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On Clearings and Oases: Poetic Reason in Times of Modern Wordlessness

Paper

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Abstract Bruno Latour (2017, 46) wrote that the idea of a modern world has become an oxymoron. In an increasingly disenchanted world, our relationship with language has become colonized by the project of controlling and engineering reality through objective, unequivocal knowing. As a consequence, the things, landscapes and persons that stabilize our worlds are gradually lost in transparency. In our search for oases in the desert from which human life can once again flourish, this article turns to a poetic reason as an alternative form of cognition. I argue that the paradoxical tension between the formal and mimetic poles in unclosed systems of expressive signs, such as the arts, harnesses the potential to know worlds in the act of their unfolding. In doing so, they acknowledge the fundamental alterity of the world and allow space and silence for the rifts and fissures that provide shelter for meaningful inhabitation.

Résumé Comme l'a écrit Bruno Latour (2017, 46), l'idée d'un monde moderne est devenue un oxymore. Dans un monde de plus en plus désenchanté, notre rapport au langage est colonisé par le projet de contrôler et de façonner la réalité au moyen d'une connaissance objective et sans équivoque. Ainsi, les choses, les paysages et les personnes qui stabilisent nos mondes se perdent dans une transparence pure. Dans notre quête d'oasis dans le désert, où la vie humaine pourrait à nouveau s'épanouir, cet article se tourne vers la raison poétique comme forme alternative de cognition. Je soutiens que la tension paradoxale entre les pôles formels et mimétiques des systèmes non-fermés d'expressions, comme les arts, les détermine à avoir le potentiel de comprendre le monde dans son déploiement. Ce faisant, ils reconnaissent l'altérité fondamentale du monde et laissent place et silence aux fissures et aux crevasses qui offrent un abri pour une habitation sensée.

Keywords Critical phenomenology; re-enchantment; poetry; epistemology.

Introduction

Sensation

Par les soirs bleus d'été j'irai dans les sentiers,
Picoté par les blés, fouler l'herbe menue ,
Rêveur, j'en sentirai la fraicheur à mes pieds.

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Je laisserai le vent baigner ma tête nue.
Je ne parlerai pas ; je ne penserai rien.
Mais l'amour infini me montera dans l'âme ;
Et j'irai loin, bien loin, comme un bohémien,
Par la Nature,—heureux comme avec une femme.

(Rimbaud 2023, 3)[12]

Sometimes, a poem feels like an encounter. A stumbling across a particular moment or memory that we thought forgotten, until the words on the paper in front of us re-awaken impressions, scents or sounds that teleport us right back to a dormant past. Strangely—or maybe not—the strongest poetic memories often belong to the period of our childhood, a time characterized by a strong connection to a sensuous experience of the world and the freedom associated with its discovery. In this way, Rimbaud's words might evoke warm nights in which, despite the heaviness of the summer air still filled with the scents of the trees and flowers, toes grow cold because of the oncoming dew that covers the grass through which we move our bare feet. Children naturally find themselves in this poetic state, a situation in which mind and senses are freer because they have not yet been compromised by the authorized interpretations of the world (Siméon 2023). While for many adults, language is increasingly reduced to a code transmitting information, language predominantly retains its enchanting power for children. It is a source of pleasure and daydreaming, of discovery, strongly connected to the bodily exploration of the world. For the youngest among us, both language and things offer a similar novelty and have not yet been stiffened through established meanings. As things that resist understanding, language and the world still harness the potential to enchant (Clancier 1986).

Today, our relationship with language itself, and hence our relationship with the world, is colonized by what Vanessa Machado de Oliveira has described as "the primary orienteering project of modernity/coloniality to control and engineer reality through objective unequivocal knowing" (2021, 21-22). This 'wording of the world', per Machado de Oliveira, refers to the desire to index the totality of reality in an unambiguous, objective language (*ibid.*). Wording is strongly at odds with the idea of a 'worlding of the world', which refers to the process of meaningfully co-creating and inhabiting the different and multiple worlds that together make up the pluriverse (*ibid.*). By unequivocally knowing and possessing the world through homogenous representations, we lose contact with the surface of being and the indeterminacy and unknowability that define it as a source

[1] In the blue summer evenings, I will go along the paths,
And walk over the short grass, as I am pricked by the wheat,
Daydreaming I will feel the coolness on my feet.
I will let the wind bathe my bare head.
I will not speak, I will have no thoughts,
But infinite love will mount in my soul;
And I will go far, far off, like a gypsy,
Through the countryside—joyous as if I were with a woman.
[2] Translation to English from https://allpoetry.com/poem/14327957-Sensation-by-Arthur-Rimbaud.

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for open-ended processes of meaning-making through which human beings reside in the world.

In this paper I argue that the 'disenchantment' of society and the reduction of a diversity of linguistic patterns to a singular 'rational' pattern of translation are putting the human condition—earthbound and open—at risk, replacing 'porous selves' with 'buffered selves' (Arendt 1958, 2; Taylor 2024, 46). The transparency of a purely descriptive language presages the decline of what exists between and beyond human beings (Arendt 2005). In what Hannah Arendt (2005, 201) has referred to as a "modern desert of wordlessness," the imperative for human flourishing is one of discovering and describing the oases from which terrestrial life can once again take root. In other words, in a context of disenchantment, we need to find and explore different linguistic rationalities that harness the potential to re-enchant and reconnect what modernity has divided: our relationships with nature, with others, and with our bodies (Federici 2019).

In her work, the Spanish poet and philosopher María Zambrano writes about claros del bosque—clearings in the forest—as poetic places of listening and feeling where reason, exhausted by the relentless questioning and the long journey through existence, finally surrenders (2019). At the limit of corporeality, or rather, beyond it, these clearings are places where words that have become detached from meaning dissolve and reconnect to an original feeling—*sentir*. The clearings are testimony to the fact that we are all capable of experiencing a fundamental poetic state that overturns our established relationships with the world only to restore them to us in unexpected harmony (Valéry 2023 [1944]). This article discusses the relevance of Zambrano's poetic reason for onto-epistemic openings and explores the hypothesis that her clearings in the forest might be examples of the oases in the desert Hannah Arendt urged us to look for. My suggestion is that poetry effectively disrupts the modern hegemony of the signifier/word in the signification process by introducing the thickness of the world through a mimetic impulse.

Poetry disturbs the wording of the world. Wording is all around us: in the conceptual language I have to use to write this scientific article, in our daily habits when we ask a vendor for the red apple in the basket or call a person by their name, and, more importantly, on a deeper unconscious level, for example when we pass by trees and flowers on our way to work, cataloguing them as signs of our progress or objects on our itinerary, rather than as presences that resist us, co-constitute us, and force us to linger. Admittedly, to a certain extent the wording of the world is an integral part of the phenomenon of language. However, over the last few centuries, and under the auspices of modernity/coloniality, it has gradually crowded out, obscured, and erased the materiality and the ideology of other semiotic interactions (Mika et al. 2020; Mignolo 1995).

The question that naturally arises is whether it is even possible to write about what lies outside of the grammar of modernity/coloniality. We can only criticize language from within language. I hope that the distance inserted by asking the question here displaces—at least minimally—the hegemony of wording and opens up a space from

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where I can try to write differently. The decision to include poems and NOT analyze them is a conscious one and, as will be clear below, testimony to an attempt at writing from a poetic border from where the wording of the world can be challenged (Mignolo 1995; Dussel 2012). The idea is that the poems resonate with the rest of the text but also introduce rifts of conceptual silence that leave space for 'not-knowing' (de la Cadena 2015). In doing so, I explore a hybrid form of writing that is capable of accounting for what Zambrano describes as the double epistemology—intellectual and experiential—of her poetic reason, and harnesses the potential to transcend the categories of modern thought, opening them up to the unknowable totality of the world and the different ways of understanding it.

The muteness of the world

Ich fürchte mich so vor der Menschen Wort.
Sie sprechen alles so deutlich aus,
Und dieses heißt Hund und jenes heißt Haus,
und hier ist Beginn und das Ende ist dort.

Mich bangt auch ihr Sinn, ihr Spiel mit dem Spott,
sie wissen alles, was wird und war;
kein Berg ist ihnen mehr wunderbar;
ihr Garten und Gut grenzt grade an Gott.

Ich will immer warnen und wehren, Bleibt fern.
Die Dinge singen hör ich so gern.
Ihr rührt sie an, sie sind starr und stumm.
Ihr bringt mir alle die Dinge um.

Rilke, 'Ich fürchte mich so' (cited in Rosa 2024, 112)[3][4]

The idea of a growing disenchantment of the modern world can be dated back to a lecture given by Max Weber in 1917 in the midst of the destruction wrought by the First

[3] I fear so deeply the words of mankind.
They utter them all with so certain a sound,
and this we call house and that we call hound,
and here is before, and there is behind.

I fear too their thinking, their mocking disdain.
They know the whole past, all things that will be.
For them, no mountain is wondrous to see;
their properties border on God's own domain.

Pay heed to my warning, now make your retreat.
The singing of things, not words, is what's sweet.
Your words make things mute, so rigid and gray,
killing them, draining their beauty away

[4] Translation to English from Shabasson 2015.

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World War. By disenchantment, Weber (1922) referred to the vanishing of the religious and the sacred from the world due to an intellectualization and rationalization produced by modern capitalist forms of social organization. Federici proposes to interpret Weber's lecture as a warning in a more political sense, as the emergence of a world in which "our capacity to recognize the existence of a logic other than that of capitalist development is every day more in question" (2019, 188). She stresses how the disenchantment of modernity discredits all non-rational[5] explanations of the world around us. As we will see, this process extends itself to language, where an increasing rationalization and calculability of linguistic processes has done away with different linguistic dimensions, and at the same time with the connection to, and resonance with, the world that these dimensions provided. As Rosa (2024) stresses in his work, while disenchantment makes the world available and controllable, Weber, just like Rilke, already deduced that excessive rationalization also entailed a muteness of the world. In what follows, I hope to show that indeterminacy and non-availability are preconditions for meaningful and livable relations to the world.

Mignolo (1995) describes how an important step in the colonial process took place when, toward the end of the fifteenth century, a philosophy of language based on the celebration of the letter began to emerge in Europe and was subsequently imposed on the rest of the world. In doing so, modernity/coloniality eradicated, obscured, and replaced the materiality and ideology of other (e.g. non-alphabetic and Amerindian) semiotic interactions with those of Western reading and writing cultures (*ibid.*). Stuck in their own grammar and categories, the colonizers erased any sign of difference between cultures by using the description of themselves as a universal frame for understanding different cultural traditions. Later, English, French and German replaced Castilian and Portuguese as the languages of modernity (*ibid.*). The literate and humanistic legacies of the Iberian languages were no longer considered well-suited for the scientific and philosophical discourse that was taking shape around the beginning of the seventeenth century, when philosophers such as Descartes and Leibniz merged literacy with numeracy (*ibid.*). From that moment on, knowledge became articulated by stressing the qualities of reason and calculability and by suppressing secondary affective qualities such as feelings and emotions.

Anibal Quijano also stresses the continuity of the colonization of the imagination. In a short article on coloniality and modernity/rationality he questions the European paradigm of rational knowledge, and more specifically the subject-object relation of which it claims that knowledge is a product (2007). He argues that the idea of the modern subject obscures and denies intersubjectivity and social totality as the production sites of all knowledge. At the same time, he writes that the idea of the object as a singular and independent entity is in contradiction with contemporary advances in scientific research which show that objects and their properties are modes and times of a given field of relations. Finally, Quijano contends that the idea that the object and the subject are of a different nature is at odds with the idea that there exists a deeper communication

[5] Rational in the sense of modernity's calculating/scientific rationality.

structure in the universe and that both language and the subject are worlded, that is, constituted by their participation in the world (*ibid*.; Mika et al. 2020). Questioning the European paradigm of rational knowledge, Quijano hints at the excesses that transcend modern epistemological knowledge. The concepts of subject and object as they have been historically understood in modern Europe cannot hope to adequately explain the situation of an interconnected world because they are the inheritance of a tradition that has radically separated subject and object.

In a paradigm that posits the complete intelligibility of the world, there is no place for 'not knowing'. De la Cadena (2015, 251) describes 'not knowing' as the possibility that statements that contradict modern knowledge may nonetheless belong to the order of the possible "as events 'yet to emerge' within modern knowledge or as events that exceed the limits of modern knowledge." Unlike the phrase "I do not know", which nonetheless implies that one will eventually come to know, the concept of 'not knowing' positively asserts incompleteness (*ibid*.). As a tool for 'not knowing', de la Cadena introduces the idea of 'not only' (253) as an instrument to perform onto-epistemic openings; it disturbs knowing as usual and allows what we know as, for example, a mountain to emerge not only as such. "'Not only' opens room for presences that could challenge what we know, the ways we know it, and even suggest our impossibility of knowing without such impossibility cancelling those presences" (de la Cadena 2015, 253).

Whereas de la Cadena's research explores the margins of, and spaces beyond, the grammar of modernity/coloniality, engaging with different epistemologies and ontologies, the Chicana thinker Gloria Anzaldúa emphasizes the need to actually displace "the accent from the delimitation of geographical spaces to their borders, locations in which languages (Spanish, English, Nahuatl) and gender (male, female, homosexual, heterosexual) are the conditions of spaces-in-between as a different way of thinking" (cited in Mignolo 1995, 109; see also Anzaldúa 1987). In her wake, Arturo Escobar (2004) and Mignolo (1995) have pointed out the fertility of border spaces when it comes to transcending modernity/coloniality and its problems. Building on Dussel's notion of transmodernity and the possibility of a non-Eurocentric dialogue with alterity, Escobar (2004) points towards border-sites where place-based worlds have to articulate global forms of power as *loci* for transcending solutions. In order to build narratives based on a different rationality/logic and to move beyond the unsustainable and exploitative practices associated with modernity, Escobar argues that one has to think and act from an exteriority to the dominant culture and structures (Dussel 2012). This paper, and the poems that traverse and disrupt it, are an attempt at thinking from such a border, at the edge of the thetic moment and its poetic rebuttal (Kristeva 1974).[6] By positively affirming not knowing and the importance of knowing from silence, can a poetic reason open an

[6] Kristeva points out the potential of poetry to challenge instituted forms of language and with them the social institutions the latter permeate. In doing so, poetry—and art—opens up languages, and thus subjectivity, in favor of a different signifying process that allows for the expression of plurality in the processes of signification. Her approach, inspired by the psychoanalytic tradition, reveals a negative dialectical movement between the plural semantic processes that precede language and the symbolic, which establishes unity once it organizes the semantic pulsions into symbols that structure social institutions.

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in-between space for epistemological and ontological difference? Before delving deeper into the question, the next section explores the importance of shared corporeality as a common and open ground for shared meaning.

In Medias Res

La dimension du sacré n'est jamais que l'approfondissement du mystère de la racine, nuancé des variations de l'errance.

La pensée de l'errance est postulation du sacré, qui jamais ne se donne et jamais ne s'efface.

Platon s'était méfié des poêtes, forceurs de l'obscur, de la parole absolue.

(Glissant 1990, 33)[78]

In medias res. We are always and already amidst things. One of the main contributions of the phenomenology of the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1945) is to have shown that our relationship to the world is first and foremost one of wandering among things, and that the latter cannot take place without a human body. Merleau-Ponty's writing focuses on the pre-reflexive corporeal processes that happen before the thetic moment of the signification process. His work shows how Western thought is mostly oblivious to these processes and maintains a hierarchy in which verbal language is considered to be the sole origin and foundation of meaning. In resonance with Glissant's words above, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy explores a straying that starts from our pre-reflexive rootedness in the world and the sanctity of the mystery, the indeterminacy, that is constitutive of our corporeal grounding.

If Mignolo (1995) pointed out the historical suppression of other semiotic interactions, Merleau-Ponty denounces the silencing of the body. Not the physical body, observed from the outside as just another thing/object in the world, nor the assemblage of organs described by anatomy, but the phenomenal body. The concept of a phenomenal or 'lived body' (1945) in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy refers to the whole potential system/schema of senses through which we bodily experience and are in the world. The phenomenal body is the locus for a lived—and at least minimally shared—experience of the world. It is a body that does not merely relocate itself, but moves with purpose, tracing through its gestures a particular way of inhabiting the world. During this process, it is not a passive receiver of stimuli, but a dynamic and open system that actively anticipates the world, finding itself in constant physical relation with its environment.

[7] The dimension of the sacred is ever only a deepening of the mystery of the root, nuanced by the variations of wandering.
The concept of wandering is a stating of the sacred, which never fully reveals itself, yet never entirely fades away.
Plato was wary of poets, those who force the darkness, the absolute word.
[8] Translation by author.

Merleau-Ponty (1945) insists on the existence of a sensuous and motile reason that has been obscured by the hegemony of the word. He claims that if not for that initial 'body language', there would be neither language nor thought. Before words, there is a body that orients, explores, and expresses itself in a silent language made up of gestures. This is not to say that meaning only exists pre-reflexively, but that we conceptually make sense of the world based on a non- and pre-reflexive understanding of the latter. Both the pre-reflexive and reflexive moments are vital to our making sense of the world. Knowing and thinking can only capture their full meaning when they do not silence the non-reflective background that they presuppose and from which they benefit. The latter, in the words of María Zambrano, constitutes for the former a kind of original past that has never been present (*ibid*.; Zambrano 2019). Below, I will argue that a poetic reason harnesses the potential to, if not capture, then at least brush and leave conceptual space for these fragile processes to emerge.

Things only appear clear and distinct to us in thought. When it comes to the body, there is a principle of indeterminacy to existence (Merleau-Ponty 1945). This indeterminacy should not be considered as a lack but rather as a condition for the inhabitation of the world. Both meaning and inhabitation require an intrinsic relationship between an inside and an outside whose very dimension is otherness (Maldiney 2022). It is only because the world resists and eludes us that it can make sense to us, hold us back and provide us with shelter. If everything we came across were instantly, cognitively intelligible to us, we would pass over it in a figurative heartbeat. Merleau-Ponty argues that to dwell in a place, to inhabit a space, one must encounter resistance and be held back. To inhabit implies allowing oneself to be drawn together by that which dislodges, surpasses and calls us, so that it can enable us to reside in a world that is not itself a pure representation. It is because our corporeal being-in-the-world cannot fully be comprehended by a symbolic and reflexive rationality that the world holds us back and gives us the opportunity to inhabit it. Without conceptual silence, the wording of the word obscures the rifts in which this pre-reflexive understanding of the world can come to the fore.

The transparency of the world

il faut qu'il y ait dans le poême,
un nombre tel,
qu'il empeche de compter.

(Claudel 1996)[9][10]

[9] Within the poem, there must be such a number
that makes counting impossible.
[10] Translation by author.

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In his book '*Où Atterir?*,[11] Bruno Latour (2017) argues that the idea of a modern world has become an oxymoron. His statement echoes the ideas of Hannah Arendt, who had already made the association between modernity and a loss of world. Arendt argued that modernity-coloniality is defined by its wordlessness; that is, the withering away of everything that exists beyond and between us (Arendt 2005). For Arendt, the world is made up of things. The objectivity and durability of the latter make them withstand and stand against their makers and users. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1958) writes that the "things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life, and their objectivity lies in the fact that […] men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and same table." In other words, Arendt recognizes the importance of friction with the world for human dwelling, and we can reasonably assume that her later statement about a modern wordlessness applies to the world of things as well.

The importance of things when it comes to worlding also comes to the fore in the ideas of the contemporary German Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han when he argues that modern disenchantment replaces the terrestrial order with a digital order (2022).[12] According to Han, digital technology and information obscure real-life things in our day-to-day lives and drain them of their color, their smell, their endurance, and their resilience (2022). As the artificial and natural things—which, for Arendt, stabilized our dwelling in the world—are obscured, our existence becomes increasingly intangible, unstructured and unstable. Just like Arendt, Han claims that things have always been the calm centers of our life (*ibid.*). In their radical alterity, things resist complete incorporation into the self and thus offer a form of resilience on which we are able to linger. Han points out the etymology of the word 'object', which is derived from the Latin word obicere, which means, 'to set against' or 'to oppose'. "The negativity of resistance is inherent in it" (*ibid.*, 22). Han argues that one cannot linger on information, for the latter is only relevant fleetingly and once incorporated disappears and makes us search for the next bit of information. Information does not have the stabilizing quality of the artificial world of things and is responsible for the destabilization of our lives (*ibid.*). For Han, information does not describe things, but non-things.

In its representational-descriptive-identifying function, language places words in front of things and persons (Rosa 2024; Han 2022). To possess and describe a world that it aims to come to know and control in its totality, representational thinking must do away with the fundamental alterity that resists the complete incorporation of the object into the subject. In order to achieve this, the sign (letter, symbol, word) through which a subject makes sense of the world needs to exhaustively describe or replace the signified reality. In doing so, the former denies and erases the constitutive difference in its relationship to

[11] The English title of the book is *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*. But 'Où atterir' translates as 'where to land'.
[12] I am aware of the critiques addressed to Han regarding, for example, the potential use of digital poetry. However, as my argument focusses on the effects of technology and digitalization in our daily phenomenological experience of the world, I believe that Han is justified in his ideas that digital technologies have a de-worlding effect. The proportional amount in which one is confronted with worlding digital technologies is neglectable compared to the exposure to de-worlding technology as smartphones, social media and headphones.

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the latter and functions, as it were, as a replacement for reality. As a consequence, the sign loses touch with the signified (reality) and obscures the uncertainty and indeterminacy that come with pre-reflexive processes of understanding.

The concepts and categories of the European rational knowledge paradigm are designed to think of the determinate and not the indeterminate (Castoriadis 1975; Quijano 2007). It is important to point out that this is not just a mechanism of an ontological tradition but also something particular to the phenomenon of language itself. The illusion of uniqueness is inherent to speech, for to name things is to name them according to their unity, and at the same time to assign them a limit, finite and incomplete (Clastres 1974). In other words, by naming things we both determine and limit them, stripping them to a certain extent of indeterminacy (Castoriadis 1975). However, 'making sense' requires indeterminacy, and it is only in the rifts and fissures that it leaves in its wake that we can find the space for meaningful inhabitation. Different linguistic patterns that are not only about describing reality will find mechanisms of symbolic disclosure—such as the metaphor—to thwart the descriptive mechanisms of the naming process.

In the last section I will discuss how the use the arts make of the symbolic harnesses a different rationality that is able to reflect the indeterminacy of the world in the act of its unfolding. For now, it is important to note that information exacerbates the process in which the signifier comes to obscure the signified and seemingly detaches itself from the latter. Lyotard (1979, 13) points out that the problem is that knowledge conveyed through information technology "lacks profoundly in world", in what exceeds the purely representative and thus brings us into the presence of what we try to know. He further describes how, because knowledge can only pass through the new technological channels and become operational if it can be translated into information, anything in existing knowledge that cannot be translated in this way will be discarded. "With the hegemony of information technology, a certain logic prevails and, with it, a set of prescriptions concerning statements accepted as knowledge" (*ibid.*, 13).

In other words, the triumph of neoliberal modernity leads to a homogenization of language through information. In the process it gradually eliminates symbolic borders, resistances or noises that can hamper pure description or translation, and hence, control (Dufour 2003). When language is so flattened, its symbolic dimension is almost eliminated and with it the symbolic distance that is crucial for our resonant inhabiting of the world (Taylor 2024). Contrary to the tendency of information to describe exhaustively, symbolic disclosure involves a distance, a mediation, an acceding to A through B. This distance is not just to be understood negatively but it also has a positive meaning. It represents a rift in which meaning can take shape, a silence that leaves space for the alterity of the world. A symbolic, more figurative translation is not just an imperfect approximation to meaning; it is also our contribution to the collaborative work of establishing contact between ourselves and the world (*ibid.*).

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Clearings in the forest

Y la palabra primera se recoge, vuelve a su silencioso y escondido vagar dejando la imperceptible huella de su diafanidad. Mas no se pierde.

Como un balbuceo, como un susurrar de la inextinguible confianza, atravesará las series de las palabras dictadas por la intención, soltándolas por instantes de sus cadenas.

Y en esta breve aurora se siente el germinar lento de la palabra en silencio.

(Zambrano 2019, 45)[13][14]

What is needed is a method that respects the continuity of meaning, one that connects the symbolic moment, which is the word, to the processes of signification that take place in the pre-reflexive areas of life and from which meaning 'surges' to infuse words and concepts with sense. In '*Claros del bosque'*, philosopher and poet Maria Zambrano (2019) explores what a method for a poetic reason could look like. Just like Heidegger's *Holzwege* ('forest paths'). Zambrano's quest for a poetic rationality takes place in wooded landscapes. But if Heidegger wrote about a forgetfulness of being, Zambrano sings about a forgetfulness of feeling (2019). For Zambrano, clearings in the forest are poetic spaces for the reconciliation of being and word (*ibid*.). Zambrano describes this reconciliation as an enlightening feeling, a knowing from the heart and from stillness that takes us back to an existence prior to any discontinuous method or organization of thought (*ibid*.). It is a form of clarity that requires a passivity from the categories of understanding and an acceptance of the immediacy of knowing. Clearings in the forest are places that disturb the dominance of vision; in a clearing one focuses on other senses, the sound of birds or the rustling of the wind. At the edges of the clearing, vision is disturbed by the diffractive effects of branches on the light and the play of the shadows.

Zambrano (2019) describes how every new method leaps out like an *incipit vita nova*—a start of new life—reaching out to us with unmistakable joy. She explains how a method arises from a glorious moment of lucidity that is beyond consciousness (*ibid*.). For Zambrano, the essence of method is continuity with the realm of feeling from which meaning originates. This continuity can only be known by an understanding that is capable of passivity. Her clearings in the forest are hollow, empty spaces, receptive to light or sound. Her conception stands in stark contrast with how modern science conceives of methods, i.e., as instruments of reflection that are discontinuous and active,

[13] And the first word is collected, returning to its silent and hidden wandering, leaving behind the imperceptible trace of its diaphaneity. But it is not lost.

Like a babbling, like a whisper of unquenchable confidence, it will pass through the series of words dictated by the intention, releasing them momentarily from their chains.

And in this brief dawn, one feels the slow germination of the word in silence.

[14] Translation by author.

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rather than continuous and passive. According to Zambrano, the modern approach leads to a fundamental disparity between an original realm of continuity, in which we are embedded in, and bodily part of, the world, and a realm of reflection that purposefully takes a step back (*ibid.*). If method only refers to objective, separated knowledge, it becomes merely an instrument, available at any given moment but therefore disconnected from the unavailability of how the world appears to us. Thought does not always follow formal logic, and as much as the human being's life is also a conscious life of reflection, is not employed continuously in it. More importantly, meaning for a large part precedes reflection (*ibid.*).

"*We ventured deeper into the undergrowth*", so declared San Juan de la Cruz in his intro to Maria Zambrano's book (in Zambrano 2019). Chantal Maillard (1993) describes Zambrano's sketching of a poetic reason as a search for a form of knowledge that, despite its rationality, and even though it is still capable of organizing experience, can bring out and name the kind of reality that resists conceptual determination. Despite having its source in an original opaque knowledge of the world, poetic reason can still organize the world—inner and outer—in the awakened consciousness. But what would be the form of such a rationality? How would a poetic method concretely proceed? The method should recognize our earthbound condition and the fact that language and world are co-constitutive of each other. In other words, it should recognize and not obscure the thingness of words (Mika et al. 2020). Taylor (2024) talks about forms of figurative language with a constitutive symbolic/semantic logic that reconnect us and make reality palpable and present. By leaving space for symbolic disclosure, they also leave space for the indeterminacy that is present in pre-reflexive forms of meaning. What is crucial here is that symbolic disclosure inserts a pause, a conceptual silence, through which the non-conceptual can emerge and resonate, and thus contributes to Zambrano's idea of knowing from stillness. Despite being an active naming of the world, the poetic reason uses silence as a tool to introduce passivity and with it the opportunity for the unknowability of the things of the world to emerge.

Zambrano (2019) puts the metaphor forward as a possible tool for the poetic reason. The metaphor forms the core of poetic and creative speech (Maillard 1993). Ortega y Gasset (1914), under whom Zambrano studied, argues that the aesthetic object finds its elemental form in the metaphor. Ortega y Gasset describes the metaphor as being simultaneously a procedure, a method, and the aesthetic object itself. The metaphor provides active participation in what it describes and as such is both a method and a presence. Ortega y Gasset (1914) argues that the metaphor satisfies us precisely because in it we discover a coincidence between two things that is deeper and more decisive than any superficial similarity. The apparent coincidence is only the first operation of the metaphorical structure. Ortega y Gasset argues that we only need an initial resemblance in order to transcend it towards a new object that is constituted by the dissimilarity of the two objects once we look closer. Maillard (1993) defines this dynamic tension of the metaphorical process as "the annulment of the two terms of an analogy due to the clash produced by the affirmation of their identity and the production of a new object, a 'place' that allows for the synchrony of differences." As such the

metaphor points to the pre-objective, reflexive intimacy of the verbal form with the body and the world without which it would have no meaning.

Gilles Deleuze (1969) places paradoxical tensions at the origin of sense. For Deleuze, sense is something living that originates in the depths of the paradoxes that traverse pre-verbal life and can only be grasped at the surface, in the tension of a paradoxical movement between propositions and the things they refer to. For Deleuze, meaning faces one way towards the things themselves and the other way towards the propositions that describe it, but it is not to be confused with either (*ibid*.). Meaning is the border itself; the articulation of the difference of the two directions of the paradox. For Deleuze, the strength of paradoxes lies not in the fact that they are contradictory, but in how they let us assist to the emergence of contradiction (*ibid*.). As such, the different dimensions of the metaphor (constructive through its contradictions) lead us to the same point: a creative passivity to the emergence of meaning (Maillard 1993). In doing so, the metaphorical process is more than a methodology: it is essential action, the passive act by which a human being realizes his transcendence or, in other words, the act by which they realize their being as openness and participation in the processes of making sense (Maillard 1993; Husserl 1994). "It produces the progressive approach to that emptiness, to that silence in which words are no longer necessary, but where nothingness is given as a possibility of all metaphors, of all words, where nothingness is the possibility of existence." (Maillard 1993, 125).

Symbolic Stillness

Une journée sans un mot –
j'ai montré
l'ombre d'un papillon

Ozaki Hôsai (In Atlan & Bianu 2002)[15][16]

"The quality of meaning and the quantity of signs move inversely." (Clastres 1974, 109). In a chapter titled '*L'arc et le panier*',[17] Pierre Clastres (1974) reflects on the *prerä*, the singing of the hunters of the Guayaki community who live in the northern forests of Paraguay. Even though Clastres's work still belongs to a period of colonial and evolutionary thinking strongly present in his vocabulary and analysis, some of his reflections anticipate Machado de Oliveira's (2021) critique of the wording of the world and point towards a possibility of transcending the latter. Clastres argues that the one-sidedness of the songs—every hunter sings for themselves and does not seem to take the other singers into account—breaches the pattern of linguistic exchanges of a society strongly characterized by the sexual division of tasks. More importantly, he argues that by limiting the quantity and the exchange of signs, the song transgresses the function of

[15] A day without a word—I showed the shadow of a butterfly.
[16] Translated by author.
[17] 'The bow and the basket'

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language and connects us to its value. As so many anthropologists have done before him, Clastres uses his ethnography of the Guayaki as a mirror for self-reflection. He claims that the Guayaki know what in our societies only poets seem to remember: that language is more than an instrument and that one loses a sense of its value if one subjects it to excessive use. More importantly, restoring the value of language means breaching the pattern of exchange and limiting the profusion of signs so that we are reconnected to the deeper dimensions where world and word articulate their difference.

The philosopher Henri Maldiney (2022) argues that pure representation is destructive to art because it always lags behind the event. According to Maldiney, art represents '*le sentir'* (feeling), or a pre-reflective way of relating to the world. Art places us amidst the things themselves while at the same time suggesting our impossibility of knowing them. As a system of expressive signs, the arts can give us presence without possession, clarity in indeterminacy, occupancy of resistance. The arts are able to grasp the lived relationship, in which world and word, signified and signifier, are united at the very point of their separation, and outside of which both extremes would only be explainable as petrified terms, deprived of the act of which they are the poles (Maldiney 2022). Adorno (1997) explains that the arts sustain a conflictual relationship between two impulses: on a mimetic impulse that situates itself on the side of the world's sensuousness on one side, and a formal impulse that unifies and takes a step back on the other. It is because of the former that the arts can claim a relationship to our experience of the world, and because of the latter that it can claim to be a form of cognition. But what exactly differentiates the arts from conceptual thinking is the continuous perpetuating of the unresolved tension between those two opposites, the sustained strain and contradiction between signifier and signified. Whereas in conceptual or objective language the tension is mostly resolved in favor of the formal and symbolic pole of language (signifier), the expressive signs of art work in a different manner and introduce symbolic silence through a mimetic disrupting of the sign (Kristeva 1974; Castoriadis 1975). In other words, the figurative logic of art means that, in art, the external (discursive, pictorial, etc.) forms that are fundamental to the control of nature are in themselves mimetically controlled (Adorno 1997, 189).

Conclusion: Giving back body to language

Witness

I am the land that can see,
loved by farmers
and cared for by them.
I am happy because they are happy.

But a typhoon came
along with a monster machine.
Funeral for the crops came after,

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fear drowned the smiles.

Bai [friend], look around,
on your travel you'll see
crops gasping for air
it's not the typhoon's fault alone.

The monster machine is smiling
after vomiting some smoke.
Endless destruction,
how will their tribe survive?
I am the land and I am their witness.

Doris (in Wright 2022).

Sarah Wright (2022) argues that poetry's decolonial praxis asserts itself through the affective ties that it helps establish. Using poems written by young scholars from a Lumad school in Mindanao in the Philippines, Wright shows how poetry's capacity to establish affective and effective communication opens a shared space where knowledge can resonate despite the dominating culture's attempt to continuously affirm its own reality and silence or erase those who do not conform (*ibid.*). In doing so, she shows how poetry harnesses the potential to amplify Indigenous voices in established spaces and contributes to creating new affective-political spaces that reach across difference (*ibid.*). An example is the poem at the beginning of this section. Through her poem, the author draws the reader into a lived experience that articulates the poet's connection with land and acknowledges the more-than-human agency of the latter. In the poem, land can, and does, see. In other words, the poem affectively communicates how land is 'not only' land. As such, on the basis of a shared corporeal experience of the world, by articulating affective and bodily experiences, poetry restores the body to thought and creates a space for the amplification of subaltern discourses.

Restoring body to thought is what I have tried to do throughout this article by showing how meaning is always rooted in a pre-reflexive and corporeal understanding of the world. Words are imbued with thingness and, together with the subject, they are co-constituted in sympathy with the world. Without this 'original past', words would be empty shells and hold no meaning to us. The process of the wording of the world obscures the pre-symbolic rootedness of signification and in doing so makes language believe that it is complete. Restoring body to thought means a return to a bodily lived world that forms the condition for the objective world. It implies rediscovering the layer of lived experience through which the world makes sense, and at the same time, is inhabitable. Without indeterminacy there would be no friction or strain, enabling us to linger and be held back, and no space for the plurality of onto-epistemic difference. In an increasingly digital and informatised world, the arts can provide the tears in the veil that provide the footholds for plural meaningful inhabitation.

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As a system of expressive signs that positively asserts formal incompleteness, a poetic reason can help add body to language by knowing the world without erasing its indeterminacy. As such, it harnesses a potential for onto-epistemic openings, for a knowing from silence that makes space for different language-patterns. Poetry has the potential to disrupt the linguistic and symbolic blueprints through which we culturally come to understand reality and open them up to indeterminate spaces of unsettled conceptions in which subaltern and obscured understandings can find room for expression (Newell 2018). As such, we can conclude that poetry is a tool for 'not knowing' in two ways. Firstly, by 'knowing differently' and creating a space in which different knowledges can emerge that challenge dominant points of view. Secondly, by not knowing, if knowing necessarily implies the wording of the world. Poetry suggests the impossibility of knowing without such impossibility cancelling presences; it suggests the possibility of knowing while maintaining the opacity of what we come to know, and as such, its potential to re-enchant.

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