

On the back of the jaguar I find your face



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VAV-moving image

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On the back of the jaguar I find your face

Sometimes the calls from the south
arrive as a warm breath
others, land
as rocks of dry ice on the grass.

The transatlantic voices are a gleam
looming behind the body
an alternate face with feline features
triangular teeth
pointed gaze
sunken eyes.

The red earth in your mouth
on one side, that familiar face
a brother
you turn around and you are
a hungry feline
stuttering.

I want to hold your body tight
against mine
in an attempt to advance or escape
I hold your fists
you grind your teeth
and scream.

Last February, I found the image of a ceramic stove pipe that had two faces laid in opposite directions. One had the traces of a human, that familiar figure, and the other had the traces of a feline. The hybrid nature of the object unconsciously reminded me of someone close who was going through a vulnerable time. This person moved through an array of emotions, from excited, happy and euphoric to angry, sad and threatening. In an attempt to understand or hold them I was confused, disoriented. If to react or stay, how to? If I spoke, which tone of voice to use? How do I perceive you?

A few days later I returned to the image and sought to write about the presence of that someone through the object. The image merged two different emotional sides of the passive and the dreadful, of the rational and the emotional. Wondering about the shared body, I was particularly curious about the symbiosis between the animal and the human as it seemed an unrecognisable fusion from our perspective. That led me to explore the object and what surrounds it, bringing with it a whole world of relationships¹.

The piece comes from the Aguada culture which is part of the indigenous Andean cultures in the northwest of Argentina. This art piece is known as a dual image or doubles and are abundant in the Pre Colombian arts. Most of the indigenous American cultures, but especially the Andean honoured light and darkness, day and night, heaven and the underworld, feminine and masculine in an equal way. The dual images manifested this dualistic principle, as they represented these complementary opposites. Their whole world is conceived as a constant dynamic between the complementary opposites that keep the light from life glowing and ensures their survival. *“Believe that the kind of alternation and equilibrium they provide is a guarantee of stability...dualistic theories create order by postulating a harmonious interaction of contradictory principles”* (Maybury-Lewis 1989:9,13)².

Simultaneously, the object is associated with the utilisation of psychoactive plants and these plants may have been used for shamanic rituals. The jaguar represented in the piece is one of the tutelary animals and accompanies the shaman through their journeys, not only as a guide, but also appears as their doubles or shadows. The expression of dualism implies unfolding which means the division of a being into parts and multiplicity of forms, something that occurs during shamanic journeys. As the shaman unfolds and overcomes the barrier of ordinary consciousness, the individual is able to enter other states of consciousness which are in turn other worlds which interact and connects with various entities and beings. *These hybrid images can be interpreted as metaphorical expressions of duality but as a particular type of representation of the phenomenon of metamorphosis or shamanic transformation* (Ana María Llamazares). Therefore it is possible to find a close link between duality, shamanism and the moments of passage. During other states of consciousness, the previously sharp and insurmountable edges between species become porous and elastic. In those moments a profound encounter between human beings, animals, plants or spirits from other kingdoms occur. This is known as the concept of trans-substantiation³ as it describes the boundaries that separates species to be more permeable and fluid⁴. Pre-columbian arts, and especially, shamanic art, is an endless resource of experiences of intimate frontiers between species perceived through the fusions of the dual images.

Thus the object demonstrates an inverse perspective from the indigenous cultures. These cultures perceive natural continuities where the Western tradition had established irreconcilable opposites of woman and man, culture and nature, human and animal, among others. Discovering through native cultures, almost silently, alternatives to thinking or perceiving ourselves in relation to nature and culture. I see their beliefs as traces of utopian knowledge, encompassing progressive thinking or politics. When using the word utopia, it

¹ Sandra G. Bari, Zoom meeting, June 28, 2020.

² Gelles, Paul H. “Equilibrium and Extraction: Dual Organization in the Andes.” 710-42.

³ Llamazares, “Arte chamánico visionario. Una invitación al cambio de paradigmas” 27-29.

⁴ Llamazares, “Arte Chamánico Visionario. Una invitación al cambio de paradigmas.” 27-29.

could be likened to a paradisiacal landscape. However, in this word I see reflected the perspective of the native cultures as an apparent distant reality. Moreover, it opens the possibility to experience another way of seeing, speaking, thinking, listening and moving in the existing context. As such, I thought of bringing the indigenous cultures' observations of the world and allow these principles to move and engage with the scenarios of modernity. To do so, I searched for the works of artists, poets and writers that have similar configurations of the indigenous communities in the northwest of Argentina in order to create and establish connections between them and the native cultures. To observe what occurs in these encounters, where would the narratives meet or fork. Or, if in fact the past provides us with other diverse reflections into the works of the artists and writers, and in turn, these pieces enable or expand the readings of images and narratives of the past.

When writing about dualistic cosmologies, I know that dualism as a term has a variety of purposes in the history of thought. Most specifically in western philosophy and theology where it appears and unfolds in various ways. Dualism appears in philosophy of the mind as the theory that the mental and the physical, or the mind and body, are radically different things yet together they make up human beings. What is the relationship between the body and mind? What is the relationship between mental properties and physical properties?⁵ Western dualism is extensive and its discussions are elaborated by various thinkers throughout history. Being a subject of long exploration, my intention isn't about pausing here, but rather to notice that their leading questions and themes differ from the indigenous Andean cultures in the northwest of Argentina.

To outline the path of the thesis, chapter one explores through the pre Columbian arts aspects of the indigenous dualistic cosmology. Later, I will move to the artistic practice of Gabriel Chaile whose sculptures or portraits were inspired by the morphology of the indigenous forms. Through his work, he proposes other readings to the hybrid images and reflects upon the silenced language of native communities. In the second chapter, I will delve into shamanistic cosmology, the trance, the shamanic transformations and shamanic art, with a focus on the dual figures. Halfway through the chapter, I will introduce the practices of Ana Mendieta and CA Conrad. Both the artist and the poet explore rituals as a form of personal transformation: poems, performances and photographs are manifestations of the encounter with oneself, others or nature. The last and third chapter reflects about the essay 'A Cyborg Manifesto' written by Donna Haraway and published in 1985. Unlike the other works explored, this is a written piece that purely introduces the figure and concept of the cyborg, a hybrid being between organism and machine. I found in the cyborgs figure a similar image to those of the dual objects, as both explore possibilities of corporeal imaginary which challenge the dualistic antagonisms from the West.

It was through the research that I realised how the indigenous cultures of the northwest of Argentina and their knowledge still occupies an intimate, or even hermetic space in the South American countries. As if their images are floating erratically in the collective unconscious. However, there are several causes that lead the cultures from the Andes and their neighbours to evaporate into the modern world as the colonisations across South America deeply eradicated the native cultures. Observing this side of the story drives me to perceive more tenderly and cautiously the native cultures. Nevertheless, it's not about romanticising the people of the Andes, rather to understand that there were multiple factors that limited their manifestations. It is perhaps curious that after time, one can connect with pre-Columbian objects as if their essence was timeless. And by recovering the images of hybrid objects one can reinterpret their narratives with greater awareness.

⁵ Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy, "Dualism".

Dual figures and dualism

The Andean cultures emerged in the territories of the Central Andes and its surroundings, occupying the areas of Peru, Bolivia, north of Chile, northwest of Argentina and the south of Ecuador. This wide extension of regions is characterised by a diverse topography as within short distances there is a variety of reliefs and climates. It varies between altitude and flatness, valleys and the punas, coasts and the mountains. All these territories of the Andes constitute complementary and mutually contrasting segments⁶. However, when writing about the cultures of the Andes or the Andean Cultures, we embrace in these words lots of communities and fields of knowledge. I am referring especially to the expressions of dualism in the cultures of Condorhuasi, La Candelaria and La Aguada located in the north-west of Argentina. Understanding that in these lands numerous civilisations lived and some have disappeared, whilst other obtained such uniqueness which can be seen today. To situate us in time, the first civilisations of the Andes appeared around 2500 BC, extending till the end of the Inca empire in the year 1533 CE.

The pre Columbian iconography is extensive and vast, through its visual language we can inhabit the indigenous cosmology. As extensive as it is, through the dual figure I thought to discover certain aspects of their dualistic cosmology. Dualism is considered to be a metaphysical category that finds its most abstract and metaphorical manifestations through the pre Columbian arts⁷. There are several forms of dual images, each of these modes of representation within pre-Columbian iconography refers to the cosmological principles of duality and its derivations, and refer to unfolding and oppositions. Present in the determination of the forms, choice of themes and the structuring and disposition of the images. Duality corresponds to the principle of opposition, however, the opposite does not strictly mean adverse. For the indigenous communities, the opposites forces were valued and honoured equally. According to these indigenous communities, existence is a process, a ceaseless game between polarities. Therefore, the oppositions represented in the dual figures express this dynamic tension between two basic states: chaos and order.



⁶ Ramiro Matos M, "El proceso de desarrollo de la cultura andina", 85-7.

⁷ Llamazares, "Metáforas de la Dualidad en los Andes: Cosmovisión, Arte, Brillo y Chamanismo", 455.

“The world as a whole is conceived as a constant dynamic of complementary opposites that keeps the spark of life alive and ensures survival” (Ana María Llamazares)⁸. The doubles thus explore the art of linking polarities within unity. The image above depicts a circular plate which converges this idea as it has a pair of opposites set side by side within the same circle. The piece is made of bronze and comes from the Aguada culture, active between the 400 till 1100 d.C. In this piece, the human character appears in its double aspect. The bodies are identical, however it is the expressiveness of the face that allows us to distinguish that it is a woman and a man. Both are joined together by the upper part and each has an arm spreading on their side. To intensify the dual characteristic, the design on their clothes is complementarily symmetrical.

A particular way of representing duality was by combining two figures either anthropomorphic or zoomorphic within the same body. Usually these pieces have more than one head or even four. The image below is a hybrid figure, a ceramic vessel from the culture Condorhuasi, that combines the traces of a bird and a human. Dual images are characterised by the details on the faces of its protagonist. If we observe closely, the bird has a pointed nose and rounded and chubby eyes. However, on the other side, a more rectangular and rounded nose for the human. Although the bird has no wings, it has limbs shaped more abstractly.



The vessel above or the stove pipe were objects used as offerings in ritualistic moments to drink or consume psychoactive plants. In this way, the object connects us to the moments of passage or shamanic trance as this artwork is a shamanic art piece and was inspired by the state of consciousness of the shaman. In the second chapter I will explore further the essence of hybrid images.

The principle of duality connects to the origin of the cosmos and the gods. It is a recurring idea that everything comes from unfolding or successive subdivisions and each creation is a new deployment of the original duality⁹. The formation of the universe, the divinities, living beings, the multiple forms that exist preserve the basic attributes of the dual opposition. *According to this conception nothing is born unique or*

⁸ Llamazares, “Metáforas de la Dualidad en los Andes: Cosmovisión, Arte, Brillo y Chamanismo.”, 457.

⁹ Llamazares, “Metáforas de la Dualidad en los Andes: Cosmovisión, Arte, Brillo y Chamanismo.”, 459.

isolated of the world. Everything that exists, be it a real or conceptual object, has indispensable its pair, its complementary opposite, its companion (Ana María Llamazares)¹⁰. Dualism and its capacity to unfold is also an attribute of the divine and appears in the American mythologies embodied by their divinities or creators. Whereby they have in themselves both the feminine and the masculine and through self reproduction they can create other minor gods – their children. In the Andean cosmology, Viracocha, a supernatural being whose main attribute is of being the supreme creator and the figure that embodies this dualist conception. They are the symbol of totality and an androgynous bisexual being. I simply wanted to dwell on the image of Viracocha, since mentioning them opens wider branches of the Andean theology which isn't my intention. Although, I imagine Vircochas figure as a hybrid figure that transverses materiality and underlines even more profoundly the inverse perspective of the indigenous cultures in contrast to western tradition.

¹⁰ Llamazares, "Metáforas de la Dualidad en los Andes: Cosmovisión, Arte, Brillo y Chamanismo", 456.

Genealogy of the form

The tendency of archaeological practices that make a hypothesis and interpret a community through objects like a vase, or any other shape, trigger the possibility of reconstructing the absent. This is a great interest for the Argentinian artist Gabriel Chaile, whose works reminds us about the traditions of the indigenous culture in the northwest of Argentina. He was born in Tucumán, a province that is also located in the northwest of the country. Tucumán is land of indigenous communities and descendants of native cultures. His works are inspired by the dual images or doubles in the pre-Columbian arts. He mainly pauses in the details of the faces, interested in how the human features appear on the pieces and merge with those of the animals. Below, there is hybrid figure that distinguished itself from the previous images by having nearly a whole body present. This body is mostly human, with the peculiarity of the peak of a bird as the nose of the figure. Gabriel thinks of the dual images as portraits of the indigenous cultures. *Perhaps they searched in the animals features their own or as if they saw in themselves the traits of the animals* said Gabriel during an interview in Espacio Tucuman¹¹. By perceiving how the features of the bird merge with those of the human, I thought this piece would bring us closer to the imagination of the artist. The figure also belongs to the Condorhuasi culture.



“ Objects are devices that operate as a symbolic mediator between the subject that produces it and its world of relationships. Objects accompany us and are being object of resignification, as they reappear in current artistic experiences, as if they are calling us”¹² (Sandra G. Vari). By bringing the morphology of the indigenous forms, Gabriel's thoughts invite us to perceive the hybrid figures from another perspective. In his

¹¹ Gabriel Chaile, Interview.

¹² Sandra G. Bari, Zoom meeting, June 28, 2020

research, the artist goes to ethnographic, archaeological and natural science museums to learn about these surviving shapes. By imagining the ancestors seeing themselves in symbiosis with the other life forms, I wonder if he sees himself reflected in the glass of the showcases and his reflection within the pieces. At the same time, the hybrid figures were inspired by the visionary dynamics of shamanic states of consciousness¹³– moments where the previously inaccessible borders between species becomes permeable. Therefore the hybrid images are supposed to have involved all the presences which appeared to the shaman. This is something that I intend to explore further in the second chapter. Gabriel, intrigued by the animated nature of the dual figures, chooses the morphology of the pre Columbian arts of the northwest of Argentina to build his “portraits” as clay ovens or as artisanal references to containers or industrial machines, he is giving visibility, precisely, to what has survived (Andrea Fernandez)¹⁴.



What if an autobiography is just
the story of others
passing through us?

Gabriel Chaile¹⁵

By bringing in the morphology of Andean cultures, the artist begins to question the genealogy of the form. This idea builds around his exhibition called “Genealogy of the Shape” at BARRO, an art gallery in Buenos Aires. The images of the artworks belonged to this exhibition during 2019. *The genealogy is the reunion with different parts of events that played different roles; as well as the points of absence, what couldn’t happen. To Gabriel, it’s about understanding the process through which the surfaces of things adopt certain shapes through time, and how they continue to mutate under a genealogical line.* (Andrea Fernandez)¹⁶. When we

¹³ Llamazares, “Metáforas de la Dualidad en los Andes: Cosmovisión, Arte, Brillo y Chamanismo.” 18.

¹⁴ Fernandez, “Genealogy of the Shape”, 3. Translation by Montserrat Callao Escalada.

¹⁵ Chaile, “Genealogy of the Shape”, 5. Translation by Montserrat Callao Escalada.

¹⁶ Fernandez, “Genealogy of the Shape”, 12. Translation by Montserrat Callao Escalada.

search the genealogy of an object, we are as well bringing a community, a culture, and their traditions to life. When thinking about the genealogy of an object, it is a gesture that Gabriel repeats and transfers onto himself and therefore into his practice. His genealogy can be understood to be a result of a cross between cultures composed of indigenous heritage and African blood, which are also consequences of the colonisations in South America. As the artist becomes aware of all the layers that constitutes him, he creates the “portraits”. The way of composing the portraits are in turn intertwined with those of genealogical thoughts, as he reunites forms and features of the objects of the indigenous cultures and others of his own. He then outlines this and draws or models in his own pieces; intimately establishing relationships between the objects which inspired him and of those born in his own imagination.





The piece above is called Patricia, which is simultaneously a womb and a factory, an oven for making bread and a supernatural female goddess. Patricia is made from adobe, iron and bricks. She has numerous breasts emerging from her body like a fertile goddess and bread making becomes a source of work and food for the family. Patricia narrates the story of Gabriel's family who are bakers and he grew up around an oven to make bread. These thoughts reappear with Patricia, an animated object which the piece morphology reminds us about the indigenous cultures.

Thereby, the pre-Columbian objects, found and loved with all the hypocrisy of nostalgia, they are there, something remains, they are still part of the present, but their meaning changes constantly. When do things die? Is it when we forget about them? When they are no longer useful? Art endows new meanings to objects once they become obsolete, or simply transforms their utility to create a new occurrence that bursts in the social flow. The surface of things gets modified because its meaning also changes. (Andrea Fernandez)¹⁷

Gabriel recovers the language of the pre Columbian forms which enables us to imagine another time where magic and life, nature and cultures and the relationships and distribution of physical and moral goods were different¹⁸. Perhaps his portraits are also autobiographies made from clay and adobe, whereby the stories of others become visible. Understanding that the native communities in Argentina, like other marginalised communities or minorities, *are faced with the threat of being captured by a foreign perspective, thus losing their own humanity, to the benefit of others. In the cities, it is harder to find winds that whisper ancient voices: the machines monopolise the sound with their functional pounding.*

¹⁷ Fernandez, "Genealogy of the Shape", 15. Translation by Montserrat Callao Escalada

¹⁸ Fernandez, "Genealogy of the Shape", 14-16. Translation by Montserrat Callao Escalada

Person Animal, Person Tree

Wind figure

The past strikes back when the notion of the future is about to be lost¹⁹

Diana Bellesi

The hybrid iconography of the Pre-Columbian arts presented in the previous chapter may not only be interpreted as a metaphorical experience of duality, but also as a particular type of representations of shamanic transformations²⁰. The fusions between animals and humans perceived in the dual images draw us near to the moments of passage and the states of consciousness of the shaman. The individual is able to interact and connect with various beings and entities. Therefore in this chapter I will delve into the shamanic cosmology, the moments of passage, the trance, the roles of a shaman, the shamanic transformations and the rituals. There will be an elaboration on the concept of trans-substantiation that was previously mentioned, the idea that in other states of consciousness, the previously inflexible frontiers between species becomes porous and elastic. Shamanic art and especially the hybrid figures, explore the natural continuities between diverse living organisms. Throughout the chapter we will also observe other examples of these pieces. For the anthropologist Ana María Llamazares shamanism *is a multidimensional, energetic, animistic and cosmological cosmivision whose understanding invites us to enter, although with inevitable limitations, into the point of view of the other; and this is only achieved by crossing theoretical and experiential boundaries, encouraging us also to include in our search the openness born from our own personal experiences*. I found her words valuable when approaching the shamanic cosmology. At times during the research it was difficult to *enter*, believe or transfer myself into the shamanic cosmology, these scenarios sound distant and complex. However, finding myself in *this resistance* was also mobilising as it demonstrated the remoteness that I felt towards the shamanic perspective. This led me to question how I was addressing this knowledge in a linear and rational thinking pattern. Slowly, I thought to open up my imagination and visualise shamanic knowledge as images of dreams, involving my body as a facilitator in the research. In this process the texts, words and hybrid iconography served as mediators between shamanic landscapes.

Curious about the shamanic practice, I found lines and traces that assimilated to the thoughts of the indigenous cultures of the northwest of Argentina in the works of Ana Mendieta and CA Conrad. Both differently approach the themes within poems, rituals and photographs. Halfway through the chapter, I will establish relations between the works of the artist and those of the indigenous communities.

As mention earlier, the divine not only unfolds to manifest itself, but also distinguishes itself from the rest of the living beings by preserving the capacity for reunification. *This peculiarity is only transferred on earth to certain special individuals, such as priests or shamans, who are able to unfold their consciousness, move to other dimensions and return to their original reality (Ana María Llamazares)*. There were channels from where the shaman could transverse and move through from our physical reality to others. These channels were considered to be blessed – they could be a tree, a cave, a hammock, a ritual or a song. The task of the shaman was maintaining these channels open, clean, safe and easily passable through the fusion of sounds, aromas, colours, textures and vibrations. Therefore I thought of presenting an image of a shamanic dance scene, a cave painting from the culture La Candelaria situated in the province of Catamarca in the northwest of Argentina. In the superior part of the painting appears the figure of a feline; jaguars were considered to be sacred animals and those who later accompany the shaman on their journeys.

¹⁹ El pasado contraataca cuando la noción de futuro esta a punto de perderse. Diana Bellesi, “La pequeña voz del mundo.”, 193

²⁰ Llamazares, “Metáforas de la Dualidad en los Andes: Cosmovisión, Arte, Brillo y Chamanismo.”, 474



As we can observe, the jaguars tongue is projected and has a lasso on its neck. Around the animal there are figures or shadows that appear to be dancing, either in a row or free from each other; stretching their extremities into the dark and dense nights. Below there is another image from the dance scene made from photographic registers of the cave painting, in order to observe in more detail the dance scene.



On the left side of the painting, there are two figures sitting between a drum. Usually during shamanic rituals percussive music was played as the repetitive rhythms also stimulated mental dissociation²¹. If we look carefully and follow the line formed by the miniature bodies, there are certain figures that appear as hybrid beings between human and animal. Further to this, some characters seem to be wearing masks or headdresses, which are common in the shamanic practices. All these elements; the fusion of the repetitive music, costumes and dances, stimulated the individual and induced them to the states of consciousness, placing them into the shamanic trances. *The trances, were the foundation of every shamanic practice, as the immediate resource to achieve the unfolding and reunification of consciousness (Ana María*

²¹ Llamazares, Ana María, "Metáforas de la Dualidad en los Andes: Cosmovisión, Arte, Brillo y Chamanismo.", 473-474.

Llamazares)²². During a trance, the phenomenon of the transformation occurs. The individual enters a trance because it needs another non-physical plane where they can encounter, dialogue, and even touch other entities or spiritual forces. The purpose of every shamanic task was always related to the transformation of one's state into another. Whether it was from a disease to health, drought to rain, fertility or pain to welfare and so it goes on. To make effective the transformation of a patient, a community or even of nature, the shaman must go through its own metamorphosis. Only by overcoming the fear of death and the dissolution of its body and identity, are they able to comprehend and acquire the powers that the other dimensions or presences extends. After this, they are able to finally accomplish their tasks²³. *The shamanic transformations are not just a momentary transfigurations, but are part of a life process (Ana María Llamazares).*

For shamanic communities, reality is much deeper and greater than what we see and touch. Our physical reality is simply the first layer. *Behind that illusory materiality is the true reality: which is invisible to the common eye, but within reach of the strong eye of the shaman trained to see beyond the surface of things*²⁴. When the individual overcomes the barrier of ordinary consciousness, other worlds appear. The world of spirits, dreams, a succession of overlapping or parallel planes where it is possible to move and transfigure into a multiplicity of forms and natures²⁵. During a state of consciousness it is possible to visualise the energetic and animated nature, embraced through the concept of trans-substantiation.

The idea of trans-substantiation is something natural for indigenous cultures, which share a much more permeable idea of the borders that separate each specie. These differences would only be a formal appearances that is captured during the vigil. Thus, in other states of consciousness, the previously so clear and insurmountable barriers become porous and elastic. By amplifying the perception it is possible to visualise the energetic and fluid nature of the subtle reality, where the recognisable forms - anthropomorphic, animal or supernatural - are only momentary configurations that emerge from a constant flow of dynamic and luminous imagery in order to have an exchange with them and then, just as they emerged they melt again. (Ana María Llamazares)²⁶.

The shaman is therefore able to overcome the boundaries that separates each species and perceive the diverse forms of life whilst being part of the ecosystem. The shaman is also capable of establishing spontaneous and deep encounters between the human beings and other forms of life. Shamanic communities believe in an energetic nature, where everything is energy in different manifestations. It is not only living beings who are impregnated with the continuous energy of life and therefore animated by it, living organisms are also endowed with spirit, soul or anima and thus with movement²⁷. This energetic landscape reveals the intense relationship indigenous individuals had with nature. A relationship of mutual and reciprocal respect, as an organic trust to natural phenomena.

From the animated nature, shamanic art and especially the hybrid figures, are images that portrayed the natural continuities between humans and the diverse forms of life. The same energy that impregnates living

²²Llamazares, "Metáforas de la Dualidad en los Andes: Cosmovisión, Arte, Brillo y Chamanismo.", 27.

²³ Llamazares, "Arte Chamánico Visionario. Una invitación al cambio de paradigmas.", 27.

²⁴ Llamazares, "Metáforas de la Dualidad en los Andes: Cosmovisión, Arte, Brillo y Chamanismo.", 24.

²⁵ Llamazares, "Arte Chamánico Visionario. Una invitación al cambio de paradigmas." 24.

²⁶ Llamazares, "Arte Chamánico Visionario. Una invitación al cambio de paradigmas." 27.

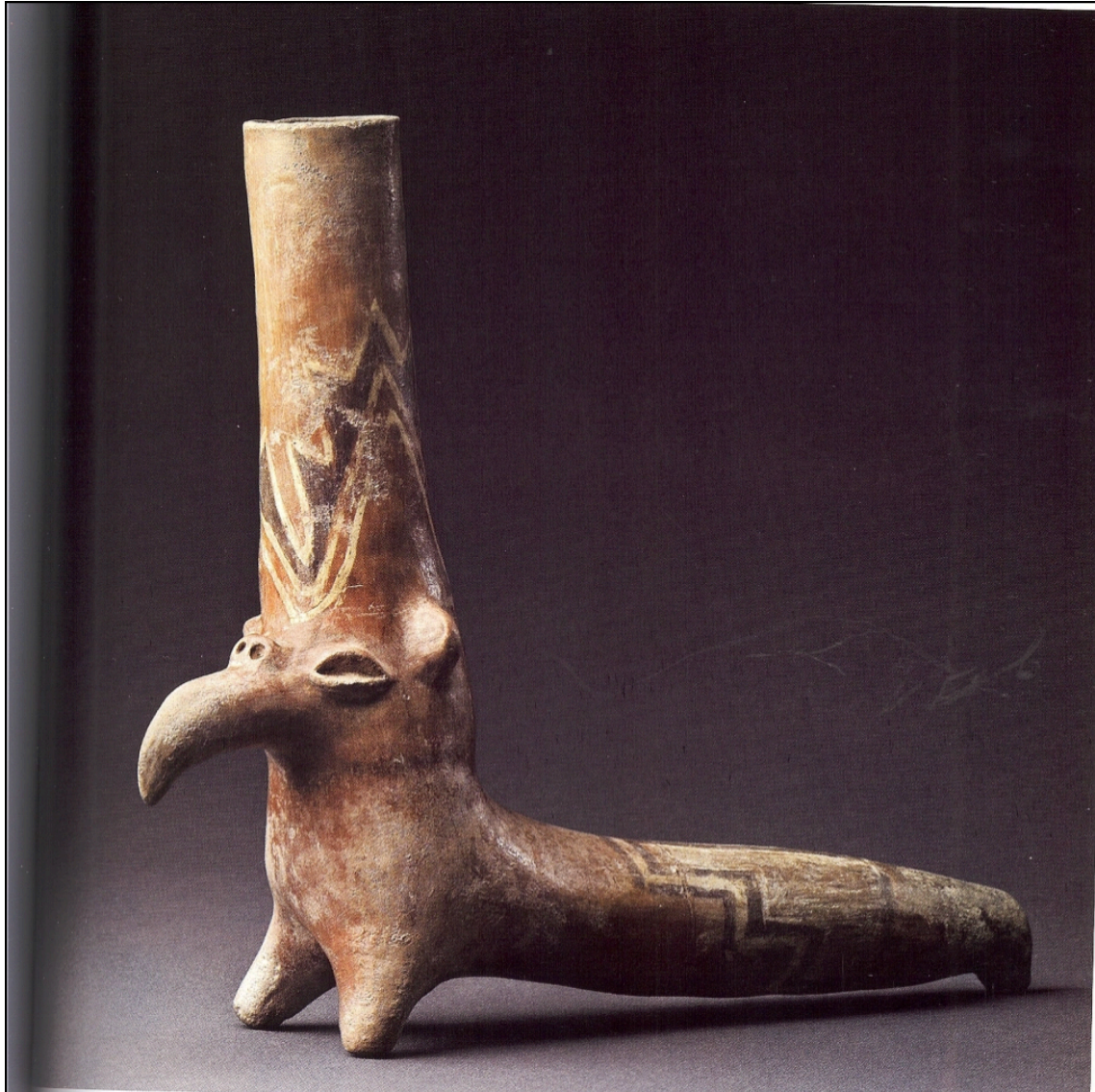
²⁷ Llamazares, "Arte Chamánico Visionario. Una invitación al cambio de paradigmas." 30.

beings, can take thousands of faces in an incessant flow of transfigurations²⁸. The pieces of shamanic art, such as those previously presented, have numerous faces that hover between human and animal features. These figures are supposed to be involved with all the essences or presences that appeared to the shaman during their journeys. Underneath two dual images, the first has two feline faces duplicated side by side. The vessel reunites both zoomorphic and anthropomorphic features, especially as the mouth and nose are closer to human features, whereby the mouth mimics a naughty human smile.



²⁸ Llamazares, "Arte Chamánico Visionario. Una invitación al cambio de paradigmas" 30.

The second hybrid figure presented below combines traces of a bird, with its pointed peak, elongated body, and almost invisible anthropomorphic presence. The eyes and the ears seem to be human traits, or perhaps of another animal, but both hint at the presence of more than one being. Both images are vessels which belong to the culture of of Condorhuasi (0-500ac).





I am intrigued by the image above, the interpretations of it could trigger numerous subjects of inspiration. Unlike the previous hybrid figures, its shape is isolated from those of an animal or human. It could be imagined to be a fruit, a plant or a tree. However from an animated perspective, endless variations may appear. Perhaps the strength of these figures lies in the ambiguous and undetermined nature of its forms, thus triggering uncertainty and stimulating my curiosity. Considering as well that these images were inspired by different states of consciousness, I wonder how the indigenous artists were able to empathise with the shaman's perceptions. Furthermore, how they transfer all the experiences and encounters through different materials such as ceramic, wood, metal and stone whilst maintaining that organic continuity of an energetic and lively nature which we can observe in the forms and bodies. Understanding also that shamanic art is referred to as visionary art or art of the transformation²⁹.

²⁹ Llamazares, "Arte Chamánico Visionario. Una invitación al cambio de paradigmas" 21-22.

A corporeal map



To introduce the work of Ana Mendieta I thought of a photograph from her *Tree of Life* (series), this is an Untitled piece from 1976. Perhaps it is difficult to notice at first sight, but Ana's face looms over the tree trunk with her body covered in mud as it merges with the texture and colours of the tree. Somehow, she creates a humanoid tree whereby a symbiosis between humans and nature appears. With this image I thought to create a passage between the shamanistic cosmology and the hybrid figures into (more) actual expressions. As she places her body over the tree, likening her skin with that of the tree, Ana discloses an endless tension between humans and nature. From a western perspective, culture is a process that is unrelated and separated from nature. The artist positions her body at a crossroad, a gesture where two worlds conceived antagonistically converge.

Ana was a Cuban artist, and during the Cuban Revolution she was sent by her parents to the United States due to her father's political situation. From there she was sent back and fourth from foster homes, or even refugee camps. Dwelling and dealing with the feeling of loss, exile and uprooting, these are themes that appear in her work. Moving to the U.S meant a cultural contrast, as being a brown Cuban woman, the colour of her skin was redefined. The presence of her body is recurring in her work either by her physical body or just the shape or outline of a body. Seen in her series *Siluetas* which means silhouette in Spanish, she claims back the place of the female body, of her brown body. A female body that moves and leaves traces.



Sometimes Ana's body is present and sometimes she searches for the silhouette in nature as it is demonstrated in the Untitled piece (Silhouette series) from 1978 photograph above. She saw in natural formations the traces of a body and tried to modify it as little as possible to create its outline. She worked with the elements of the place as mud, earth, sand, grass, fire and water. The presence of the body illustrates the absence of it. Ana was haunted by the exiles sense of displacement, trauma and pain can sometimes disconnect us from the outside³⁰. As such, she searched to connect with natural entities by evoking their healing energy – an organic trust or reciprocity between transferring and receiving. As a shaman, she saw herself engaging with the practice of healing.

Most of the silhouette formed in nature or within nature have the particularity of being ephemeral. They dissolve or transform through the ground, or may turn into ashes that later becomes fertiliser for the land. Her work seems to follow natural cycles and is connected to the themes of birth, rebirth and death.

Sometimes, her silhouettes resemble a grave. Above, there is a still from a film called *Alma, Silueta en Fuego* (translation from Spanish: Soul, Silhouette on Fire) from 1975. The image feels painful, strong and profound all at the same time. I kept thinking of the burning body, as if that silhouette was screaming. Still there is something endless in the repetitive silhouettes in Anas work as it presents the possibility of portraying a ceaseless number of women. The boundaries of our bodies fade away and by opening the body to nature, we allow ourselves to access and break the classical dichotomies from Western tradition³¹.

³⁰ Carolina Joos, WhatsApp call to author, May 19, 2020.

³¹ Ana Mendieta: Decolonialized Feminist and Artist with Laura E. Pérez.



The Andean rituals promoted relations between humans and their environment. The rite is a symbol of action, which through ideas, concepts and desires related to nature, life and death are represented ³². Through her work, Ana expresses the urgency to connect with nature, in another time and with other elements in contrast to the Andean civilisations. By allowing spiritual and psychic domains to enter her body and mind, the artist and the Andean cultures seem to converge in a hybrid language between the symbiosis of humans and nature. Rites encouraged transformations of that which supposed to be permanent and proved to have healing qualities as the shaman searched for answers or connections with other forms of life. Along these lines, I will introduce CA Conrad an American poet that created the (Soma)tic poetry rituals. The poet's method to write poetry through rituals initiate and promote such a diverse way of writing - possibly liberating the individual, a word, a body or another. Born in a family of factory workers, the main difficulty was to find a way to recover the ability of being present. Rituals create a space that induces CA Conrad in "*the extreme present*", meaning that during the rituals the poet cannot think about anything except the ritual and writing.

*When raised by people who have lost the present, it may take long time to recognise what has happened, and then when we do, we will need more time to discover a way of recovering the present, and for me that is where (Soma)tic poetry rituals come in. These rituals, as it turns out, do not just help me remain in the present to write poems, they also give me a newly mindful days for investigating the world around me, wherever I find myself.*³³

In their book '*While Standing in Line for Death*' from 2017, CA Conrad composed a series of poems that emerge from rituals. The poet had several goals in mind for the creation of the book, one of them was to cure their depression after the poet's boyfriend was brutally murdered and the police refused to investigate the death. The indifference from the police and Conrad's profound pain and sadness, made the artist seek

³² Sanders Gómez, "Cosmovisión e Identidad Andinas", 5.

³³ CA Conrad, "(Soma)tic Poetry Rituals Introduction".

healing through the poetic rituals. *"I believed that I could do a ritual for poems, that could drag me out of that depression"*(CA Conrad)³⁴. Another goal the book had was to create political actions for poetry, as a way of confronting the anti-lesbian, gay and transgender laws that were appearing in the United States regarding the elections of 2016. While doing activism CA Conrad was tired of the yelling and violence towards the LGBTQ+ community and therefore decided to create political action rituals for poetry called *Power Sissy Intervention number 1: Queer Bubbles*. This is the first ritual of a series of actions opposing to the violent social landscape. In the intervention number 1, the poet sat down on a busy street in South Carolina and blew colourful bubbles to the children. The kids attracted by the colourful bubbles, were playing and laughing but their parents were looking at CA Conrad as someone who looked odd and different from them. In these uncomfortable moment, CA Conrad replied to them, *"These are queer bubbles, and they are gonna make your children queer. Not gay or lesbian but, queer. Meaning that they will be heathy, happy, queer...putting an end to misogyny, phobia and help change the word for the better"*. From and through this ritual CA Conrad wrote the poem found underneath, *Every Feel Unfurl*.

Every Feel Unfurl

I was naked
 on a mountaintop
 kissing someone
 who loved me
 people fully
 clothed two
 thousand
 feet
 below
 as crossed out as this cage I
 say I belong to no more
 the stars let me off the hook again
 this is so new I don't get it
 hear myself sing with
 a voice I do not recognize
 the best voice to happen to
 me I want it back
 each night
 there is nothing little about little lights in the sky
 now the pronunciation is perfect for another
 morning of lips performing their duty to verb
 shrouding ourselves by light of
 damage control stations of rhetoric
 lips as piglet prepared to
 be hacked apart beneath a greenery of
 mansions a mess the ambulance cannot reach
 there is nothing little about the cicada revving up while
 we think our car horns
 are so impressive

7

³⁴ CA Conrad, interview.

Observing the form of the poem unleashed from words, as it grows and dims expanding freely and continuously side to side. Perhaps words appear over the page in the same rhythm as emotions and images emerge to the poet in the ritual. As a simultaneous symbiosis between body, emotion, head, heart, word and page. I sense fragile and intimate images within the poem which I try to empathise with; the poet's gloomy body, between images of dreams and reality. External sounds such as the ambulance and car horns intersect and interweave with those images of intimacy. The poem's emotion reflects on an experience so rough, that is the murder of their partner. As if the poet reconstructs a moment that simultaneously disappears. At the same time, the poem's voice seeks recognition and justice for the writers partner.

I thought to reflect about the word queer and what happens to it during the ritual of it becoming a bubble: an innocent, colourful and transparent attire is given to the word. As if during the ritual the word queer transforms for a moment, to an inverse meaning of what it implies in the world and the specific social context of South Carolina. The way the ritual used the word queer enabled imaginative transformations which can contribute to a more desirable future for the queer community and our social landscape. The ritual becomes such an extraordinary medium because it restores, communicates and transforms the ways we tend to understand, think or judge individuals from a non-binary nature. I wonder if in the ritual, the poets figure fades and its position could be assimilated to that of a shaman. As someone that seeks to transform their depression and the violence towards the LGBTQ+ community to a state of equity and respect. To be able to do so the individual has gone through their own transformation; through their depression as they sought to heal themselves through the poetry rituals. They are able to confront and communicate this internal healing that can in turn spread and transform another.

Simultaneous bodies

In the last chapter, we delved into the shamanic cosmology and observe an animistic and energetic perspective of the world. The phenomenon of trans-substantiation, the frontiers that separate human and other forms of life dissolves were also explored. Shamanic art and its hybrid imaginary, such as the dual figures, embody the transformations between humans and the natural; whether animal, vegetable or mineral, it eventually embraces a corporeal diversity. The presence of hybrid images enables an alternative way of thinking about the relationship between humans and nature. Something similar happens which I associate with the figure and concept of a cyborg from Donna Haraway that appears in her essay 'A Cyborg Manifest' published in 1985. The cyborg is a hybrid being between organism and machine, that arises at a time when technology appears to disrupt human borders. *It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what is body in machines that resolve into coding practices*³⁵. From this perspective, the cyborg explores a reality where the borders between natural and artificial, technological and organic, mind and body, self-developed and externally designed are becoming ambiguous. Haraway's hybrid figure challenges the dualistic couples implanted in western traditions and *suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves*³⁶. The cyborg's image reminds me of the hybrid figures as simultaneous bodies stretching the boundaries of what we think our bodies and identities are in relation to nature and machines. Both conceive a body without the limiting structures imposed by classical dichotomies. I believe pieces such as the cyborg and the doubles induce us to other ways of thinking.

Haraway created the image and concept of the cyborg inspired by novels and films in the eighties. *Contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted (Donna Haraway)*. Some of the works mentioned, among (many) others, are Blade Runner, The Female Man, The Adventures of Alyx and Tales of Nevéýön. These titles explore genetic transformations, mutations, cross-species and hybrid beings. These combinations are possible within science fictional narratives³⁷. These bodily imaginaries in turn play a fundamental role in constructing the cyborgs figure, as well as opening up possibilities of rethinking and reconstructing our bodies.

Haraway places the cyborg in a post-gender world which has no truck with bisexuality³⁸. At first, thinking about a post gender world seemed somehow unrecognisable from my perspective. Later, I thought that these words don't intend to erase gender, but enable us to imagine a world without the categorisations and implications of gender. *Cyborgs might consider more seriously the partial, fluid, sometimes aspect of sex and sexual embodiment. Gender might not be global identity after all, even if it has profound historical breadth and depth (Donna Haraway)*³⁹. The cyborg therefore breaks away from the social and historical constructions of gender as a constraining factor, and instead towards a transformative possibility. I wonder if the cyborg could be thought as an available and alternative identity to think of as ourselves, as it potentially enables another category that breaks away from the permanent and antagonistic images of both

³⁵ Haraway Donna, Cyborg Manifesto University of Minnesota Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/warw/detail.action?docID=4392065>, 60.

³⁶ Haraway Donna, Cyborg Manifesto University of Minnesota Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/warw/detail.action?docID=4392065>, 67.

³⁷ Although it is not my intention to delve into the works, science fiction as a genre explores imaginative scenarios where science and technology interrupts the social landscape and the identity of its characters.

³⁸ Haraway Donna, Cyborg Manifesto University of Minnesota Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/warw/detail.action?docID=4392065>, 8.

³⁹ Haraway Donna, Cyborg Manifesto University of Minnesota Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/warw/detail.action?docID=4392065>, 67.

men and women, and rather facilitates another approach to gender, in a fluid and open manner. *I am making an argument for the cyborg as action mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings* (Donna Haraway)⁴⁰.

I wonder if from this perspective of gender we observe the hybrid figures, it could be said that their gender also seems somehow unrecognisable. Perhaps is not about searching for the hybrid pieces gender, rather to imagine that within their ambiguity, the hybrids possibly involve all genders. Both figures, the cyborg and the dual images explore the possibilities of corporeal frontiers and enable strong fusions between humans and machines or humans, animal, plant or mineral.

It is important to note that the effort to construct revolutionary standpoints, epistemologies as achievements of people committed to changing the world, has been part of the process showing the limits of identification. The acid tools of postmodernist theory and the constructive tools of ontological discourse about revolutionary subjects might be seen as ironic allies in dissolving Western selves in the interests of survival. We are excruciatingly conscious of what it means to have a historically constituted body. (Donna Haraway)⁴¹

In order to explore these figures of resistance in the doubles or the cyborg, the Western idea of the self is dissolved and instead moves towards a world of change and transformation. Haraway explains that it is required to create certain tools, which are often stories, retold stories and versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms. The writer proposes an idea to retell and rewrite stories from those places and voices that were silent, oppressed, colonised or were just unwritten. *In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors*⁴² *subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture. We have all been colonised by those origin myths, with their longing for fulfilment in apocalypse* (Donna Haraway)⁴³. Somehow her thoughts are comforting and relieving, perhaps as it changes the course in which we are supposed to write or approach history. It moves towards a place of recomposing narratives and rediscovering history through a multiplicity of voices. This in turn reconnects to the ways in which the indigenous cultures of northwestern Argentina were perceived, understood and categorised by the West, like many other colonised cultures. *Shamanism and animism, something that classical anthropology and psychology originally disqualified as an erroneous and childish religious conception, characteristic of communities of little evolution* (Taylor, 1871) *or as a primitive form of neurosis* (Freud, 1913) (Ana Maria Llamazares)⁴⁴. These words revealed even more profoundly the roots of the colonisations in South America. Today we can revise these disqualifications and rewrite them as Haraway suggests. Imagining also the difficulties that can be encountered while rewriting history, since these are fragile narratives which involve absent and painful moments of history. This reminds me of a phrase I heard a while ago from Safiya Sinclair, a Jamaican poet who writes in a language that is not hers but was imposed upon her by colonisers. Understanding as well that colonisers first install a discourse and dominated through language⁴⁵. The poet's words stayed floating in my mind as something I never thought of before and which I found revealing. As an Argentinian person, I too am speaking a

⁴⁰ Haraway Donna, *Cyborg Manifesto* University of Minnesota Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/warw/detail.action?docID=4392065>,

⁴¹ Haraway Donna, *Cyborg Manifesto* University of Minnesota Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/warw/detail.action?docID=4392065>, p20-21

⁴² Simply to clarify, the cyborg authors are all those works, novels, films or figures which the inspired Haraway to create the cyborg, some of which were mentioned earlier

⁴³ Haraway Donna, *Cyborg Manifesto* University of Minnesota Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/warw/detail.action?docID=4392065>, p 55

⁴⁴ Llamazares, "Arte Chamánico Visionario. Una invitación al cambio de paradigmas" 30.

⁴⁵ Sandra G. Bari, Zoom meeting, June 28, 2020.

language which isn't autochthonous⁴⁶. Language becomes this unconscious frontier that reminds us of a past that simultaneously doesn't feel mine or ours. Spanish changes and forks in each country and culture. Moreover, language is moulded to a indeterminate form depending on the context. When rewriting colonised stories or narratives, I feel as if language passes unnoticed. Perhaps through language we can find tools to reinstate silenced stories and utilise the possibilities of language in order to navigate native knowledge. As Haraway describes, *It is not only a question of literary deconstruction, but of liminal transformation* (Donna Haraway)⁴⁷. From the author's words, language and history are one of the antennas to decolonize voices and suggests that something even more internal transforms, perhaps transmuting our intimate dialogues in relation to the past.

⁴⁶ When utilising the word autochthonous, I refer to a language which isn't specific to the place. A tongue that wasn't born in the same place where it resides.

⁴⁷ Haraway Donna, *Cyborg Manifesto* University of Minnesota Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/warw/detail.action?docID=4392065>, p 55

Utopia

She is in the horizon.
I approach her two steps,
she moves away two steps more.

I walk two steps
and the horizon moves
ten steps further away.
As much as I may walk
I'll never reach her.
So what's the point of utopia?
it serves for this, to walk.

Eduardo Galeano⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Autonomies, For Eduardo Galeano.

End Words

The hybrid images from the pre Columbian arts transport me to an apparent reality. Each object portrays a living form merging into another and so continuously, one appears as the extension of another being. I discovered within the pieces there is a certain invisible movement: an individual body moves through a fluid frontier (between species) becoming a multiple being. Something that resonated with me is that movement that can be recognised in a piece by its hybridity or ambiguity. The ability to move outside of oneself and merge into another state. The presence of the dual figure as the stove pipe served as a channel from where I could navigate the presence of someone close in relation to an animal metaphor. Enabling me a wider understanding of that presence and consequently the situation.

Initially, while researching the native cultures in the north west of Argentina I felt disoriented. Especially during the shamanic cosmology I realised my difficulties in addressing the native beliefs. I was approaching the readings in a linear and rational manner – sometimes reading aloud or highlighting with colours and sometimes imagining scenes but always, always from the mind. This led me to no place and left me in an unfocussed state. I figured my methods followed a western mindset that did not let the body, feelings or fantasies be possible routes. I slowly started imagining the shamanic journeys, wondering how the phenomenon of trans-substantiation could be visualised in my thoughts as dreams. Later I understood anthropological texts and the hybrid images served as guides and mediators to induce us into the perspective of the other. Perhaps a *key* to shamanic fields is to let their knowledge pass or transverse the body.

Simultaneously a personal exploration about the native communities of my culture was unfolding during the research. Both the indigenous iconography and knowledge resonated as familiar and distant. This led me to wonder, how rarely the indigenous cultures inhabit consciously our social and cultural landscape, how little we are motivated to pursue native knowledge. With these questions in mind, I began to unravel pieces of our colonised past and understand the impact the Spanish arrival caused the Argentinian culture (as well as other colonised cultures). The expansion of a culture over another penetrates so profoundly that the society that emerges from this coalition becomes a crossbreed-hybrid creature. The frigidity is this creature has imposed on them a body, a language, a systems of thoughts and so on. Something similar to how the Argentinian cultural network is, a fusion of which the West is the main protagonist.

Connecting the dualistic and shamanic cosmology of the north west of Argentina to the practices of Gabriel Chaile, Ana Mendieta, CA Conrad and Donna Haraway revealed to me a diverse way to perceive my cultural background. Through these linkings I notice how inspiring, alternative and contrasting the indigenous perspectives are. But most of all, an inevitable message emerged between the fusions of the Andean voices and those of the artists and writers: the urgency for a change of paradigm in how we relate to nature, with marginalised communities and colonised stories. Something which is not entirely new, yet there seems to be undoubted resistance within us to change and transform. I feel the hybrid figures could served as inspiration to imagine and rethink our systems, methods and words. This reminds me of a poem written by the poet Eduardo Galeano about Utopia as a horizons to walk towards to. Perhaps thats how the indigenous cosmologies served, as horizons, as alternatives to devise the skyline.

The voices in this journey

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