Interview with Yayo Herrero[1]

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Jaime Vindel: The task outlined in this edition of *Re-visiones* is still in its early stages. It concerns how the theoretical frameworks in areas such as ecological economics, political ecology, decolonial ecologies or ecofeminisms, as well as the work already realised within in them, can be carried over and applied to the field of image-based critical thinking. The proposal we put forward opens up this possibility for art history and visual studies. With this in mind, we were very interested in putting some questions to Yayo Herrero, in order to discuss what progress has really been made within artistic practice, something which is often left out when reflecting upon these lines of work, and which we want to revive in this edition. Having set out these aims, we make the following suggestions to Yayo.

The first image I have chosen, *The Monuments of Passaic*, is a historic referent of the turn that comes about in contemporary art history with regards to how the relationships between art and nature are addressed. Traditionally, at least from the 18th and 19th centuries onwards, there was an overwhelmingly escapist sensibility that was reflected, for example, in the romantic composition of the landscape, and in the reconstitution of the links with nature, links that had been long lost as a result of industrialism. Smithson turns this all on its head, in order to ponder what kind of visual ecology we want to construct. As such, he does not shy away from industrialism's effects on civilisation – instead, he draws our attention to them. What is interesting about his view is the lack of any praise for productivism and industrialism, and the presence thus of a critique. Smithson had studied Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen's writings in depth, he was well-versed in various disciplines, and he had up-to-date knowledge about contemporary research in geology. Thus, he realised that both industrial civilisation and the field of representation had been neglectful of ecology.

Robert Smithson, *The Monuments of Passaic*, 1967.

Yayo, this specific experience that we put to you, the very title of which is somewhat ironic – the idea of *The Monuments of Passaic* refers, rather, to non-monuments – points to another side of industrial modernity, or the effects on the urban landscape caused by the development of infrastructures that, paradoxically, came about as symptoms of the downfall of industrial civilisation itself. The reflections offered by Smithson in the late 1960s, despite the fact he died young and did not get the chance to work up the whole project, were somewhat portentous, given that, subsequently, they were further evinced by the oil crisis in the early 1970s.

With this as our starting point for thinking about the issue of energy, the question we propose – which revisits the idea of walking – can be approached however you like, although I am particularly interested in thinking about matters concerning entropy and limits, the kind of questions that, generally speaking, are not often contemplated in our culture. But we can also veer towards the feminist approaches that are being constructed, based on a critical redefinition of the very concept of energy. A few days ago, I went over some seminars, from the past few years, on energy and gender and, as it happens, they highlight the fact that, in our view, energy is not only a physical concept, but also a culturally-constructed one: it responds both to productivist criteria and clearly gender-based criteria. It is so crucial to reflect on other stances that relate to the matter of energy, ones that not only have a democratic and sovereign component, but that also include, as in the previous example, the perspective of gender.

Yayo Herrero: I honestly think it's a really intriguing piece of work, for many reasons, and it also has elements that link it to what Belén suggested in terms of an anticolonial perspective. For example, I am very much drawn to how Smithson uses walking, the idea of walking itself as methodology. I love walking, and the sensation is completely different when you're walking along a forest trail, completely shrouded in that ecosystem, compared to when you're walking on a far wider path, or you're speeding down the road in a car. What I mean is that the speed you're travelling at, and the width of the path or road, is what determines your place as an observer. The faster you go, the more you perceive the landscape as being something external to you, something you just see with your eye. In other words, you miss the nuances, or rather you don't bother using your other senses for getting to know all of your surroundings. I believe this concept is typical of western culture, but also of patriarchal culture, understanding the patriarchy not as a system for men's domination over women, but rather as something that feeds into what Almudena Hernando was getting at in *The Fantasy of Individuality*, i.e. the illusion of an idea of emancipation that is built around three escape routes: living life emancipated from nature, emancipated from one's own body, and, in turn, emancipated from the body of others. That is, disconnected and absolved of all responsibility with regards to the body of others. For me, the patriarchal subject is whoever embodies the fantasy of this triple emancipation, a fantasy which is mostly carried out by men's bodies, but also other bodies, women's bodies or those bodies that rebel against such binary normativity.

So, on the one hand, the methodology of walking reminds me of a book by Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust*, a history of walking which also takes us on a tour around different life stories and people, all via the act itself of walking. In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley makes walking a fundamental aspect of the plot, as did Mary Wollstonecraft in her writing, and also Jane Austen, whose female protagonists often walk and walk as a key part of their connection with nature. On the other hand, the idea of focusing on the industrial areas, and not on a supposedly "natural" space, takes me back to Lorca's *Poet in New York*, in which he is immersed in looking at reality from inside the machine, from inside the industrial logic. Because when you look at and describe something, let's say the landscape, from within that industrial space, I think that the nature/culture dichotomy breaks down, in a rupture that forms part of the ecofeminist gazes, a rupture that, from my point of view, is crucial.

I've just read a great little book, which I highly recommend, called *The Word for Woman Is Wilderness* by Abi Andrews. This young English writer tells the story of a girl who attempts, in a markedly feminist, liberal and western approach, to emulate Thoreau, Chris McCandless and all those mountain-men like Walt Whitman, who, in some way, describe nature while

escaping from their own culture. The plot hints that, even from the conservationist perspective, the rupture between nature and culture has become further exacerbated, with nature being deemed the naturalised space exterior to the person, based on gender privilege. The great naturalists, those who have written about their forays into nature while abandoning western culture, have been mostly men who sought to strike up their own individual relationship with the wilderness. As a result, nature came to be depicted as something external, something to be conquered. Climbing a mountain is considered more worthwhile than ambling along a small forest path. This kind of relationship with nature, in which we observe it from an elevated vantage point, from the outside, reflects the eagerness to dominate it, and this emphasises the idea that human beings relate with nature from an external position, from a place of superiority in the extremes of western capitalist cultures, and from a place of instrumentality.

Let's go back to that powerful gaze that focuses on industrial ruins. After the vast urban sprawl, when the property bubble burst in 2007, there were some photographic projects that looked into so-called "modern ruins": all those skeletons of buildings that remained frozen in time, because there was no money left to finish them. The kind of ruins that you come across when you go to some small town and suddenly you are greeted with the skeleton of a vast new housing development that was meant to form part of the property speculation of the time, but instead is now a ruin, before it has even been built. Therefore, *The Monuments of Passaic* really was thought-provoking, for me.

I was also struck by the fact that the text alongside the images spoke about entropy. In western culture, which is so completely anthropocentric and illiterate in terms of ecology, concepts such as entropy, biodiversity, positive or negative feedback loops and homeostasis are tremendously difficult to get our heads around. Though we have the words to denominate a given concept, we need to spend a great many hours studying in order to really grasp what it means. This contrasts, for example, with what I have been able to learn about the Mapuche language, which has a way of constructing language and grammar in which the subject itself expresses the action; that is, the subject is the verb. In this language, the word biodiversity, within the very formulation of the word, explains this whole web of complex relations. Our culture, however, and I think this is very much linked with patriarchal organisation, has been built upon isolated elements, facts and subjects, and the links between them have been comprehensively disregarded or repressed. This causes us huge problems, and it means we have to invest a great deal of time in order to understand the links within nature or the links between people and processes. Just like these links, entropy, furthermore, entails something that is very hard to come to terms with in our culture: the idea of irreversibility. It is a hugely

unsettling idea, and people try to ignore it because once something is beyond repair, once it has irreversibly vanished, it's gone forever. This is why the law of entropy, even for people educated in natural sciences, is so difficult to understand. There is an almost anthropological kind of denialism about time's arrow, about things that change irreversibly, and which cannot be undone. In this sense, Newtonian physics still looms large, and irreversibility becomes incomprehensible.

Let's move on to think about the field of relationships – not the relations studied in the physical sciences, but rather in metaphorical terms. When we study, from ecofeminist perspectives, how a human group is maintained, how life is actively and intentionally sustained, there is a permanent energy flow of work. It is no coincidence that energy is measured in the same physical units as work. There must be a constant flow of energy if life is to be sustained. When that work, that flow of energy, is not put in, life deteriorates, and there is a breakdown in the complex relationships, meaning that life cannot thus be sustained. There is a flow of energy, in the form of work, that breathes life into societies or into human groups, and it constantly battles against dirtiness, illness, scarcity, insecurity. This workflow has mostly been contributed by women, and it has been made invisible. This is why the concept of entropy and complexity have always been, for me, such powerful ideas when working on the matter of how life is sustained.

Robert Smithson, when he talks about his own work in the text, claims that these pictures are clear proof of failed immortality. The patriarchal culture has long been a culture of permanent escapism, escapism from immanence, escapism from death. Death cannot be understood as a part of life if you consider it from a strictly individual perspective. It can only be understood within a complete cycle, the sensation that you are part of something greater. Essentially, many of these ruins, these industrial landscapes which end up dying and becoming a lasting expression that decays over time, are proof or relics of the failed pretensions of immortality. In the end, limits come into play: the physical limits of the Earth, the physical limits of life itself, limits as an inherent feature of life itself.

With regards to your question, Jaime, when you said that many of these concepts are inapprehensible and extremely difficult or almost impossible to come to terms with in the framework of cultural representations that we have at our disposal, I again began thinking about languages. This is not my area of expertise, but I am very interested in it. In particular, I was wondering how astronomy or the world is represented in other languages, such as those of indigenous peoples. These populations were in fact able to comprehend these terms, and they had the tools to represent them, albeit in a radically different linguistic framework, i.e. different with regards to

how they configure their thoughts. Their conceptualisation of cyclical time is represented in language by means of a grammatical structure completely unlike our own. In the West, these terms are only accessible if you make a huge effort to understand them. This is why I think artistic representation is key. My own education comes more from books, or visual sources, and there are gaps in my knowledge. At the moment I am trying to learn from Marta Tafalla's book, *Ecoanimal*, which I have found very helpful for thinking about plurisensoriality. By concentrating solely on the eye and the ear, precedence is given to the outside. However, developing other kinds of senses means we can grasp the idea of being *inside*, just like the little path, as opposed to the motorway from which we can see a magnificent landscape, but from the outside. Lewis Mumford and the ecologist Ramón Margalef both speak of how the lineal advance of industrial time has led to a significant loss in natural complexity.

J.V.: You've touched upon questions that I put to you in terms of this other project, which is related to a debate raging at the moment, not only in the field of art history, but also within aesthetics and visual culture: how do we make visible, how do we make palpable, how can we think via images, in order to directly affect corporality and agency in such a way that encourages people to rise up against something which they do not necessarily understand, such as global warming? We often sense the sheer unfathomable scale of the ecological crisis, but it is only at times like these when its presence is truly felt, in the form of heatwaves. Even so, artistic and cultural practices ought to play a fundamental role in this regard, both by raising awareness about the scale of the ecological or social crisis, and also by suggesting new kinds of agency, new forms of desire that allow us to move towards a shift in ecosocial justice. This is the other factor to bear in mind, because I think a certain utopian kind of imagination needs to be reactivated.

Y.H.: I totally agree. The idea of creating new desirable outlooks, which are compatible with the material reality, is fundamental. In the last few years, we have lived through a surge in dystopia. Despite the fact that dystopias are completely necessary, since they force you, sometimes pretty brutally, to face up to a reality that perhaps you don't want to see – I am mainly referring, here, to the reality of our western frameworks – they also run the risk of turning into something conservative. Their discourse might end up shoving you, somewhat conservatively, into that same dystopian narrative, so this is why the generation of these everyday utopian frameworks could help us see what a viable and sustainable future might be like. We really struggle to think of ourselves outside of capitalism, so much so that it is hard to imagine a good life, a dignified life, a desirable life, in a context that has to accept the finiteness of limits and the radical uncertainty to which we

are now clearly being subjected by the realities of climate change and the crisis in energy and resources.

I am currently working with Miguel Brieva and Kois Casadevante on a project we hope to set up. We think that, just as films such as Lars von Trier's *Dogma* set out a list of commandments to define a certain style of artistic creation, we could also set up a movement to create commandments for the sustainability life. This kind of guidance, once incorporated into processes of artistic creation, might encourage series, films or shorts to depict things like Emilio Santiago Muiño's idea of luxurious poverty, the interdependent workings of a consumer co-operative, or a space for shared caring, as common, desirable frames of reference. I think we really need something like this.

J.V.: One idea I've been obsessed with lately is that sometimes, in ecologism, I think we replicate a certain commonplace of the left. In other words, we believe that there isn't much general awareness about the crisis, and so we reckon it's enough just to flag up its historical and structural causes. Undoubtedly, there is always work to be done in that sense, but what most surprises me is the sensation that these dystopias really have made an impact, and there is actually a certain social awareness about the fact that we are in a grave, historic situation, from an ecosocial perspective, and this is also now embedded in TV series, in the shared imaginaries. In *Years and Years*, a near-future dystopia about the crises in post-Brexit Britain, people openly talk about the kind of ecocides and genocides that might well be awaiting us more or less imminently. And yet, despite these cultural products and news stories about the melting of the polar icecaps, we stick firm to our position as spectators, when, in fact, we really need to take action from a different place. As such, I do think imagination can have an important role because, at times, the problem is not so much a lack of awareness about what's going on, but rather our not being able to find the means to change the situation we are living through.

Y.H.: I agree with what you're saying, but I do think there has been huge progress, albeit insufficient, in the "rational" perception of the crisis, perhaps even more so than the ecological movement itself can perceive. But we still do not worry about the crisis. We can acknowledge how it conditions the economy, or that it has a bearing on forced migrations, yet there is a kind of original sin in our culture, i.e. the lack of any sense of belonging to nature or to a common network that sustains us. This prevents us from connecting what we already know about the issue with the genuine need to make changes that will ensure our survival.

J.V.: I think there is widespread inertia, which has to do with people's behaviour and the imaginaries they now accept as true. So it's really complicated.

Belén Romero: I'd like to add, regarding dystopias, how necessary they are in the context of the western gaze, and our situated bodies. This is unlike regions in the global South, such as Latin America, where essentially they do not think about dystopian futures because they have been living, for a long time now, in a dystopian present, in terms of their own territories and ways of living. While, here, the dystopian aesthetic might be necessary for imagining not only the immediate future but also the present, over there, it is set aside. When I worked in Mexico, involving the women of the Mazahua people, and specifically the actions of the Zapatista Army of Mazahua Women in Defence of Water, I saw how, in their struggles for their territory, for the place they call home, they decided, from the outset, to carry out what we might refer to as street performances. Their marches, their concentrations, their wooden rifles, their traditional clothes and capes, bursting with colour, are all a strategy which they saw as far more effective than merely pointing out what was happening in their territories with regards to the dams, the flooding, the lack of a water supply in their homes and all the ransacking of their lands. In other words, the kind of dystopian future that is depicted via the aestheticisation of violence and suffering, which for us might be helpful at some point, is not helpful for these women – as in other contexts of the South, it is not a useful, attention-grabbing strategy for them. Thus, to try to change the imaginaries, they propose alternatives to this regime of meaning, ones which are completely different, and more directly proactive.

Y.H.: I remember an international meeting I went to, for discussing all kinds of global issues, and a Mapuche woman was there, of the Mapuche people who live within the borders of Chile. There was a debate going on about various different collapses, and at one point this woman spoke up to say "look, I live in a territory that collapsed over 500 years ago, and yet here we are, still debating the matter". I belong to the kind of social ecologism that is considered tremendously radical, but there is also a patriarchal and colonial gaze therein, regarding the collapse.

J.V.: Eurocentric, too.

Y.H.: Yes, of course. A racist and patriarchal gaze that you notice when you're working with a group and some of them, usually those who work in and around matters of the collapse, say "we're running out of time" or they ask "how much time have we got left?". My response is always: "time for what, exactly?". So many lives have already collapsed. The collapse is relived as a phenomenon detached from nature itself and bodies, as a kind

of button you just press. What people really mean when they say "collapse" is the arrival of the effects of a totally destructive model, one that threatens to declare war on the ways of life of the privileged places. I've been reading and working for a long time now about realities that are so awful, so utterly brutal, that when it comes to picking a film or doing an activity, if somebody suggests watching a completely dystopian documentary or film, my immediate reaction is just to say no. It's not that I only want to look at nice things – it's just that, in my day-to-day life, I spend so much time absorbed in all of this stuff, and I'm completely conscious of it, so I also need to allow myself beautiful things, real ideas for the future. This is why I think that ecofeminist perspectives – I'll come back to what Belén was saying about the terminology – are so powerful, because what they do is place your feet and body right into people's day-to-day lives. That way you realise that, even if humanity does not have one single global experience of collapse, there are many humanities and peoples in the world who do have local experiences of resilience, and of escaping from incredibly difficult situations. So if I can take strength from this, then the many people who have been enduring dystopian situations, for many decades, will undoubtedly get through it too. Even in the peripheries of our cities, we can see how this symbology is being constructed, such as by the PAH, the platform for people affected by evictions. I also remember a campaign called *Hagámosle el amor al miedo* ("Let's make love to fear"), by a group of Colombian women who played around with the idea of fear, in order to turn it into something else, there in a tough, paramilitary-controlled area. I think they're mechanisms – I wouldn't call them defensive, and by no means escapist – but they're mechanisms for sheer survival, and for the creation of meaningful life, even in awful situations.

B.R.: Yayo, as you saw in the open call, we also wanted to focus on the importance of a decolonial approach. In the proposal we sent to you, there were two reasons behind this. Firstly, for understanding how coloniality works not only in an outward direction, but also from the outside-in, since working on this issue as if it were something that only happens to other people, elsewhere in the world, did not seem like a wise starting point. That is, we want to highlight how coloniality runs through our bodies, how it runs through our houses, our lives, our general environment, and also how it permeates us, from what we eat and wear, to how we breathe. Secondly, the other matter that we want to look into is how, today, the ecological, ecofeminist, theory-based, and activist movements in the global North are now focusing on the kind of relational ontologies, as Arturo Escobar calls them, that suggest a continuity between nature and culture, and even with worlds that we could call supernatural. Ultimately, these ontologies are the basis of the age-old struggles for their territories, for their lives. All these proposals that are coming up are not only interesting, but they should genuinely be considered. Even so, we wonder how exactly we might bridge

the gaps between these very different ways of thinking and learning. With this in mind, the first question I put to you is about the increasingly prominent role of women in the struggles against extractivism in the global South, and whether you think this is something new, or whether it comes from the media and people within academia who research this topic, with their differing interests.

Y.H.: Based on the exchanges I've had with women, and with collectives, particularly in Latin America, which is where I've had most contact, I don't think the participation of women in the social movements there is anything new at all. When you look back, you can see that, even at other times in history, women have played a strong, central role in these kinds of movements. I really like the analysis and work they do in the collective Critical Perspectives on Territory based on Feminism [*Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo*], who work mainly in Ecuador. They say that the neo-extractivist strategy is just a new version of the same old patriarchal oppression, and that the arrival of the large transnational extractivist businesses, ruled by the logic of what Amaia Pérez Orozco calls the *BBVA-h* type of man[2] - also heteropatriarchal – is just a resignification of the patriarchal relationship. These transnationals make decisions about the territory, and they establish dynamics of co-optation and alliance with the local patriarchies themselves. That is, in some way, the local men of these communities are the ones who are co-opted, by offering them jobs, resulting thus in the expulsion of women from any of the spaces where decisions are made, spaces that they used to occupy. Looking deeper into this dichotomy between the productive and the reproductive, a classic of capitalism and western culture, the production space is geared towards monetisation, while everything else is left out of this space. Those who enter this space are white, male subjects, from communities which, one way or another, are the owners, promoters or leaders of the neo-extractivist dynamic. What this feminist collective suggests is that this dynamic ends up disrupting the cycles of the reproduction of life – I refer to the social reproduction as a whole, which includes everything related to production and the prior reproduction – and this is of great importance in terms of economics, since it clearly reformulates the space of what is called "work", what has to be done in order to sustain life, and what is forced out of the economy per se. They also reformulate the space for decision-making, since it becomes greatly masculinised, and the bodily dimension of it gets exploited, whereby the territory and the women's bodies both end up becoming a space to be conquered and dominated. Their discourse highlights the fact that these dynamics have forcibly led to women's organisations taking greater precedence and becoming more visible in these territories. This is why looking at resistance movements in other communities is so important.

For us in Spain, we feel greatest affinity with those in Latin America, because of the language. However, the imaginaries in Africa, and the movements of African women and communities are just phenomenal. There are collectives in this country too, such as Afroféminas, made up of Afro-descendant women who reject and fight back against the racist dynamics of the feminist movement itself, and I really value their work. So, to sum up, I don't think women's movements are anything new. But I do think that right now, at a time when the neo-extractivist dynamic is taking on a new specific character in terms of the vast architectures of impunity that are holding up the free trade agreements, militarisation, commodification and even security itself, women's movements like these acquire great strength, and their confrontations are far more visible. Afterwards, from here, we look over there – but the colonial logic runs deep within us. That is, even in our academic spaces, the voices of these women are pilfered; in their own contexts, they are the protagonists of these processes, while here their actions are subsequently reinterpreted, reconstructed and retheorised using the typical western logics.

One product of the colonial gaze is the emergence of dual classifications, split between apparently "essentialist" gazes on the one hand, and "constructivist" ones on the other. The spirituality or interpretation as realised by women in indigenous communities, the rural peasant women (the *campesinas*) in Latin America, is actually constructivist when considered from a gaze other than our own. Capitalism has also created a religious side, in the form of the sacredness of money. This, in the epistemological framework of western culture, is perceived as entirely rational and objective. One thing I've learnt over the years is that whenever we define a social movement, namely one outside of our territories, as essentialist, then we have to look into the racism and coloniality that underlies such a qualification. Therefore, we have to revise our own gazes. I really like how you put it, Belén, because I think that the decolonial perspective not only helps us analyse a system of domination of the global North over the global South, but also the system of domination and coloniality that resides within us. Before the historical colonisation of Latin America, there was also a colonisation of the very gaze upon nature, upon the West's own culture. Silvia Federici and Maria Mies have made interesting contributions in this regard.

I try to be somewhat careful when working on the decolonial gaze, when interpreting what is going on in Latin America, because I think there are already so many really impressive women doing that work. Instead, I am trying to listen to and learn from them, since they have many more tools and their own powerful voice for describing their reality and their own emancipatory processes. More than anything, this has been helpful – both for me, and for the collectives of which I am a member – to encourage us to

look inside ourselves, to try and find those tiny parts of us, or not-so-tiny parts of us, that are racist, colonial and misogynistic. Also, it has really helped me rethink and reapproach Spain's gypsy culture in a different way, which is a phenomenon of exclusion that is all around us here, yet we turn a blind eye.

B.R.: That's right, it permeates us completely, our subjectivity, our bodies – it's so prevalent in our life habits and uses that we don't even realise it's there. You have to be constantly alert.

Y.H.: In your outline, earlier, you were asking about the issue itself of terminology. In Latin America there are many women who do not want to call themselves feminists or ecofeminists, and they reject the idea itself of ecologism, seeing it as something entirely alien to their culture. If you come from a cosmovision that is not traversed by the western dichotomy of culture versus nature, then the very concept of nature is a colonial, imposed concept, which leads me back to the work of Smithson that Jaime sent over. The idea of nature as that which is wild, as that last natural bastion, separated from culture, is such a western concept, and it does not apply to other cosmovisions, nor does it make any sense in them. We have met other women's collectives who talk more about territorial feminisms and communitarian feminisms, and sometimes they don't even talk about any feminisms at all, preferring to makes use of their own emancipatory processes, reflecting on how to build a good life, one that is included in a community and nature, that is, within a natural environment from which you cannot be separated, and of which you form an inherent part. In this sense, I think that academia often operates as a homogenising, colonial element, which seeks to position you in a certain space that can be labelled by a single word that encompasses a given concept. Therefore, I think we need a great deal of heterodoxy in terms of the terminology, because, if not, we have no way of understanding each other. I can call myself an ecofeminist, or rather I've been labelled as such, and it's something that, here, can be useful for me in order to talk to certain people. But, for example, when I go to a little town or when I speak with the trade union members of a car company, this pigeonholing is not useful at all, because it immediately puts up a barrier, which is not ideal when you're trying to build bridges. In terms of reaching sustainability, we must put these terms and this classifying dynamic to one side, and instead be greatly heterodox.

The whole debate, which becomes heated at times, about degrowth and a certain part of the Green New Deal seems so futile to me – if you want to affect the land and the bodies that you refer to, it's just far easier to build bridges. When I want to think like an activist, about how to defend a forest or a certain territory, I realise that, in the end, the whole range of cultural practices, with their varying representational frameworks, often resort to

the same acts of resistance, such as hugging a tree. This action has been realised by so many, such as the forest-dwelling women described by Agarwal, and by women in Latin America, even by Baroness Thyssen when she clung onto the trees on the Paseo de Recoletos, in Madrid. My point is that, sometimes, the academic side ends up digging itself into various trenches, from which it is hard to understand each other. That's why I mentioned that I've been trying to think about how best to explain what ecofeminism is, that is, how it has been constructed in the West, if only then to say that this trench-like model is pretty useless if you want to apply this academic knowledge and genuinely try to transform reality. There is a part of academia that has always taken pleasure in just knowing things, but has not felt the calling to transform realities. Because when your vocation is to transform, the sometimes incredibly violent space, i.e. that of "I am sticking here, within this conceptual field, and it's my own work so I shall defend it to the death and you don't belong in it so I will call you essentialist", ensures that the realm of knowledge and science, rather than being a space for bridges and encounters, turns into a space for domination and disagreement.

B.R.: A while ago, Jaime and I were saying that, today, there are more and more academic articles that label, define and classify in some way. I don't think it's a bad thing that such terms are used, as long as there is recognition of the fact that they come from the individual's interpretation. It does actually annoy me, a bit.

Y.H. Yes, me too.

B.R.: That's why I was interested in having this critical dialogue with you, because I'm worried that a certain epistemic violence is once more being reproduced, powerfully so, which goes hand-in-hand with the coloniality of the gaze that still persists in research articles and other academic works, those which restrict themselves to academic box-ticking. If we keep using the same Eurocentric analysis methods, and we spend all our time labelling and classifying, then we water down and anaesthetise the aspirations of those involved in the struggles to defend their territory and the sustainability of life, struggles which are long-established, and which are clearly very different to the ones we have here. They form part of a long history, based on a cosmovision and with cultural constructions like those you mentioned earlier. So I ask myself: are we making the same mistakes? To what extent is this work really seeping into the collective subjectivity in the global North? Is it effective enough to allow us to build the bridges we need to build?

Y.H.: I think about my own personal process, the path I have taken since I started out. I joined the anti-racist movements when I was fourteen, later

the trade union movement, with an ecological slant, and this particular sphere, the one under discussion here, I joined later, almost out of sheer necessity, after having seen what was going on, and trying to fill in the gaps so I could understand a more global system of relations. What I've found is that I now have less and less legitimacy – not that I ever had much of it, to be honest – to speak on behalf of anybody. I fully recognise that I must clearly set out who I am and where I am speaking from, or at least I personally feel the need to do so. That is, I am a person, a straight, white woman; I spent most of my life in the city until recently, when I moved somewhere more rural; I lived through times of extreme precariousness in my childhood and youth, but not anymore. It's crucial that you are completely open and honest, at least with yourself, about where you're coming from, with regards to what you know. As an activist, what I am most interested in, with regards to the work of ecofeminism (however we define the term), is that of the critical analysis of the western cultural framework. My own approach to activism is really about how to fundamentally change imaginaries and ways of living, right here, where I live, and where the strongest logics of domination arise. The way I approached the gazes of other communities of people, with other cosmovisions, was first to try to understand, and then listen and try to learn. I see, and I feel, that here, in our context, the rupture in relations, the illusion of immortality, of transcendence, of individuality, has been so strong that, having seen other cultural systems in which it does not work like this, I think there is a great deal we can learn, without transposing, like some kind of UFO, certain fantastical dynamics and cosmovisions that do not exist. There is perhaps one side of South-North cooperation, and epistemologies, that might be extremely useful for us. For example, well-explained approaches - because not everything can be easily turned into a snappy label, brand or trend – such as that of the sustainability of life, are far more helpful. From my own experience, it's easier to form connections with those collectives who do not engage with the labels ecodependence, interdependence and the sustainability of life, instead of other logics. I get the sensation that, by talking about the sustainability of life, it builds a bridge of respect, because life is sustained in different ways in different places, and so there is no place for overarching masterclasses or dominating epistemic gazes. When trying to build bridges, this more grounded kind of approach is far more effective than any other.

B.R.: I've taken the same path. I started researching ecofeminisms, and I ended up veering towards issues around the sustainability of life. In other words, I set the sustainability of life as the focal point, as the only real way for us to build those much-needed bridges, via processes of translation. This explains the intercultural vocation that we suggested, based on translation processes, of course not translation in the literal sense. That's why I put those images to you.

Y.H.: That's the part of translation that Boaventura de Sousa Santos speaks about so much, phenomena in which there are many concepts that need to be translated. Some cases, such as the debate between degrowth and the Green New Deal, beyond any political opportunity or electoral campaign, need to be grounded. The other day I had a meeting with Héctor Tejero. At first I thought he had come looking for confrontation, but it was actually really easy in the end, because we established what things mean - we grounded them. Another thing is, within the sphere of political practice, depending on everybody's place and the options on offer, we must explore all avenues, and try to come up with new ideas and somehow convince others to get involved. That's why I think feminism, as a movement in general, looking beyond its internal disagreements, is very helpful in terms of its reasoning about bodies and specific lives. The focus on the day-to-day, on life as it is lived, is, in any case, a great contribution from feminism, despite the fact that there are indeed some awful feminist dynamics out there, such as the most liberal kinds of feminism, that point us in a direction that, for me at least, is far less helpful.

B.R.: This is exactly the debate I wanted to put to you, through both the image of *La Virgen del Cerro* ["The Virgin of the Hill"], a painting by an anonymous 18th century artist, and the performance of the same name by María Galindo (2010), which could be interpreted as an act of counter-visuality. Also, the graphic images by Vanessa Cárdenas, featuring women in the Ecuadorian Amazon who are fighting against the exploitation of hydrocarbons and oil.

Anonymous, *La Virgen del Cerro*, 18th century / María Galindo, Mujeres Creando, performance, 2010.
Source of the second image: https://youtu.be/hE680ObcxmU

Y.H.: That performance is incredible.

B.R.: The mine in the famous Cerro Rico, the hill depicted in the painting, is thought to be the oldest mine that is still being exploited. These days it is a tin mine, because the silver there has been depleted. So, in a way, there is a certain release, that notion of breaking free from all colonial, patriarchal, capitalist logic, but it also includes, at the same time, an interesting exercise in translation, all grounded, as you put it, in a street market in La Paz.

Y.H.: Furthermore, it's proposed as a decolonial exercise, or at least that's how I've interpreted it, based on bridge-building. In other words, María Galindo knocks down the columns. Clearly, the only act of violence in the painting's transformation is the knocking-down of the two columns of power, smashing them to pieces. Taking the crown, and bringing it down to the people, represents the redistribution of power. The way she undresses God, and Christ, is just incredible; she undresses and feminises the angels, with women's bodies; she takes the gold from the dove of the holy spirit and she moves the sun and the moon to a higher position. She does not just turn the whole thing on its head by elevating to a place of power that which was previously at the bottom – instead, she sets up a dialogue.

I also really like the images you sent, by the other artist. Yesterday, I was working on the idea, within ecology, of the trophic pyramids, and it's just so completely hierarchical and patriarchal. These diagrams show the food chain, with the human being at the top, as an omnivore who directly makes the decomposers disappear. However, Vanessa Cárdenas's images of that land, surrounded by women in a circle, in a cycle, makes me wonder: couldn't the trophic pyramid be drawn in a circular and cyclical way, so that it is far more scientific and comprehensible? The representational frameworks of biology itself, in order to explain something that is inherently interconnected and cyclical, instead of using circularity, instead resort to the pyramid, to the hierarchy. This morning, when I was looking over these questions, I started thinking that working in terms of circularity, not only within artistic representation, but also in a textbook in which food chains are explained, takes your head somewhere completely different.

Vanessa Angie Cárdenas Roa, *Niñas del Río* (2017) and *Mujeres tejiendo territorio* (2014).

B.R.: In fact, the reading of that 18th-century painting is triangular and hierarchical, and top-down. María Galindo decomposes that hierarchy, and she realises a circular reading.

Y.H.: And who does she put at the bottom? She replaces the figures of power – the Pope, the bishop, Carlos V – with the body, the territory; that is, she situates the relations at the bottom, in the end.

B.R.: She deconstructs it, then builds something completely different, something that makes so much sense, and is easy to understand, so that the information reaches you straight away.

Y.H.: I've made a note of it; I want to use it one day in class, because it's just so powerful.

B.R.: I used these images in my doctoral thesis[3], and I immediately thought of them as an interesting way of bringing up certain questions for this interview.

Y.H.: I'd love to read your thesis, Belén.

J.V.: Well, if you like, we can carry on with this conversation another day. But, for now, thank you so much, Yayo, for your time.

Y.H.: Thank you both; I've really enjoyed it.

Notes

[1] Video interview: https://youtu.be/pwq1g0IDEOc

[2] For Amaia Pérez Orozco, the initialism *BBVA-h* is shorthand for referring to a certain dominant category of person, invariably *blanco* (white), *burgués* (middle-class), *varón* (male) and *adulto* (adult). The extra *h* is for heterosexual (or perhaps heteropatriarchal, as suggested above). Note that BBVA is the name of a major Spanish bank. See Pérez Orozco, Amaia (2014), *Subversión feminista de la economía: Sobre el conflicto capital/vida*. Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños / Mapas, p. 19. [Translator's Note]

[3] *Maniobras ecológicas. Prácticas artísticas y culturales de re-existencia pensadas desde el Sur*: https://roderic.uv.es/handle/10550/58126