Part III

A Bigger Toolbox

Thinking Patterns and Contemporary Interrogations

24

Being River

Ambient Poetics and Somatic Experiences of More-than-Human Flows

Lisa Blackmore

"Record it, *güevon*! It's coming fast!" Mobile phone in hand, a man stands on the banks of a river and points his camera shakily toward the horizon. A dry river bed, full of boulders, lined by a concrete wall on one side and mounds of mud on the other, comes into pixelated focus against an ominous sky. As the man starts to move quickly, the camera points to the ground, capturing his shadow, his panting breath, and the crunch of his feet as he scrambles over sediments and rocks, struggling up the river bank to find a better viewpoint. Again, the horizon. Shouts and screams as a roaring sound grows. A wave of thick, dark mud carrying blue plastic water tanks, rocks, trees, and wood bursts into the frame, flowing past the camera, which tracks downstream as the river sweeps away trucks and motorbikes caught in its path. "It's too late. Boom! Get out of there!… Oh my god! It swept that shit away! Jesus. There's more coming!" Panicked interjections continue for several minutes. Over and over. And then a change. The camera rotates 90 degrees to a landscape shot that settles on the river. The shouts stop. The car horns die down. Now only rushing, roaring, hissing, bubbling. A turbulent mass of mud.

This video, which went viral across social media in early 2017, captured the River Huaycoloro as it coursed through an arid landscape on the outskirts of Lima, Peru.[1] The scene was decidedly local, but the gushing river divulges broader ruptures in the material and aesthetic compositions of landscapes across Latin America and the Caribbean, a region whose bodies of water are vexed by flooding, scarcity, and contamination, among other anthropogenic and climate-related phenomena. Whereas pre-Columbian water cultures and technologies honored bodies of water as living entities imbricated in Indigenous cosmogonies, sustainable means of production, and communality, the intertwined logics of colonization, urbanization, and extractivism have entrenched the hydraulic orders that reframed water as a resource to be administered by technocratic management plans and infrastructure designed to control contact between human bodies and liquid flows. The landscape idea similarly emerged from this opposition between nature and culture, shaped by colonial quests that mapped "supremacy of reason onto human supremacy via the identification of humanity with active mind and reason and of non-humans with passive, tradeable bodies."[2] As cartographic and pictorial traditions developed through colonial and postcolonial contexts, they served this paradigm by charting hydrographies as zones for colonization and by assigning rivers, waterfalls, and lakes privileged status in picturesque and sublime scenes that harnessed flow for visual pleasure.[3]

 DOI: 10.4324/9780429058912-28

The trembling shots of the Huaycoloro river overflow these epistemological, infrastructural, and aesthetic paradigms, materializing instead as a "kakosmos"—Bruno Latour's coinage describing how, in the Anthropocene, nonhuman matter ruptures "well-composed arrangement," liquefying the political, aesthetic, and ethical paradigms that reduce nature to a repository of resources to be mapped, measured, and extracted.[4] The assertion that this age "cannot be followed, documented, told, and represented by using any of the older traits associated with subjectivity and objectivity" signals a need for aesthetic forms of documenting, telling, and representing that might convey other distributions of agency and stimulate modes of attunement to the manifold ways in which nonhuman matter matters in the shaping of the world.[5] This need for new narrative modes and forms is the central challenge of contemporary environmental aesthetics as it responds to the profound critique of Western rationalism. It follows that if the Cartesian separation of mind and body relegated the senses and emotions to a secondary plane in the production of knowledge, embodiment and affect might offer means of cultivating ethical dispositions to the environment. This wager for the senses and emotion resonates with the argument political philosopher Jane Bennett makes in *The Enchantment of the Modern World*, where she underscores that any *ethical* action is predicated on *somatic* experience: a process of becoming affected by another's life through processes of sensory and emotional opening. The Latin etymology of *condolere* (where *com* means "with, together" and *dolere* means "to grieve") demonstrates how sensorial attunement is a condition for compassionate attention to others' wellbeing, since a genuine expression of condolences at another's pain entails a suspension of "somatic inertia" and a channeling of affect into bodily gestures that manifest a disposition toward an ethics of care for nonhuman bodies, that is, those vibrant entities previously grouped under the term "nature."[6]

Understanding how sensorial attunement might inspire acts of care raises questions about what aesthetic forms and somatic experiences might kindle kinder dispositions to the world by reorienting the senses in ways that open onto the environment as a porous realm where multitudinous bodies and matter constantly affect and permeate each other in and beyond the structures of containment and enclosure forged in the mold of human supremacy over allegedly passive nature. In this chapter, I bring these concerns to bear on the lives and wellbeing of rivers compromised by processes of contamination, industrialization, and urbanization inherent in the Anthropocene by asking: What aesthetic forms render porous the boundaries between subject and object to approximate ways of being river that bring human and nonhuman bodies of water closer together? How do aesthetic forms appeal to somatic experiences that reveal the ways that humans and rivers affect each other and foster a more-than-human understanding of ecological wellbeing?

Situated in the blue humanities, this inquiry also plots recent shifts in Latin American cultural studies as it incorporates ecocritical perspectives that orient analyses of canonical and emerging production in the arts toward the environment and its related philosophical, political, social, and economic paradigms, creating confluences of planetary debates around the Anthropocene and the regional contexts of cultural production.[7] In what follows, I examine fluvial motifs in works by the Peruvian poet Javier Heraud, moving beyond their biographical and geopolitical valences to identify "ambient poetics" that evoke worlds where rivers are producers—not objects—of landscapes.[8] Then I explore sound works by the contemporary Colombian artist Leonel Vásquez, considering how he mobilizes embodiment and enchantment to encourage ethical dispositions to contaminated river flows through somatic experiences of listening.[9] Ultimately, I contend that ambient poetics and sensory attunement articulate a liquid ecological aesthetics that dislocates anthropocentric paradigms

by attending to the agency of rivers as active flows that move, sound, and sculpt other material bodies, and whose effects and affects cannot be fully predicted or harnessed by human reason or hydraulic infrastructure.

Humanist Rivers

On May 15, 1963, a 21-year-old man sunk lifeless into a hollowed-out canoe on a river near Puerto Maldonado in the Peruvian Amazon. Some thirty bullets had torn through the poet Javier Heraud, a lanky youth born in 1942 to a middle-class family from Lima and recognized as a literary prodigy for his five-poem debut, *El río* (The River, 1960), and second collection, *El viaje* (The Journey, 1961). After representing Peru's Progressive Social Movement at the World Youth Forum in Moscow, the young writer traveled around the USSR and Europe, returning to Peru briefly before taking up a scholarship to study film in Havana in 1962. Inspired by the Revolution, he traveled to the Peruvian Amazon via Bolivia to wage the emancipatory struggle in the ranks of the National Liberation Army. It was on this mission that he was killed in the Madre de Dios River at the hands of the state's Republican Guard.

Rivers run deep through Heraud's foreshortened opus, and critical literature widely considers them its "original metaphor," departing from humanist frameworks to read rivers as ciphers for his life, poetry, and political convictions.[10] The fact that, in "El río," the river metaphorizes human mortality has led to his whole oeuvre being interpreted, somewhat tragically, as "a permanent call to death."[11] Framed by the epigraph "Life descends like a wide river," which honors the Spanish poet Antonio Machado, the poem's nine stanzas trace the course of an unnamed river as it descends through fertile valleys, floods towns, and ultimately flows into the ocean where "all will dissolve / into an expanse of water / where another song or a poem / are but little rivers that flow down."[12] This biographical lens reads "El río" as the chronicle of a death foretold, proof that Heraud felt "fatefully destined to flow into the ocean" to whose vast archive of poetry he would only contribute "little rivers."[13]

Much as rivers flow across diverse geographies, so did postrevolutionary ideologies connect Latin American territories and cultural production in the 1960s and 70s. Heraud's own trajectory mirrors the shift from revolution in aesthetic form to revolution in praxis that Jean Franco identified in the wake of the Cuban Revolution. In his later work, rivers became sites where Heraud renegotiated his role as *poeta guerrillero* [guerrilla poet].[14] In "Explicación" [Explanation], a poem written in Havana, he describes his turn away from an intimate phenomenology of seasonal patterns and toward the political space of the plaza: "Before I spoke of the river and the mountains, / I sang to autumn, winter, / I cursed summer and its rituals. / I spoke, I travelled, I trod on other lands, / I said Peace in Moscow, in squares / in streets and on bridges. / Today, I am doing something else."[15] Heraud describes Cuba's influence as a "lightning flash," a temporal-climatic schism that impels him to fight to emancipate his "sad homeland" of empty squares, hunger, and entrenched inequality. By mid-1962, Heraud had adopted the nom de plume "Rodrigo Machado," channeling his poetic voice and the mass of revolutionary fighters into a single figure whose "age is unknown because he is as old as the struggle of his people." In a prose text also titled "Explicación" and penned in Havana in late 1962, he wagers that Machado's fight against imperialism might cost him his life, wondering: "Will hope keep him traveling or will he be buried in some river bed that has dried up completely?" Metaphorizing the river as the lifeblood of revolutionary struggle, Heraud ultimately rejects the "desiccation" of political commitment, writing: "No, but rivers of life, of

hope, will keep flowing in crystalline torrents. Because in the river is the life of a man, of many men, of a people, of many peoples."[16]

Alongside these biographical and political readings, liquid flows and climatic phenomena also operate as humanist metaphors in Heraud's meta-poetic work. "Arte poética," a three-stanza piece composed between Madrid and Havana in 1961–62, describes poetic maturity as a hydraulic operation that staunches free-flowing words. He alludes to his early practice of filling "hundreds and hundreds / of useless pages" with gushing verses that "'issue from my hand / like the spring that toppled / the old cypress trees on my street.'"[17] The poem "Solo" [Alone], published in *El río*, epitomizes this style, where loose streams of words—"In the mountains or the sea / feeling alone, air, wind, / … Rain, wind, cold"—convey solitary, sensorial immersion in the environment without organizing its components into any overarching narrative. In stanza two, water is no longer the metaphoric substance of poetry, since writing becomes "potter's work" with "clay that cooks between hands, / clay shaped by quick fires." After articulating his transition to *poeta guerrillero*, Heraud deploys his new process in the final stanza, concluding: "And poetry is / a marvelous lightning flash / a rainfall of silent words / a forest of heartbeats and hopes / the song of oppressed peoples / the new song of liberated peoples."[18] Harnessing the "hydropower" of streams of words and climatic flows, Heraud's tree-toppling verses and intimate phenomenological experiences are supplanted by a carefully confected ecosystem, one where poetry composes nonhuman forces and matter into an emancipatory landscape that augurs collective political change.

Overflows

While rich in insights into Heraud's poetics and politics, the analyses above enclose rivers in anthropocentric paradigms. However, in "El río" Heraud's rivers exceed humanist framings since the poem's form and content invoke the river, not as a passive body or resource available for extraction (whether material or poetic), but as an active subject whose liquid mass sculpts the territories it flows through—sometimes with devastating consequences.

Fluvial agency in "El río" transpires through several means. The poetic subject resists any simplistic reading of the river as a mere double of Heraud, since the insistently repeated first-person assertions "I am a river / I am the river" stage ontological slippages between poet and river, subject and object, that limit the anthropomorphizing of nonhuman flows. The repetition of the verb "sing" and the noun "song" give the river's voice a performative dimension during the hydrological cycle, until its "furious shouts" are silenced as they pour into the ocean. The poem's content remains focused on the river's sensorial and affective experiences of its descent. This is articulated through verbs that describe contact zones between hydrology and geology, infrastructure, and architecture as the river descends, slides, hurries, hits, floods, and travels, feeling its way through tenderness, generosity, anger, and fury. Heraud's attunement to fluvial movement recalls the somatic dimension that Bennett highlights as a prerequisite for ethical dispositions. Reason and moral codes alone do not induce ethical acts, which require a suspension of "somatic inertia" where "the will eventually arranges face, arm, legs, and voice into the expressions, gestures, and sounds of ethical acts."[19] As "El río" explores how the river composes and decomposes its affects as it moves through the landscape, a *somatic poetics* emerges that situates it as "vibrant matter" charged with life and, by extension, worthy of an ethics of care.[20]

In *Ecology Without Nature*, Timothy Morton advocates ambient poetics as a way of evading the reification of nature as an entity partitioned from culture, proposing "a materialist way of reading texts with a view to how they encode the literal space of their inscription—if

there is such a thing—the spaces between the words, the margins of the page, the physical and social environment of the reader."[21] In "El río," somatic and ambient poetics combine to further emphasize the river's agency. Poetic form emulates gravity's pull on water, mapping the reading experience onto the river's flow, and spacing out how the water sculpts and engulfs other bodies, liquifying boundaries between human and nonhuman bodies. In the first five stanzas, where the river is at altitude and gravity is strongest, short verses pull the eyes down the page at speed, limiting horizontal movements that would draw the reader's gaze through meandering turns from one line to the next. The repetition of the verb *bajar* [to descend] in the first stanza heightens this gravitational pull, while the formulation "voy bajando" underlines the river's will in its inexorable descent:

Yo soy un río,	I am a river,
voy bajando por	I flow descending through
las anchas piedras,	broad stones,
voy bajando por	I flow descending through
las rocas duras,	hard rocks,
[…]	[…]
Yo soy un río,	I am a river,
bajo cada vez más	I descend ever more
furiosamente,	furiously,
más violentamente	ever more violently,
bajo	I descend
cada vez que un	every time a
puente me refleja	bridge reflects me
en sus arcos.[22]	in its arches.

The river's unstoppable, violent flow also manifests in its refusal to be fixated as reflection on the bridge's arches, instead moving ever faster to escape this enclosure. This pitting of *material* flow against *pictorial* composition can be read as resistance to a mode of enframing prevalent in the landscape tradition where meandering rivers draw the gaze through picturesque but rather static scenes. Such scenes, of which Frederic Church's painting *Cotopaxi* (Ecuador, 1853) is emblematic, compose rivers in two senses: they harness flows into conventional *aesthetic* forms and channel their *affective* connotations into the calm waters of the picturesque regime. In Heraud's poem quite the opposite occurs. The river's hydropower cannot be harnessed but constantly decomposes the landscape, exerting hydrological force on geological matter and escaping infrastructural and architectural containment. This is anticipated by the adverbial descriptions of the river's furious and violent flow in the stanza cited above, then enacted in the flooding that occurs in the third stanza, where the river descends "with fury and with / rancor," shattering stones and inundating homes and bodies:

Los animales	The animals
huyen,	flee,
huyen huyendo	they flee fleeing
cuando me desbordo	when I overflow myself
por los campos,	across the land,
cuando siembro de	when I sow with
piedras pequeñas las	small stones the
laderas,	hillsides,

cuando	when
inundo	I flood
las casas y los pastos,	houses and pastures
cuando	when
inundo	I flood
las puertas y sus	doors and their
corazones,	hearts,
los cuerpos y	bodies and
sus	their
corazones.[23]	hearts.

The insistence on the river's material thrust—realized through the repetition of the richly sonorous pairing "cuando / inundo" [when / I flood]—emphasizes the undifferentiated violence it unleashes as it breaches its normal course, transgressing doors to merge nature with culture and engulfing hearts to churn water with blood. "It is here … / when I can / grab them by their blood / when I can / look at them from / inside," announces a river that is no longer the object of human optics, but a fluid gaze that permeates other bodies to grasp and view them from inside out.

Like the flowing mud in the viral video, Heraud's rivers overspill the conventional humanist framings that shape literary criticism. Reread in a materialist vein, amid the current onslaught of floods and mudslides, "El río" stages modes of being river whose volatile flows attest to contemporary ecological existence, where ontologies and matter do not congeal as fixed forms, but act unpredictably as they mold landscapes, here drying up, there overflowing in turbulent torrents.

Mimesis to Dynamis

In "Una piedra" [A Stone], published in *El río*, Heraud poses questions about the challenges and limits of environmental aesthetics: How can poetry distribute agency to nonhuman subjects beyond mimetic forms that merely enumerate natural features to make "pretty or sublime pictures of nature"?[24] Faced with a "cold, solemn" stone that has rolled down a hill and dropped into water, he yearns for attunement to its "voice," either by embodying it so it speaks through him or by hearing the testimony it articulates autonomously through movement. As he writes: "¡si pudieras hablar / en mi costado, / si pudieras cantar en / tu vertiente" [if only you could speak / in my ribs / if only you could sing as / you descend].[25] Heraud imagines the collapse of boundaries between human and nonhuman bodies, yet an incommensurable breach persists in the poem's speculative, subjunctive mode, isolating the stone's testimony from human perception.

The incommensurability that exercises Heraud is symptomatic of how the enshrinement of logocentricism and reason engendered a silencing of nonhuman bodies, whose voices were made inaudible to populations acculturated in urban modernity, although not, of course, to many Indigenous communities.[26] Exiting the sensorial impasse of this "mute world" requires alternate epistemologies and aesthetics that foster "communication, interferences, translation, distribution, passages and bridges" among diverse life forms, as Michel Serres notes.[27] Beginning in the 1960s, the Italian artist Guiseppe Penone created communicational channels to a geo- and hydrological time in which human history is but a grain of sand. He postulated that nonhuman agents have their own material aesthetics by asserting that "to truly sculpt

a stone, one must be a river," deploying this logic in his sculpture *Essere fiume* (Being river, 1981), for which he extracted rocks from river beds, carved them in ways that emulated the corrosive effects of flowing water, and then exhibited them on the gallery floor.[28] Georges Didi-Hubermann saw in this process a shift from mimesis to "a material ontogenesis of form, a dynamis of the river itself," where sculpture is not defined as the object produced, but as the process through which nature creates form.[29]

In his practice, the contemporary Colombian artist Leonel Vásquez also engages the dynamis of nonhuman flows by inventing ways of rendering the "mute world" of rivers and stones via acoustic embodiment, where sound is a channel for experiencing continuities between human bodies and bodies of water challenged by extractivism, contamination, climate change, and violence. He starts from the principle that stones and water are not silent, but that humans are actively engaged in masking their sounds. Positing silence and listening as political acts, his practice centers on making bodies of water audible and creating works that attune the senses to anthropogenic change. *Canto rodado*, an exhibition presented in 2019 in Bogota, is an ongoing project where Vásquez counters willful deafness by confecting devices that play the sounds of stones taken from Colombian rivers, tracing their courses and exploring anthropogenic impacts caused by political conflict, industrial activities, and climate-related alterations such as desiccation.[30] The title *Canto rodado* resists translation, since it plays with the two meanings of "canto rodado," which is the geological term for a smooth stone sculpted by water and, in its literal translation, means "rolled song." The project title thus both evokes the dynamic movement of the body of water that rolls the stone, shaping it over time, and attributes to geological matter a voice capable of expressing itself by singing, which opens the realm of aesthetic production to nonhuman entities.

The exhibition, spread out over two rooms, comprised one space that presented the project's research and fieldwork through photographs and films of rivers Vásquez visited and included a *Biblioteca de piedras cantoras* [Library of Singing Stones], where stones extracted from different rivers were arranged on shelves. The library was flanked on both sides by a *Canto rodado de una voz* (Rolled Song for One Voice, 2019; see Figure 24.1), an interactive sound sculpture on which visitors could "play" the singing stones. A second space housed an installation of one large sound sculpture and more than a dozen smaller ones organized in groups (Rolled Song, 2019; see Figure 24.2). Each sculpture features an electrically powered rotating mechanism connected to the turnstile, on top of which sits a stone that rotates like a record. Each also has different types of speakers and a unique needle, made of wood, plastic, or metal, which does not follow a set pattern of grooves as on long-play records, but moves in constantly changing paths across the surface of the stone. The sound sculptures are gramophones of sorts—a handcrafted wooden box equipped with a turntable, a needle made from metal wire, a rotating mechanism, and an amplifier that play the stones. The gramophone's rotations thus mimic the earlier gyrations in the river that sculpted the stone's form. Contrary to its role, along with film and the typewriter, as an augur of industrial modernity and the forward-looking temporality of progress, here the gramophone is synchronized with the expansive geo- and hydrological space-time of the river bed retro-engineered to serve as a bridge between the present age of ecological crisis and the voices and flows of primordial matter.[31] As the needles move irregularly along the edges and grooves of the water-sculpted rocks, their grating pitches "sing" each stone's geological core and eroded surface and, brought together in the installation, create a lithic symphony where stones sing their different rivers—generating a virtual hydrology that connects diverse rivers in a delta of sound.

Figure 24.1 Leonel Vásquez, *Canto rodado de una voz*, Casa Hoffman, Bogota, November 28, 2019 to February 12, 2020. Reproduced by permission of Leonel Vásquez.

Figure 24.2 Leonel Vásquez, *Canto rodado*, Casa Hoffman, Bogota, November 28, 2019 to February 12, 2020. Reproduced by permission of Leonel Vásquez.

Aesthetic Membranes, Viscous Beings

Vásquez's use of sound enables intensely embodied experiences that channel nonhuman matter and human bodies via acoustic and mechanical vibrations that flow through air and ear to let the outside in and others into the self through a process of "interpermeation," to use the feminist phenomenological thinker Astrid Neimanis' term.[32] According to Vásquez, "We are immersed in a world that expresses itself through sounds and that can hardly be silenced. … [where] we are tied to a body that is alive, life being synonymous to the vibration of matter."[33] In that assertion resides the critical thrust of his practice, which insists that just as human physiology cannot be muted, neither can subaltern bodies nor nonhuman matter. If silence does not exist as a physical state, then it is produced by "psychoacoustic masking"—acts of will and somatic disposition that have ethical implications insofar as they are decisions *not* to listen.[34] Bypassing the macro-scale devastation that typifies some Anthropocene aesthetics, Vásquez unmasks the voices of specific flows, regularly working with local communities who become participants in collective and performative acts of listening that probe confluences between their bodies and bodies of water. Using underwater microphones, he has recorded water polluted by lead, cadmium, metals, detergents, and other chemicals by mapping routes to sites of anthropogenic change, such as factories, waste dumps, and aqueducts, along a stretch of the notoriously contaminated Bogotá River, which he travels regularly to reach his home in Sibaté, on the outskirts of the Colombian capital.

By opening the senses to vexed flows, Vásquez encourages "enchantment" as a potential trigger for ethical dispositions toward them. "A river without memory is a river without identity, nobody's river," he has written, noting that the undifferentiated sound of polluted and unpolluted water "expresses hope for change."[35] The artist operates strategically in the sensorial disconnects between visibly polluted waters and their soothing sounds not to dismiss dirty flows as lost causes, but to stimulate attunement to water as a "hydrocommons" worthy of ethics of care that span aesthetic, judicial, and patrimonial realms.[36] A participatory project that epitomizes this strategy is *Memorias del Río Tunjuelo* (Memories of Tunjuelo River, 2016; see Figure 24.3), which addressed the soundscape of a tributary to the Bogota River as hidden heritage, deploying somatic aesthetics to incorporate abject flows into bodily circuitry and gestures. It comprised community workshops to record experiences, memories, and sounds of the polluted river, tracing it from the Páramo Sumapaz to the iconic Tequendama Waterfall, where dammed waters feed a hydroelectric plant, as well as the performance *Río móvil* (Mobile River, 2016; see Figure 24.4), in which participants pushed along the river's course a gramophone mounted on wheels that reproduced its sounds and testimonies about it. By subverting modern hydraulic orders that purport to isolate filth from the senses and by staging acoustic leakages that mirror contamination-causing failures of infrastructure, Vásquez's works stimulate recognition of how these waters permeate human lives, encouraging identification with, rather than silencing of, nonhuman matter.

Nature, whether polluted or pristine, is never *over there* but always *right here*. This statement—along with the assertions that we are all bodies of water and that subject-object dichotomies require dissolution—are close to becoming truisms of ecocriticism. But each statement comes with its own limits; differentiation is never entirely dissolved by material confluences of human and nonhuman flows. Precisely because "Water is always sometime, someplace, somewhere," fluidity is contingent, not absolute.[37] Something similar can be said of the ambient and somatic aesthetics in Heraud's and Vásquez's approximations of being river. Both eschew static forms and monolithic representations of water as extractible resource, instead recognizing rivers as sculptors of landscapes: the artifices of aesthetics of *dynamis* that materialize

Figure 24.3 Leonel Vásquez records sounds from the Tunjuelo River with project participants, 2016. Reproduced by permission of Leonel Vásquez.

Figure 24.4 Leonel Vásquez, *Río móvil*, 2016. Reproduced by permission of Leonel Vásquez.

in frictive encounters (rather than total permeations or containments) among liquid flows, hydraulic systems, and circulatory infrastructures.

Nevertheless, Heraud's and Vásquez's mediations of nonhuman flows have different intensities and porosities shaped by specific topographies of context and medium. Even as they speak to planetary concerns, the regional origins and ecocritical analyses of their works within Latin American cultural studies retain the sediments of geography and discipline that form the area's history. For instance, *El río* emerged when hydropower was in its infancy in Latin America and catastrophic flooding had not yet become a viral phenomenon—hence, the battlegrounds that shaped Heraud's work and its reception were ideological, not environmental. The ecocritical turn in Latin American cultural studies reframes *El río* to sound out its ambient poetics as a harbinger of now-frequent fraught encounters between human and nonhuman flows. Vásquez's work, by contrast, springs from "the idea that the catastrophe, far from being imminent, *has already taken place*" across multiple scales and locations.[38] Ethical implications are central, rather than tangential, to his ecologically engaged practice, since the artist draws strategically on the posthumanist and ecocritical currents that are reshaping the theoretical landscapes of cultural studies on a global scale, while he also engages communities and bodies of water imbricated in the specific ecological and post-conflict scenarios that affect hydropolitics in Colombia. With regards to aesthetic form, there are also striking differences between Heraud's and Vásquez's approaches. The former preserves conventional strategies of mimesis and semantic coherence that render the river's voice in an almost universal—rather than local and contingent—register, even as he seems to acknowledge the distance that anthropomorphism puts between the human and the nonhuman. The latter, by contrast, moves beyond the translation of the river into the nonverbal register of sound, seeking to create a sonic hydrocommons where river water and human voices are reproduced, as occurs in *Río móvil*, in which a single soundscape of vibrations is emitted and internalized across landscapes and bodies.

Works of art and poetry that experiment with being river thus operate as differential membranes that retain "viscous porosity," to use feminist philosopher Nancy Tuana's term, since they distribute agency to different degrees, making subject-object and nature-culture partitions more fluid without dissolving them entirely.[39] In its ecocritical turn, the field of Latin American cultural studies is also operating as a membrane—one permeated by theoretical currents from the planetary scale of the Anthropocene yet rooted in local topographies, hydrologies, and histories that shape cultural production, circulation, and reception. Together, such membranes offer rich opportunities for analyzing historical and contemporary paradigms that have framed water as resource and for elaborating alternate concepts of hydropower that recognize the agency of nonhuman flows by tracing how their aesthetics have emerged, and will continue to emerge, in states of flux and enclosure, just like bodies of water.

Notes

1 Numerous videos and photographs captured these dramatic scenes. For those described here, see: "Huayco se lleva dos camiones en Chosica—Lima, febrero 2017," YouTube, March 16, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEQPmBGWXPA.
2 Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 4
3 On the landscape concept in Western culture, see Cosgrove, "Prospect, Perspective," 45–62.
4 Latour, "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene," 3.
5 Latour, "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene," 15.
6 Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 134.
7 See Heffes (ed.), *Ecocrítica en América Latina*.

8 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 3
9 Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 131.
10 Sologuren, "Recuerdo de Javier Heraud," 10.
11 Goloboff, "Javier Heraud," 41–2. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. I have opted to include the original Spanish quotes from Heraud only when their translation is necessary for the argument.
12 Javier Heraud, *El río*, 35.
13 Goloboff, "Javier Heraud," 44.
14 Franco, "Modernization to Resistance," 77–97.
15 Heraud, *Javier Heraud: Poesía completa*, 269.
16 Heraud, *Javier Heraud: Poesía completa*, 266.
17 Heraud, *Javier Heraud: Poesía completa*, 273.
18 Heraud, *El río*, 37.
19 Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 134. The simple but illustrative example she gives is straightening one's back in a sign of respect.
20 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter.*
21 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 3
22 Heraud, *El río*, 25.
23 Heraud, *El río*, 27.
24 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 160.
25 Heraud, "Una piedra," *El río*, 36.
26 An eloquent recent example is the Mapuche man who "speaks water" in the film *El botón de nácar* (The Pearl Button, dir. Patricio Guzmán, 2015).
27 Serres, *Biogea*, 171.
28 Cited in Celant, *Giuseppe Penone*, 110.
29 Didi-Huberman, *Being a Skull*, 46.
30 *Canto rodado* was held at Casa Hoffman, Bogota, from November 28, 2019 to February 12, 2020.
31 Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter.*
32 Astrid Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 29.
33 Vásquez, "Give and Receive Silence," 132.
34 Vásquez, "Give and Receive Silence," 132.
35 Vásquez, "Río móvil"; Vásquez, "Give and Receive Silence," 138.
36 Of course, the "hydrocommons" is as much a philosophical and eco-aesthetic concept as a potentially operative legal one. On this, see Neimanis, "Bodies of Water."
37 Neimanis, "Hydrofeminism," 90.
38 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 28.
39 Tuana cited in Neimanis, *Hydrofeminism*, 89. Neimanis explores this "membrane logic."

References

Bennett, Jane. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.
Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.
Celant, Germano. *Giuseppe Penone*. Translated by Anne Machet. Milan/Paris: Electra-L. and Durand-Dessert, 1989.
Cosgrove, Denis. "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 10, no. 1 (1984): 45–62.
Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Being a Skull: Site, Contact, Thought, Sculpture*. Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2016.
Franco, Jean. "Modernization to Resistance: Latin American Literature 1959–1976." *Latin American Perspectives* 5, no. 1 (1978): 77–97.
Heffes, Gisela, ed. *Ecocrítica en América Latina. Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 49, no. 79 (2014).
Heraud, Javier. *Javier Heraud: Poesía reunida*. Lima: Peisa Bolsillo, 2016.
_____. *El río*. Lima: Peisa Bolsillo, 2011.
Goloboff, Gerardo Mario. "Javier Heraud: La palabra en su límte." *Hispamérica* 2, no. 4–5 (1973): 41–48.
Kittler, Friedrich. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Latour, Bruno. "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene." *New Literary History* 45 (2014): 1–18.
Morton, Timothy. *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
Neimanis, Astrida. "Bodies of Water, Human Rights and the Hydrocommons." *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 21 (2009): 161–82.
_____. *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
_____. "Hydrofeminism: Or, on Becoming a Body of Water." In *Undutiful Daughters*, edited by Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni, and Fanny Söderbäck, 85–99. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
Plumwood, Val. *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. London: Routledge, 2002.
Serres, Michel. *Biogea*. Translated by Randolph Burks. Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2012.
Sologuren, Javier. "Recuerdo de Javier Heraud." In *Javier Heraud: Poesía reunida*, 7–12. Lima: PEISA, 2016.
Vásquez, Leonel. "Give and Receive Silence." *Cuadernos de Música, Artes Visuales y Artes Escénicas* 14, no. 1 (2018): 129–143.
_____. *Río móvil*. http://www.leonelvasquez.com/obra/rio-movil/.
_____. Memorias del Río Tunjuelo. https://memoriasdelrio.wordpress.com.