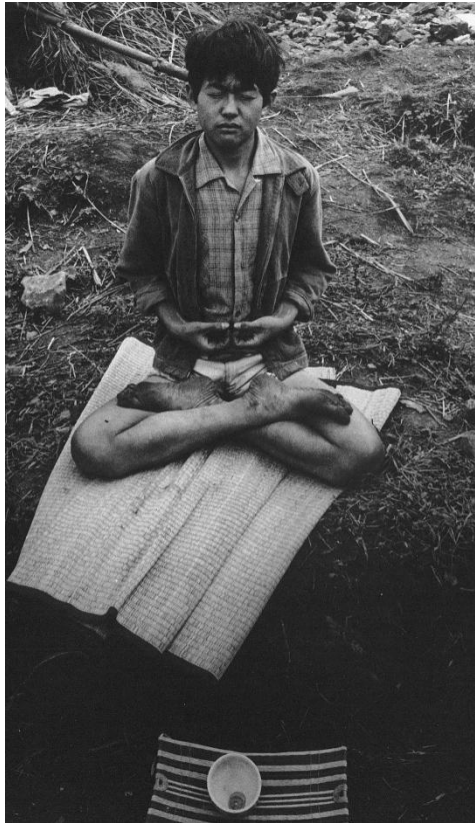


Figure 14. Kikujirō Fukushima, 1967. Member of the Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe. (1981, 118).

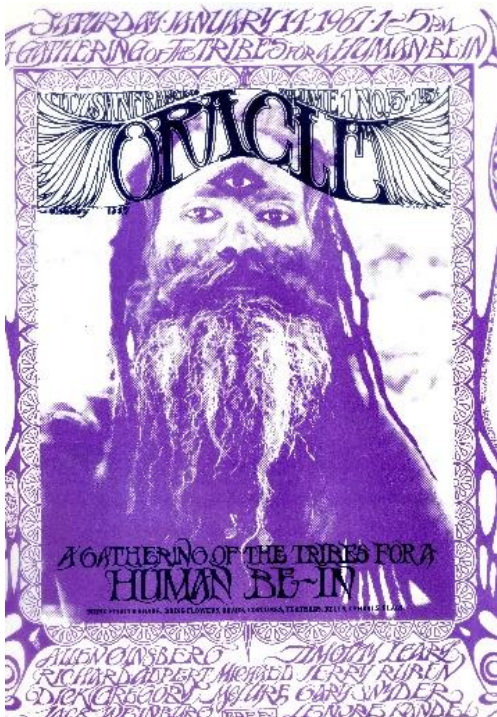


Figure 15. *The San Francisco Oracle*. Vol.1. No.5. January of 1967. Cover.



Figure 16. *Buzoku Shinbun* 『部族新聞』 (The Tribes Newspaper). Vol.2. Num. 1. December of 1967. Back cover.

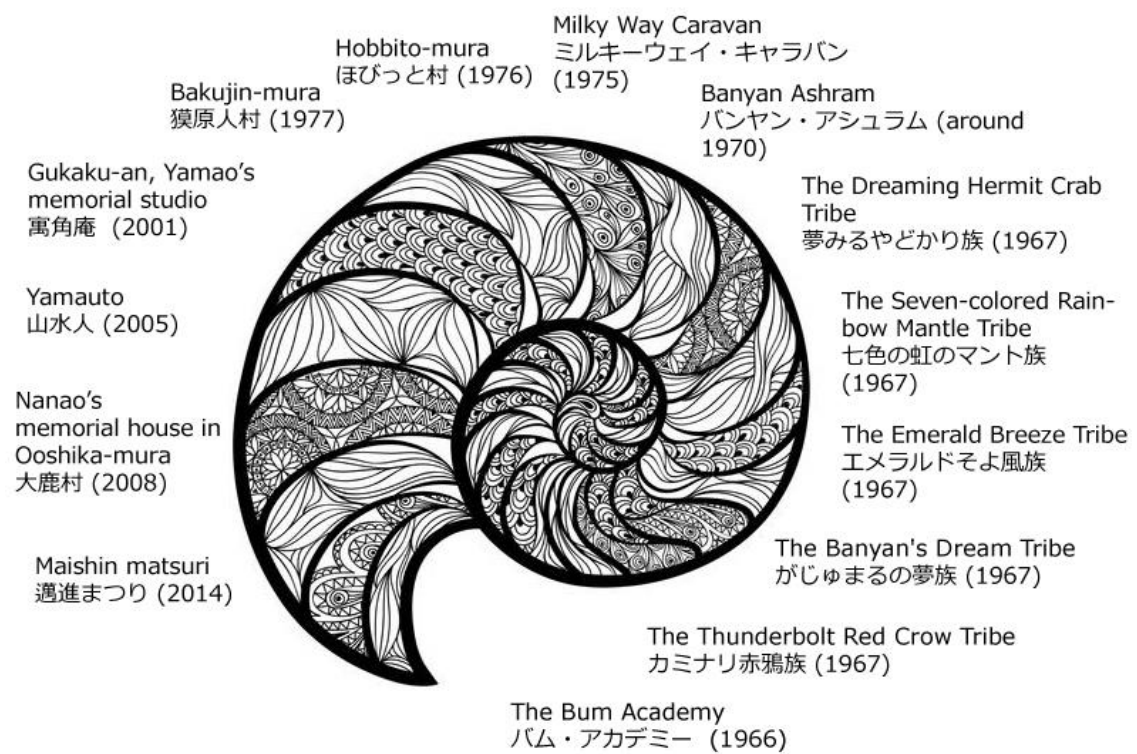


Figure 17. Yaxkin Melchy, 2022. “The shell of reconnection with the Earth.” Communes, ashrams, caravans, communities, ecovillages, festivals, and memorial spaces, growing through generations building the shell of a new society.



Figure 18. Yaxkin Melchy, 2018. Corals, stones, and shells at the entrance of poet Tetsuo Nagasawa's and Rada's house in Suwanose island.

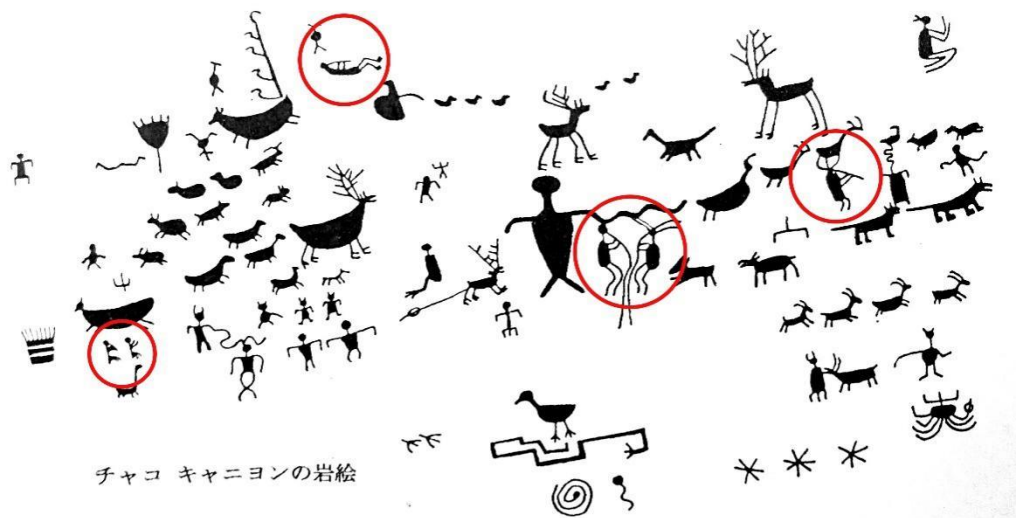


Figure 19. Nanao Sakaki, 1999. Drawing of Chaco Canyon's rock paintings (チャコ・キヤニオンの岩絵) in Nanao's book *Kokoperi* 『ココペリ』 (1999). (Kokopellis highlighted by the author).



Figure 20. Nanao Sakaki 1999. Three Kokopellis on the cover of Nanao Sakaki's book *Kokoperi* 『ココペリ』 (1999).



Figure 21. Toshikazu Kawakami. A depiction of Ōkuninushi (大国主神). In SAVER-Life BLOG.

<https://saver-life.jp/yaoyorozu-kami/okuninusi/>



Figure 22. Daikokuten 大黒天 or 大黒様 carved on wood (ca. the middle of the fourteenth century). Enshrined in the Shingon Buddhist temple of Tandai-ji (谷田寺). Photo: Obama city, Fukui Prefecture. http://www1.city.obama.fukui.jp/obm/rekisi/sekai_isan/Japanese/data/338.htm

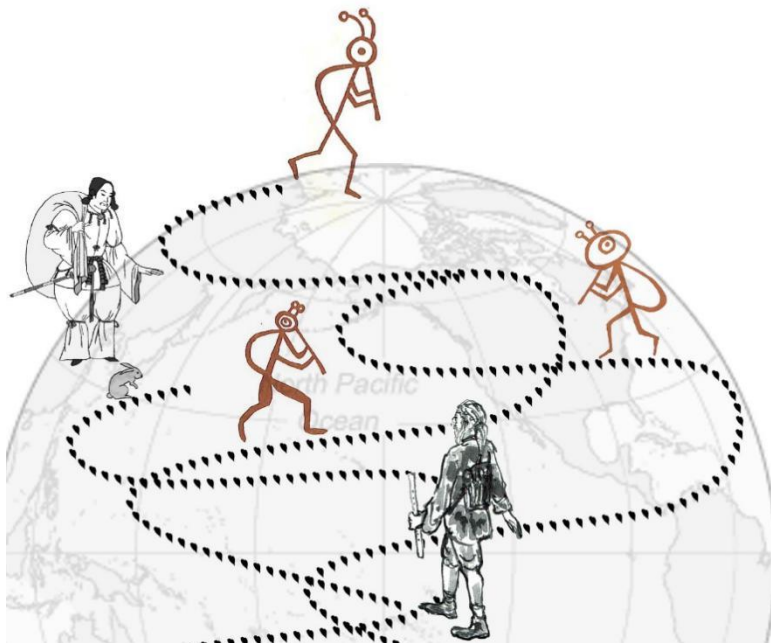


Figure 23. Yaxkin Melchy, 2022. “Not walking alone.” Nanao’s eco-poetic design of the eco-cosmopolitan wandering. (A reinterpretation of “Nanao doing his thing” by Arthur Okamura in *Nanao or Never. Nanao Sakaki walks Earth A*, 2000).



Figure 24. Yaxkin Melchy, 2019. Nanao Sakaki's house and memory place in Ōshika-mura, Nagano.



Figure 25. Yaxkin Melchy, 2019. "Kokopelli in Akaishidake, winter." Kokopelli in the forms of snow guiding a procession of spiritual allies in the peak of Akaishidake (赤石岳) as seen from Nanao's memorial house during my first visit to Ōshika-mura in December 2019.

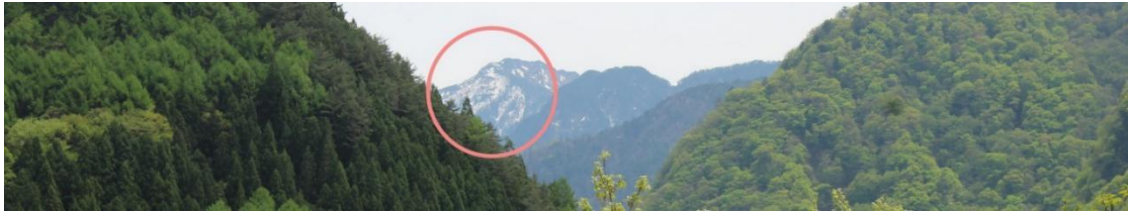


Figure 26. Yaxkin Melchy 2022. “Kokopelli in Akaishidake, summer.” Kokopelli figure as seen during my second visit to Nanao’s memorial house in Ōshika-mura in May 2022.



Figure 27. Yaxkin Melchy, 2018. “Kabocha, the “Squash” poem.” Poem in Sansei Yamao’s cabin studio called Gukaku-an (愚角庵) in the mountains of Yakushima Island.

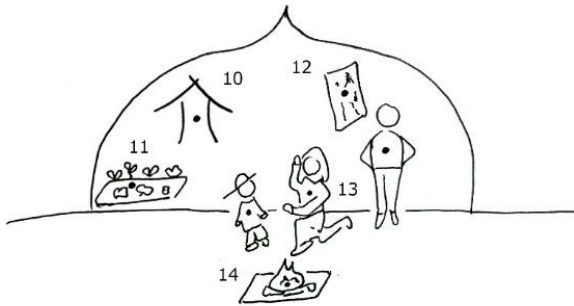
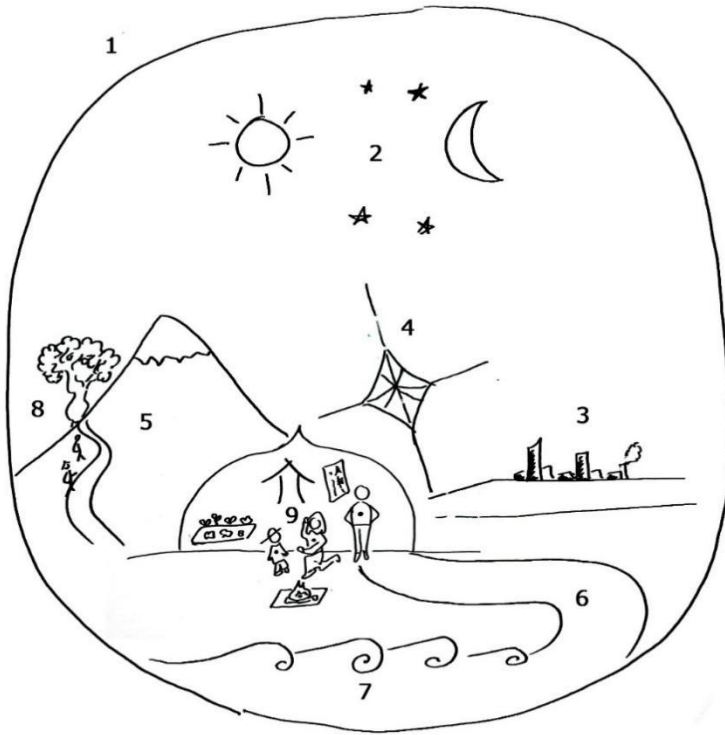


Figure 28. Yaxkin Melchy, 2022. Yamao's Yakushima Island wisdom: an image of the *kami-world*.

Figure 29. Elements of the final abode: the ecopoet's home in Yakushima.

Figure 30. The personal spiritual path: achieving the truth of the *kami-world*.



Figure 31. Chuleles, 2016. Handcrafted shoes named “chuleles.” In Chuleles Facebook (2016/11/15).



Figure 32. Carlos Barraza, 2017. Carlos removing the inner leaves of the maguey plant. In Carlos Facebook (2017/03/20).



Figure 33. El Xastle, 2017. The Popocatepetl volcano in the morning. In El Xastle Facebook (2017/06/01).



Figure 34. El Xastle, 2017. Chana the duck. In El Xastle Facebook (2017/07/16).



Figure 35. Carlos Barraza, 2017. Carlos holding a damaged corn cob after a hurricane. In Carlos Facebook (2017/08/21).



Figure 36. Carlos Barraza, 2017. Carlos showing the archeological figure found in the *milpa*. In Carlos Facebook (2017/08/22).



Figure 37. El Xastle, 2017. A caterpillar on a squash vine. In El Xastle Facebook (2017/09/06).

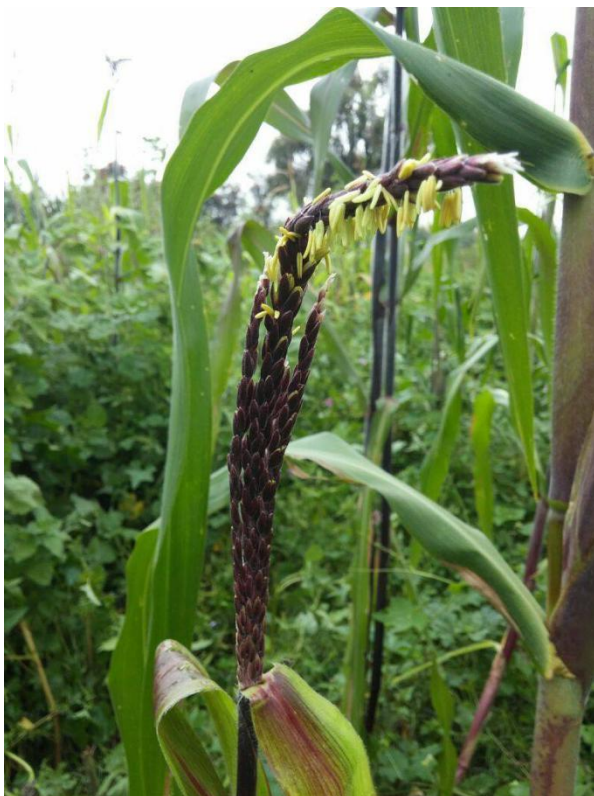


Figure 38. El Xastle, 2017. Corn male flower. In El Xastle Facebook (2017/09/06).



Figure 39. Carlos Barraza, 2017. Harvested corn cob. In Carlos Facebook (2017/09/23).



Figure 40. El Xastle, 2017. Harvested squash for sale. In El Xastle 17/09/27).



Figure 41. Carlos Barraza, 2017. The Popocatepetl volcano with a “cloud hat” in the early morning. In Carlos Facebook (2017/09/29).



Figure 42. Carlos Barraza, 2017. Two native corn cob varieties at the extremes and three *teocintle* wild corn cobs in the middle. In Carlos Facebook (2017/11/10).



Figure 43. Carlos Barraza, 2017. Mexican Native corn varieties harvested in the *milpa*: “Conic with blue” variety (top left), “Indio” corn variety (top right), “Arrocillo bola” with red and blue variety (bottom left), “Coscomatepec” variety (bottom right). In Carlos Facebook (2017/12/03).



Figure 44. Carlos Barraza, 2017. Popocatepetl volcano's ash emissions at sunrise. In Carlos Facebook (2022/12/15).

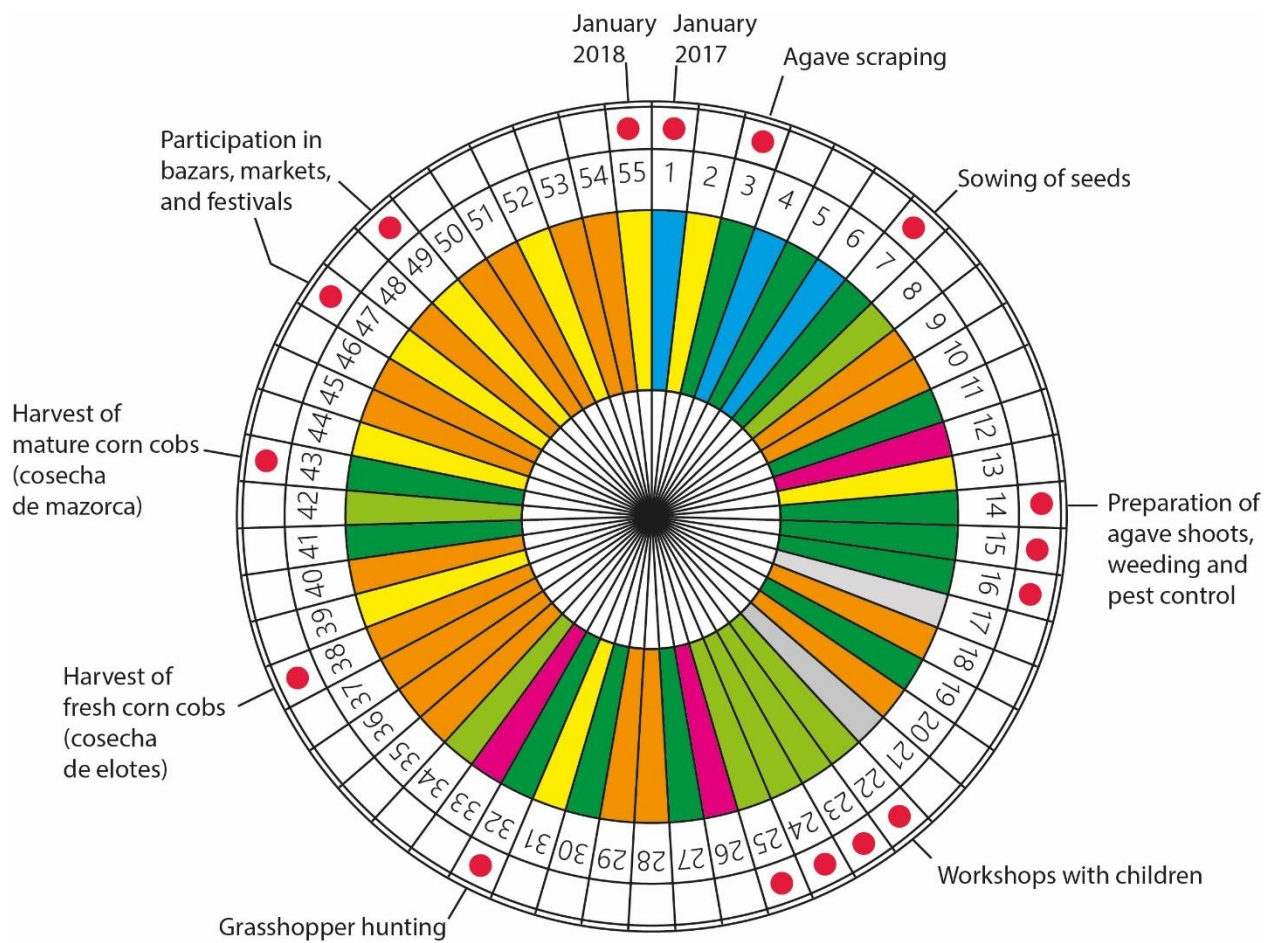


Figure 45. Yaxkin Melchy, 2022. “The Agropoetic Timeline.” El Xastle’s eco-poetic design of natural time, agroecological practices and way of life. The order must be read clockwise. The number indicates the entry number in table 1 and the red dots correspond to notable posts discussed in the analysis below.

Tables

Table 1. El Xastle’s 2017 agro-poetical selection of posts in Facebook.

1. January 10. (Carlos Barraza). Post with lyrics to Carlos’s rap “For cooking,” a rap to sing before cooking.
2. February 2. (Sandra Araujo). Post with a photo advertising Sandra’s travel to Cholula City for selling their *chuleles* (knitted shoes) and cacao jam.
3. February 15. (Carlos Barraza). Post with photos introducing the traditional agriculture of agave plant (*maguey*), its hardships, and the challenges and unfair practices that Carlos faced as a young *tlachiquero*. *Tlachiquero* works consist of scraping the agave’s core to obtain the nectar (*aguamiel*) necessary to make the fermented alcoholic beverage called *pulque*.
4. February 24. (Carlos Barraza). Post with a photo of an agave plant at night and Carlos’s prayer for good harvesting of agave nectar (*aguamiel*).
5. March 20. (Carlos Barraza). Post with photos describing the artisanal work of removing agave plant leaves (a technique called *despencar*) carried out on a 16-year-old plant (figure 32)
6. May 30. (Carlos Barraza). Post with a Spanish translation of a Rarámuri prayer used to ask for rain.³³⁰
7. May 31. (El Xastle). Photo announcing the completion of sowing the *milpa*.
8. June 1. (El Xastle). Post with photos and commentaries on the experience of teaching children the “culture of *maguey*.” In the photograph, Edwin, a 10-year-old child, carries a traditional nectar harvesting tool called *acocote*.
9. June 1. (El Xastle). Post with a photo of the snow-covered Popocatepetl volcano, commonly called “Popo,” with the following commentary: “The Popo greets us most beautifully” (figure 33).
10. June 2. (El Xastle). Post with the following reflection on seed sowing: “Sowing is respect for life, returning to mother earth what she gives us to preserve our life.”
11. June 6. (El Xastle). Post with a photo and a commentary on the learnings from the native “criollo” corn growing workshop:

³³⁰ The Rarámuri people, or Tarahumara, inhabit in the highlands and canyons of the Sierra Madre Occidental in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico. Originally this prayer was compiled by Carl Lumholtz and published in his book *El Mexico Desconocido* (1904), 332 (Spanish edition), *Unknown Mexico, Volume I*, (1902), 339. (English edition). See Lumholtz, “Unknown Mexico, Volume I.”

“We attended the ‘criollo corn planting’ workshop. It is important to eliminate the planting of hybrid corn³³¹ and preserve native seeds (incorrectly called *criollas*). For this, the use of totally organic planting practices without resorting to chemicals is essential since, if not, we will continue to kill life.”

12. June 11. (Ale Robles, reply by Sandra Araujo). Post with a photo of weaver artists and their spider-web-like installation crafted in Puebla City. The installation was done collaboratively, and Sandra participated as the representative from Chuleles.
13. June 18. (Sandra Araujo). Post with photos advertising chuleles for sale.
14. June 28. (El Xastle). Post with photos showing the preparation of agave plant shoots called *mecuates* for planting.
15. June 29. (El Xastle). Post with photos and the following commentary on weeding the field: “Also, it has come the time to weed, and we do not use herbicide, because what the plant eats will be eaten by you, let’s not poison our mother earth anymore.”
16. July 4. (El Xastle). Post with a short explanation of how to prepare a natural oxytocin pesticide against the insect called *fraile* (*Macroductylus mexicanus*).
17. July 11. (El Xastle). Post presenting an El Xastle fanzine titled *Historias de los tlachiqueros* [*Tlachiquero Stories*] about the traditional work of the agave farmer (*tlachiquero*).
18. July 16. (El Xastle). Post with a photo of Chana, the duck (figure 34).
19. July 17. (El Xastle). Post with photos and a commentary on the difficulties of weeding the *milpa* without using herbicides (such as glyphosate). Faced with the hardships of manual weeding, cooperative work done by family, friends, and neighbors becomes an invaluable aid. Eventually, they avoided using herbicides by being helped by three close friends, “their family” (Gabriela, Juan, Fer). Nevertheless, they empathize with farmers who opt for using glyphosate, as many families have been separated from their homelands due to migration. The photos show mushrooms that naturally grew “without poison” in this field.
20. July 21. (El Xastle). Post with a photo showing the growing *milpa*.
21. July 22. (El Xastle). Post with a photo showing the handcrafted manuals ready for the My Little Cactus workshop, a workshop for youth on reading, writing, and cacti care to be held the same day.
22. July 25. (El Xastle). Post with a short commentary and some snapshots of the workshop on agriculture for children called Monsters like Walls (*Monstruos como*

³³¹ The word used in Spanish “*híbrido*” in this context is referred to genetically modified corn developed by the agrochemical industry.

- muros) held on July 23. The commentary says: “Once again, we had an incredibly happy time. Moms, children, and more friends get together to remember that sowing and taking care of our food is essential. We learned to make a seedling tray where cacti, beans, and tomatoes coexist, we learned to make our own board games, we remembered the habitat of our plants, and mainly we remembered that teamwork is the main key to everything. Thanks!!”
23. July 26. (Casa Nueve). Post with mask pictures to promote the workshop on traditional masks titled My Grandparents’ Masks (La máscara de mis abuelos) held on July 29.
 24. August 3. (El Xastle). Post advertising the mural embroidery workshop titled Embroidering The Border (Bordando la border) to be held on August 5 and the woven self-portrait workshop titled I Weave The Mirror (Tejo el Espejo) to be held on August 6.
 25. August 14. (Casa Nueve). Post advertising the workshop on creativity and environmental awareness titled A Frog’s Story (Historia de una rana) held on August 19.
 26. August 19. (Sonido Mamalón). Post presenting Sonido Mamalón’s recent music composition titled “Nuestra energía” [Our Energy]. It says:

“How to describe the tidal wave of life when one finds the pinnacle of his shelter and path? The continuous flowering of my senses leads me to compose new tones, sounds, and feelings, thanks to my duality. I dance in the depths of the water, I fly in the waterfall, the wind is our spirit, our energy is divine.

I convert the house into my body
and bring it onto my pillow

I took away my coolness from my body
Which came along with me from [sic.]”³³²
 27. August 21. (Carlos Barraza). Post with a photo showing the damage caused to the *milpa* by a hurricane and two days of hail. The photo shows Carlos’s left hand, with a tattoo of Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, holding a damaged corn cob (figure 35).
 28. August 22. (Carlos Barraza and El Xastle’s reply). Post showing an archeological piece from Pre-Hispanic times founded in the *milpa*. The post’s reply comes with the following commentary: “When working in the field, we find figures of our

³³² The last four lines in verse were written originally in English.

- grandparents. INAH³³³ is never notified. It is an institution that is good for nothing more than destroying history or privatizing it. More community museums!” (figure 36).
29. August 22. (El Xastle). Post with a photo showing a sunflower about to bloom with the following commentary: “Also, the sunflowers that we sow are about to greet us.”
 30. August 24. (El Xastle). Post with a photo and commentary on the necessary judgement needed for straightening the maize plants bent by the hurricane.
 31. August 26. (El Xastle). Post with photographs showing grasshopper preparation and advertising the prepared grasshoppers for sale (prices per kilo).
 32. August 31. (Carlos Barraza). Post showing Carlos dressed for grasshopper hunting and describing the difficulties of hunting, the factors to consider when setting the selling price, and the sense of dignity in practicing a way of life connected with the land. He writes: “It doesn’t shame me having university studies and living in this way, I was rather ashamed that before they paid me to work ass-seated hours at a desk when I didn’t even know how to procure my own food. How good can school be if you don’t even know how to plant a seed?”
 33. September 1. (El Xastle). Post advertising Carlos and Sandra’s activities at Placid Sunday (Plácido Domingo), a poetic event in Orizaba City held on September 3. These activities include Carlos’ Sonido Mamalón performing and Sandra’s embroidered self-portrait workshop.
 34. September 1. (El Xastle). Post advertising Sandra’s woven self-portrait workshop titled I Embroider the Mirror (Tejo el espejo).
 35. September 6. (El Xastle) Post with several photos of the *milpa* and the following poetic writing on El Xastle’s identity:
 “We dream of our grandparents’ legacy. The purpose written into our plants, our palms. We aren’t a piece of paper, we aren’t a number, we are a word. Thank you home, thank you earth, thank you grasshopper, thank you corn, thank you *quelite*,³³⁴ thank you morning glory, thank you squash. Companions in existence. We aren’t the authors of any life; we are just another being forming part of the *milpa*.” (Figures 37 and 38).

³³³ INAH, National Institute of Anthropology and History, is a Mexican government institution established to research and preserve Mexican historical and archaeological heritage.

³³⁴ *Quelite*, from the Nahuatl *quilitl* which means “edible herb,” refers to many different plants, herbs, or vegetables that grow wild in the *milpa* and are used as food.

36. September 8. (Carlos Barraza). Post with the photo of a little duck presented as a “duck-child.”
37. September 14. (El Xastle). Post with a photo and a commentary on the death of Ruth, the duck, due to illness. The comment titled “Silence and Peace” criticizes the deplorable condition in which animals are maintained in city markets, without the love they deserve as living beings and being treated as simply commodities. The photo is a snapshot of the burial.
38. September 23. (Carlos Barraza). Post with photos of the diverse fresh corn cobs (*elotes*) they harvested. The post’s commentary reads, “Today, we finally harvested corn from our *milpa*. Another sign that during these difficult times the key is to procure food. The *esquites* were delicious.” (Figure 39).
39. September 27. (El Xastle). Post advertising the recently harvested squash for sale (figure 40).
40. September 29. (Carlos Barraza, replied by El Xastle). Post with photos showing the Popocatepetl volcano with the following commentary: “For those who ask how the Popo is doing, he had a hat a little while ago” and “when we collect grasshoppers, we see the most beautiful landscapes.” (Figure 41).
41. October 5. (Carlos Barraza). Post with a photograph of a turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), El Xastle’s new “velociraptor.”
42. October 11. (El Xastle). Post with pictures advertising the embroidery mural workshop titled Embroidering The Border (Bordando la border) to be held on October 14 in Casa Nueve cultural space.
43. October 24. (El Xastle). Post with commentary and photos of mature corn cobs being harvested (*cosecha de mazorca*).
44. October 26. (El Xastle). Post introducing El Xastle’s products logo, designed by Lxs Crecientes.
45. November 9. (Carlos Barraza, with replies by El Xastle and Sandra Araujo). Post with photos and commentary about the harvest of the *milpa*. The photos show the different colors and textures of native corn and pumpkin varieties and give thanks to the people who supported Carlos and Sandra with their works and prayers. The comment reads as follows: “The colors of the cornfield. Thanks to all who put their work and prayer into the *milpita*. Genuine love always nurtures. Nourished bodies and full souls have no fear. We continue on the road. Our loving community reaps, dances, and gives thanks.”

46. November 10. (Carlos Barraza). Post with photos showing the local wild maize cobs (*teocintle*) called by El Xastle “the *teocintle* fathers” alongside “their children” of the domestic corn cobs (figure 42).³³⁵
47. November 16. (El Xastle). Post advertising El Xastle’s participation in the Local Art and Products Exposition at the National Museum of Mexican Railways in Puebla City on November 25.
48. November 18. (Sandra Araujo). Post with the following motto: “Demand, Demand, legitimacy for your food choices” and the following comment on seasonal consumption “We try to speak the language of youth and promote modern thinkers. Ask for your salt and/or grasshopper sauce. They are the last [of the season] ... Why? Because food is given seasonally !!! the illusion that there are apples all year round is a nightmare from which we must awaken to release fieldwork from ridiculous consumer demands.”
49. November 24. (El Xastle). Post advertising El Xastle’s participation in the National Convention of Social Collectives (Encuentro Nacional de Colectivos Sociales, ECOS) to be held at the Central Library of the BUAP (University) on November 24 in Puebla City and the Local Art and Products Bazar to be held at Puebla’s Railway Museum on November 25.
50. December 2. (Carlos Barraza). Post with a photo of the Popocatepetl volcano and the words “Boom.”
51. December 3. (Carlos Barraza, with a reply by El Xastle). Post regarding El Xastle’s first anniversary with photos of the colors and shapes of the loving community’s harvested corn varieties: *arrocillo*, *azul rojo*, *amarillo*, *blanco*, *cacahuacintle*, *conejo*, *chiquito*, *ratón*, *bola*, *chalqueño*, *tunicata rojo*, *tunicata blanco*, *gordo*, *serrano*, and *cónico*.
 Carlos Barraza’s commentary on the work done in the field and the results states: “For us, the next year has already begun. On November 28, we celebrated one year of living in the Sierra Nevada lands of Puebla. Mother [Earth] gave us a lot of corn. It was tough because we did not use any agrochemicals. This year we made great friends who are now our family and helped us row the *milpa* field. I am very surprised by the results and for each corn that, when husked, gave us great surprises: native corn is the most beautiful, the same as life. I’m proud of working in the field.” (Figure 43).

³³⁵ *Teocintle* is the common name for a range of native wild maize. In fact, according to scientific theories, some *teocintle* species may be the ancestors of domestic corn varieties (*Zea mays*).

52. December 7. (Chuleles). Post with photos advertising Chuleles knitted winter models of gloves, hats, and arm warmers for sale. In one photo, Carlos is wearing a knitted hat.
53. December 15. (Carlos Barraza). Photo of a majestic Popocatepetl volcano emitting gases (figure 44).
54. December 16. (Carlos Barraza and replied by Sandra Araujo). Post with a photo of the interspecies community and the following commentary: “Well, we still don’t know how it happened so fast, but we are already around 20 interspecies animals.” The photo shows: ducks, turkeys, chickens, and dogs wandering freely in the house’s backyard.
55. January 5 of 2018 (El Xastle). Post with photos showing a recently scrapped agave and inviting to place new orders for *pulque*.

Table 2. El Xastle’s aesthetic grammar.

El Xastle’s aesthetic grammar			
Ecopoetic Pattern	Representative example in Timeline	An affective grammar of	Artistic Form
Vignettes.	Popocatepetl volcano vignettes. [9]	Perception of the Popocatepetl volcano.	Pictures with brief commentaries that employ humorous language.
Manifestos.	Poetic reflection “We dream of our grandparents’ legacy.” [35]	Self-identity.	Text and photographs.
Prayers.	Prayer for a good harvest of agave nectar. [4]	Communication with spiritual beings.	Text and photographs.
Songs.	Rap lyric “For cooking.” [17]	Learning to cook.	Text (song lyric).

Table 3. Eco-poetic Design – The conception of Earth.

Eco-poetic Design explored	Distinctive pattern that reveals an eco-poetic relationship in their works and lives	Layers of the eco-poetic relationship	The conception of Earth as seen through reconnection.
Frida Kahlo's painting her bonds with animals.	A “fluid human-animal” pattern of self-identity. (A pattern for embracing the life of Earth.)	A story of companionship and cohabitation with “ <i>animalitos</i> .” The cultivation of a deep reverence toward animals as subjects connected with the sacred Mexican heritage. The pictorial exploration of an animalist understanding of human identity inspired by the Indigenous notion of <i>nahualli</i> .	She achieved a reconnection with the Earth conceived of as a Mexican-native mother Earth. Frida embraced her animals as part of her identity and as a mother, in the same way, she felt embraced by a Mexican Mother Earth. For her, Earth was not conceived of only as a dwelling place or environment, but as a being that embraces us maternally and connects humans and all living beings through a sacred bond of care.
Buzoku's members putting into practice the spirit of an alternative ecological society.	A “spiral” pattern of the construction of an alternative ecological society. (A pattern for building a society on the Earth.)	A story of a practice of living in communes for returning to the Earth and building a new society modeled on different tribes across the world's. The creation of a transpacific network of solidarity, translation, and mutual inspiration between “tribes”. The artistic exploration of a “tribe of tribes” spirit able to shelter a diversity of alternative or countercultural lifestyles in Japan.	They achieved a reconnection with the Earth, conceived of as a sacred community. For Buzoku's members, the Earth was not conceived of as just a dwelling place, a surrounding environment, or a land for building their communes, but as the community itself.
Nanao's ecocosmopolit an wandering following the footprints of Kokopelli.	A “footprints” pattern following Kokopelli. (A pattern for walking the Earth.)	A story of a practice of foot walking across continents. The poetic exploration of nature observation with wondering eyes, opening the heart to ancient cultures, and warning people of ecological depredation. The recognition of walking spirits and associating with Kokopelli as a poetic and spiritual model to follow.	He achieved a reconnection with the Earth, conceived of as a “vast land” (<i>daichi</i>) ecologically interconnected and a planetary mother calling on humanity to work toward an age of ecological and spiritual awareness. Earth was not understood to be simply a planet on which humans dwells and travel, but as a ground for spiritual and poetic practice, a planet still traversed by spirits,

			and a planetary-scale mother wishing humans of different nations to awaken their spiritual eyes.
Sansei Yamao maintaining a spiritual and poetic conversation with Yakushima Island's <i>kami</i> .	A " <i>kami</i> " pattern of world. (A pattern for articulating a philosophy in dialogue with the Earth.)	A story of a sustained dialogue with Yakushima Island based on contemplation, farming work, philosophical reflection, and poetic writing. The articulation of an ecosophy of the world and a pedagogic methodology rooted in the understanding of <i>kami</i> and inspired by Yakushima's island wisdom.	He achieved a reconnection with the Earth, conceived as a <i>kami</i> -world. For Yamao Earth was treated as a place of spiritual practice to realize that "our true self" is one with the phenomenal world (<i>shinrabanshō</i>), the <i>kami</i> , and the Buddha Nature. For Yamao, our planet Earth is not an inanimate world ruled exclusively by mechanistic laws, but an animated planet directed by the force of love, understood as the relational force he called <i>shinwaryoku</i> (elective affinities). For Yamao this conception of Earth doesn't argue against the validity of scientific investigation but offers a complement to the Modern world's ontology.
El Xastle managing an agropoetic account on Facebook	A cyclically arranged pattern of artistic life. (A pattern for organizing a life attuned to the Earth.)	A story of a practice of living an agroecological and artistic life in the Mexican Plateau. The creation of a digital timeline of artistic and farming activities following the cycles of the <i>milpa</i> . Exploration of an aesthetic grammar of the land.	They achieved a reconnection with the Earth, conceived as a woven and cyclical "Mother Earth." For El Xastle's loving community, Earth was not conceived only as a dwelling place or an environment, but as a major fabric of souls, which includes animal souls, vegetable souls, ancestor souls, volcano souls, product souls, and human souls. Mother Earth and artists' reconnection was understood to be regulated by cycles that naturally arrange artistic production and their activities. In other words, artistic production is not something made at the Earth's expense but woven into the big fabric of creative Mother Earth.

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