

Constitutional and Ecological Entanglements in Contemporary Chile

Paul Merchant

University of Bristol, UK

Abstract The outbreak of protests known as the *estallido social* in Chile in late 2019 and early 2020 sparked widespread demands for a new constitution to replace the one implemented by dictator Augusto Pinochet in 1980. While ultimately unsuccessful, many of these initiatives employed inventive and creative methods to challenge the role of the non-human environment within the country's constitutional framework. Engaging with thinkers such as Bruno Latour and Eduardo Gudynas, this chapter examines contemporary Chilean cultural production that advocates for a new, interconnected constitutional settlement.

Keywords Constitution. Archipelagic thought. Chile. Bruno Latour. Delight Lab. Estallido social.

Summary 1 Constitutional Derangement. – 2 Delight Lab: Projecting Alternative Futures. – 3 An Archipelagic Constitution?

1 Introduction

On 14 October 2020, a group of women in black mourning clothes processed to the waterfront in the Chilean port of Valparaíso, where they held a symbolic funeral for the Chilean constitution, copies of which were thrown into a boat alongside fragments of text indicating ideas and social norms that the group wished to consign to the past (among them *patriarcado* and *machismo*). The act was accompanied by chants such as “Sin libertad, sin igualdad, no hay derechos ni dignidad. Regresa por donde viniste. Hoy, hundimos el miedo” (Without freedom, without equality, there are no rights or dignity. Go back to where you came from. Today, we drown fear).¹ The boat then left the pier and made its way out to sea, where, implicitly if perhaps not physically, the offending texts were consigned to the deep.

This performance was the work of LasTesis, a Valparaíso-based feminist group which shot to international prominence in November 2019 with *Un violador en tu camino*, a street performance addressing the complicity of the state and society in perpetuating rape culture (for an analysis of the transnational impact of this performance, see Martin, Shaw 2021). This action was just one of many artistic interventions in Chilean public space since the *estallido social*, or social uprising, of October/November 2019. The immediate causes of this extraordinary social movement, which led to a Constitutional Convention and a proposed replacement for the current constitution (which dates from the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet), might not appear at first glance to be related to the climate crisis or other ecological issues. The rejection of the proposed new constitution in September 2022 moreover leaves the path forward unclear.² This chapter argues, nonetheless, that the ecological focus of many artistic initiatives that emerged in the run-up to or as part of the social movement towards a new constitution merits close attention, not least because these initiatives challenge the peripheral status accorded to ecological concerns in the current constitutional framework, and suggest a more holistic view of human entanglement with the nonhuman world. In interventions by the artistic collective Delight Lab, and in works such as the documentary *Alas de mar* (Mülchi) and *Archipiélago* (Godoy, Lértora and Agosín), a questioning of hegemonic modes of aesthetic representation in the context of ecological crisis can be viewed as a call for a new, ecological constitutional settlement that may yet be answered.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the Author.

² At the time of writing (October 2024), the July 2022 constitutional draft had been rejected in a plebiscite, as had a second, much more conservative draft (in a referendum in December 2023).

2 Constitutional Derangement

A focus on artworks and artistic interventions which call into question the possibility of representation might seem to sit awkwardly with the contention that the same works point their viewers towards the possibility of a new, ecological constitutional framework. After all, do not all (democratic) constitutional processes and structures entail a degree of representation? Bruno Latour engages with questions of representation in his influential positing of a new Constitution, to replace the modernist Constitution that “saw debates over ecology merely as a mixture to be purified, a mixture combining rationality and irrationality, nature and artifice, objectivity and subjectivity” (Latour 2004, 129). Latour’s definition of representation is, however, characteristically idiosyncratic: in the glossary provided for *Politics of Nature*, two senses of the word are provided. The first is “one of the two powers of (political) epistemology which forbids all public life, since subjects or cultures have access only to secondary qualities and never to essences”. The second is “the dynamics of the collective which is re-presenting, that is, presenting again, the questions of the common world, and is constantly testing the faithfulness of the reconsideration” (248).

Latour’s constitutional proposal is, as the capitalized orthography of his Constitution suggests, more concerned with the high-level, metaphysical organization of knowledge and life than with the possibility of specific, located constitutional reforms. The two ‘houses’ described in his proposed constitution are given the daunting task of composing a common world, and Latour makes clear that he regards the terminology of parliamentary democracy as ‘outdated’ and simply playing the role of “a white flag waved in the wind so that we can finally negotiate” (2004, 165). The simultaneous specificity and abstraction of Latour’s proposal, then, make it of limited use for an analysis of a specific case of potential constitutional change in Chile. It is striking, moreover, that among the human actors that Latour identifies as crucial for the construction of a new constitution, there is no mention of artists or creative practitioners, though the constitution itself is described as a work of art. This task is left to scientists, politicians, economists, and moralists (161-3).

This chapter argues, conversely, that creative work, especially when it tests conventional categories of aesthetic representation, is precisely the kind of activity that can afford the formation of better, more inclusive collectives of humans and nonhumans. It argues, moreover, that such work can be seen as a civic endeavor, consonant with the constituent process currently underway in Chile. In that sense, I am advocating, in a specifically ecological arena, the notion of art as a civic agent put forward by Doris Sommer. For Sommer, works of art “on grand and small scales” can “morph into institutional

innovation" (2014, 3). To illustrate this notion, Sommer gives the now famous examples of Antanas Mockus' use of pantomime artists to regulate traffic in 1990s Bogotá, and Augusto Boal's development of "legislative theater" to improve inclusion and conflict resolution in the city government of Rio de Janeiro (2014, 2). How, though, to assess the relation between cultural agency in a broad public sphere and the mechanics of the creation of a new constitution?

This is where an at least partly Latourian approach can be productive. Kerry Whiteside assesses the ability of Latour's proposals to inform "change in the actual constitutional structure of representative democracies", arguing that Latour's proposal that "every reflection on governance must take 'nature' into account" can act as a powerful challenge to current democratic practices. Whiteside notes, however, that any actual processes of political-ecological change in the constitutional arena are likely to rely on concepts of agency, deliberation and reasoning that would qualify for the pejorative adjective 'Modernist' in Latour's thought (Whiteside 2013, 200, 202). For Whiteside, Latour is mistaken to view the environmental crisis as a failure of the scope of representation – the problem is not that nonhumans have no effective representatives, and the solution is not simply to expand representation. The problem is rather the current representational paradigm itself, from which, in this account, Latour never quite detaches his proposals. What is needed, Whiteside argues, is precisely a *constitutional* process, one that determines new paradigms for what counts as representation, because

Republics as we know them have stabilized modes of representation that consistently fail to take 'Nature' into account to a degree commensurate with the gravity of the unprecedented, world-altering phenomena that we have collectively unleashed. (2013, 203)

At this point, Whiteside's argument comes rather close to that advanced by Amitav Ghosh in *The Great Derangement*, his analysis of the modern novel's inability fully to deal with the scale and nature of the effects of climate change. The artistic works to be discussed here offer some hope that Ghosh's diagnosis of a 'great derangement' in the modern novel's attitude to the climate crisis need not extend to other forms of aesthetic action. Whereas the realist literary novel, for Ghosh, traffics in probabilities that obscure the (improbable) real, and in 'settings' that are disconnected from global networks (2017, 59), the artworks to be discussed here ask their spectators to look again at their apparently banal everyday environments and to see, hear and feel them anew. These are works that often resist containment within one medium, and that engage their spectators on multiple fronts – they are multisensory experiences. And they are precisely concerned with the ways in which experience exceeds conventional

structures of *representation*. We might think of them, then, as an aesthetic response to Whiteside's call to "make good the defective ability of existing representative institutions to take up concern for 'nature'" (2013, 200).

A focus on Chile may nonetheless seem a stubbornly national framework for thinking about global ecological concerns, but I think it is possible to argue, *pace* Ghosh's skepticism on the utility and fairness of the nation-state, which he views as a correlate of the novel (Ghosh 2017, 59), that the nation can be a framework for an honest and thorough engagement with the realities of the climate crisis. In the artworks discussed below, the nation is at least implicitly posed as a framework for understanding the problem, and for imagining potential solutions. The fact that the management and conservation of bodies of water, from rivers and glaciers to the Pacific Ocean, emerge as key issues of concern means that the nation cannot be the ultimate horizon of this discussion, but it is perhaps a starting point. In the action by LasTesis with which this chapter began, for example, the ocean is figured as a space for renewing the constitutional framework of the nation.

Before moving to consider the artworks in detail, though, it is important to have a clear sense of the existing constitutional architecture and the ways in which possible changes to it have been sketched out. The current Chilean constitution contains only one substantive reference to environmental matters: Article 19 (Section 8) guarantees "el derecho a vivir en un medio ambiente libre de contaminación" (the right to live in an environment free from pollution) for all, and goes on to state that "es deber del Estado velar para que este derecho no sea afectado y tutelar la preservación de la naturaleza" (it is the duty of the State to ensure that this right is not affected, and to safeguard the preservation of nature) (Constitución Política de la República de Chile, Article 19, Section 8). This promised right has not, however, proved enforceable, as the proliferation of highly polluted 'sacrifice zones' demonstrates (Ramírez Nova 2020). By contrast, the 2022 constitutional proposal included an entire chapter dedicated to nature and the environment, and the first article in that chapter (number 127) states that "la naturaleza tiene derechos" (nature has rights) (*Propuesta de Constitución Política* 2022, 45). The chapter goes on to set out a duty for the state to protect biodiversity, establishes a category of "bienes comunes naturales" (natural common goods) with special protections for water, and creates a body charged with protecting the rights of nature - the Defensoría de la Naturaleza.

The proposed constitution thus went a long way towards implementing ideas advocated by many activists and scholars of political ecology. One prominent member of the latter group, Eduardo Gudynas had suggested to the Constitutional Convention's commission on the environment that a new constitution, rather than determining an

economic model for the nation, should consider what kinds of value nature possesses, beyond the economic (as realized in Chile's current extractivist economic model). These might include, Gudynas argued, aesthetic and historical value, as well as the value ascribed to nature by indigenous peoples, and a concept of "simples valores ecológicos" (simple ecological values). A recognition of these kinds of value at a constitutional level would then, Gudynas suggested, necessitate a constitutional guarantee of the rights of nature (Comisión sobre Medio Ambiente, Derechos de la Naturaleza, Bienes Naturales Comunes y Modelo Económico 2021). In what follows, I argue that the challenges to representation, or expanded forms of representation, of the ecological artwork emerging alongside and from within Chile's recent social movements encourages a reframing (whether legal or otherwise) of human relations with 'nature', in a manner consonant with Gudynas's submission to the Convention's environmental commission.

3 Delight Lab: Projecting Alternative Futures

The Chilean *estallido social* provoked an explosion of politically oriented creativity, or 'activism', to use a term with Latino/a and Chicano/a roots. Yet with the exception of LasTesis, perhaps no group has become more publicly associated with the *estallido* than Delight Lab, an experimental audiovisual design studio whose projections on the Torre Telefónica in Santiago de Chile's Plaza de la Dignidad (known before the *estallido* as Plaza Italia) have become emblematic instances of contemporary protest aesthetics. The projections have, moreover, generated significant repercussions within existing institutional structures. To give just one example: on 19 May 2020, while Delight Lab were projecting the word 'HUMANIDAD' (HUMANITY) on the Torre Telefónica, an unmarked truck protected by members of the Carabineros (Chile's principal national police force) used its headlights to block out the projection. After a legal action in the Chilean courts was unsuccessful, "Delight Lab recurrirá ante la CIDH tras rechazo de la Corte Suprema a reconocer censura en su contra" (Delight Lab appealed to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, alleging censorship of their work). The collective has also taken an explicit interest in the new constitutional process, projecting the word 'RENACE' (IS REBORN) when there was a decisive national vote for a new constitution in later October 2020.

Beyond the immediate context of the *estallido* and its aftermath, much of Delight Lab's work has linked a revaluation of indigenous knowledges and peoples to an enhanced ecological sensibility. María José Barros has documented interventions carried out in collaboration with Corporación Traitraico in the Chilean part of Wallmapu,

the ancestral territory of the Mapuche people. Barros argues that the projection of images on the banks of the Rawe and Pilmaiken rivers, protesting the planned construction of hydroelectric dams by a Norwegian corporation, contrasts a Mapuche spiritual understanding of rivers as the means by which the souls of the dead return to the sea with the Chilean state's willingness for water rights to be bought and sold like any other commodity (Barros 2020). In the most recent edition of the Santiago a Mil theater festival, the collective presented *Espíritu del agua*, in January 2021, a series of animations projected on water towers across Santiago and in Concepción, a city in the south of Chile. *Espíritu del agua* begins and ends with the following incantation in Mapudungun, performed by the Mapuche *Werken* 'cultural elder' Joel Maripil, which puts forward a vision of human existence as inherently fluid:

Del agua salimos y al agua volveremos. Hemos sido río, vapor y hielo. Hemos andado en corrientes que suben y bajan, que se hunden en la tierra o se disuelven en el mar. El océano es el gran espíritu del que todo emerge y al que todo regresa; somos fragmentos de él, lágrimas de gozo o tristeza que salen en cuerpos y regresan en espíritu. (Delight Lab 2021)

From water we came and to water we will return. We have been river, vapor, and ice. We have moved in currents that rise and fall, which sink into the ground or dissolve in the sea. The ocean is the great spirit from which all emerges and to which all returns; we are fragments of it, tears of joy or sadness that go out in bodies and return as spirit.

Here, we find an identification of human embodiment with water that recalls Astrida Neimanis's conception of humans' watery embodiment and Stacy Alaimo's notion of "trans-corporeality at sea" (Neimanis 2017; Alaimo 2012). This notion of fluid and mutable corporeality allows a call for the conservation of bodies of water to be rendered as a call for the preservation of human souls: "Las almas regresan al mar a través de los ríos. Pero así como los selk'nam, los ríos viven amenazados por la codicia de las personas desconectadas de la tierra" (Souls return to the sea through rivers. But like the Selk'nam, rivers are threatened by the avarice of people who are disconnected from the land) (Delight Lab 2021). Moreover, the projection of crashing ocean waves on a concrete water tower, and the prevalence of fade cuts and close-ups of flowing water in the audiovisual montage, ironically relegate the infrastructure of modern water management, with its insistence on containment and separation, to the status of mere background for the envisioning of a different, more fluid relation between humans and their environment. The

projections also reclaim the infrastructure of a privatized water management system as a resolutely public forum for experimental forms of aesthetic representation.

It is possible to imagine a critique of Delight Lab's interventions along the lines of that advanced by David Chandler and Julian Reid in their excoriating analysis of the 'speculative turn' in anthropology: for Chandler and Reid, the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Marisol de la Cadena, and others seeks to "distil Indigenous knowledge as method or analytics" that allows the development of a new branch of speculative philosophy" (Chandler, Reid 2020, 498). It should be acknowledged, of course, that Andrea and Germán Gana Muñoz, the siblings who make up Delight Lab, are not themselves of indigenous descent, and so it might be said that their work makes use of indigenous concepts in the service of their own creative ends. Yet the fact that many of their interventions have taken place in Wallmapu, in collaboration with Mapuche actors (such as Corporación Traitraico and Joel Maripil) and were designed to raise awareness of political and ecological realities affecting the lives of Mapuche communities, suggests that that critique would not be entirely fair in this case. The importance of political context to the works produced by Delight Lab can be seen, for instance, in the timing of *Espíritu del agua*, which was presented in the run-up to elections for Chile's Constitutional Convention, held in May 2021. It has therefore been seen as a call for the new constitution to abandon the privatized water rights of the 1981 Water Code, an offshoot of the 1980 constitution that is still in force today.³

It is far from the only such call. To give just one further example: in September 2020, the ecological magazine *Revista Endémico* issued a call for 'posters for an ecological constitution', posters designed to encourage the Chilean public to vote for candidates for the Constitutional Convention who espoused ecologically conscious positions. Launching the call, the director of *Endémico*, Nicole Ellena, noted that there was a long tradition of graphical activism in Chile, and offered a view of art and design as "herramientas de cambio, [cuyo] rol es clave para darle una voz a nuestro planeta y sus habitantes no humanos" (tools of change, [whose] role is key to giving a voice to our planet and its non-human inhabitants) ("Convocatoria abierta para campaña 'Carteles para una constitución ecológica'" 2020). Ellena's phrasing here clearly allocates the (envisaged) posters a representative role, not only in aesthetic terms but also politically, and thus recalls the debate around Latour's propositions discussed above. The posters that were eventually selected by *Endémico*'s editorial team,

³ On the uniquely privatized nature of post-1980 water management in Chile, see Budds 2004.

meanwhile, are heterogeneous and impossible to fully categorize as a group, though there are some common features across the individual works. These include the use of bright colors, clear lines, and bold block text (all of which indicate, of course, the close relation of these works to posters and placards carried in the protests that took place between October 2019 and early 2020). Several of the selected posters include no text beyond the phrase “constitución ecológica” (ecological constitution) itself, while others opt for short slogans, such as “de la tierra venimos, a sus entrañas volveremos” (we come from the earth, and we will return to its entrails) and “la ecología es más importante que cualquier ideología” (ecology is more important than any ideology). One poster reworks Chile’s national motto, “por la razón o la fuerza” (by reason or strength), into “ni por la razón ni por la fuerza / por la fuerza de la naturaleza” (neither by reason nor by strength / by the strength of nature). What these three examples have in common is a ceding of protagonism to a non-human actor, variously named as the earth, ecology, or nature.

Here, again, we witness a point of contact with the 2022 constitutional proposal’s establishment of ‘nature’ as a subject of rights. There is a connection with Delight Lab’s work, too, in that *Endémico*’s initiative demonstrates a commitment to art’s place in the public sphere. It is perhaps misleading to refer to a singular ‘public sphere’, however, as the posters are available in an open-access virtual exhibition on the *Endémico* website, as well as on *Endémico*’s social media channels, but have also been exhibited in physical spaces, such as in the Parque Cultural in Valparaíso in June 2021.

The form of the interventions described above, which combine written or spoken language with audiovisual media, and moreover use language in a way that exceeds simple indication of a signified object, mean that they can be viewed as examples of an ‘ecological avant-garde’ in Chile.⁴ Where Ghosh argues that the novel “always align[s] itself with the avant-garde as it hurtles forward in its impatience to erase every archaic reminder of Man’s kinship with the non-human” (2017, 70), a perspective from Chile offers a more complex conception of avant-garde practice. Somewhat paradoxically, a work like *Espíritu del agua* stages a rupture in our typical modes of relating to our surroundings, transforming a water tower into a projection screen, but orients this rupture in experience precisely towards a reminder of ‘kinship’, in Ghosh’s terms, between humans and their non-human environs. I have already briefly suggested above that it is no accident that this project makes use of watery environments in suggesting this connection. In what follows, I expand on this observation

⁴ For an analysis of the history and present of ecological avant-garde practices in Chile, see Merchant 2020.

to suggest that an ‘archipelagic’ reading of cultural production might offer a way of imagining an inclusive ecological constitution.

4 **An Archipelagic Constitution?**

The notion of ‘archipelagic thought’ is rather more familiar in Caribbean and Pacific Island contexts than in studies of the cultures of the Southern Cone: through the work of Édouard Glissant, for instance, or in Epeli Hau’ofa’s now-canonical notion of the ‘sea of islands’, which values islander knowledge and relations with marine and island environments above the colonizer’s view of the ocean as the empty space in between:

There is a world of difference between viewing the Pacific as ‘islands in a far sea’ and as ‘a sea of islands’. The first emphasizes dry surfaces in a vast ocean far from the centers of power. Focusing on this way stresses the smallness and remoteness of the islands. The second is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships. (Hau’ofa 1994, 152-3)

Craig Santos Perez has recently drawn on Hau’ofa’s groundbreaking work in his analysis of the diasporic cultural identity of Chamoru islanders (Perez 2020). And beyond Oceania, Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens have suggested that an “archipelagic American studies” can offer a way of “decontinentalizing” our understandings of space and identity (Roberts, Stephens 2017). A way, in other words, of recognizing the cultural and political value of apparently marginal or in-between spaces like islands, seas, beaches and inlets, and the people who live in them. Jonathan Pugh and David Chandler, meanwhile, argue in *Anthropocene Islands* that “work with islands has become productive in the development of many of the core conceptual frameworks of Anthropocene thinking” (Pugh, Chandler 2021, 2). This is in part because of their frequent position on the front lines of environmental change (rising sea levels), but also because of how islands often come to constitute distinct but related ontological units, for their inhabitants and also for those who visit and study them. In that respect, they are ideal places for thinking through the ever more complex relational entanglements between humans and nonhumans, and indeed between humans and other humans, that characterize our contemporary world.

Chile is, in geographic terms, unquestionably an archipelagic nation: one need only to look at a map to establish that. South of Puerto

Montt, the land fragments into hundreds of islands.⁵ Through an analysis of some recent documentary films and a multimedia sound art/installation project, I will argue here that a decontinental or archipelagic understanding of the Chilean nation, which foregrounds shared exposure to and entanglement with the world, might provide a productive basis for the elaboration of a truly inclusive ecological constitution.

In Patricio Guzmán's documentary *El botón de nácar*, we meet Martín González Calderón, a Yaghan man from Tierra del Fuego who explains how the Chilean Navy's strict control over maritime space has made it almost impossible for him and his family to travel by boat using the skills and techniques passed down over generations. Guzmán also speaks to Gabriela Paterito, a Kawésqar woman who recounts a long journey by canoe that she made when she was a girl, and the director prompts her to state that she does not feel Chilean at all. In Guzmán's film, indigenous mobility by water in the Patagonian archipelago is presented as lost to the past, and impossible in the present.⁶ Other filmmakers have taken a different approach to these issues, however. In 2016's *Tánana, estar listo para zarpar*, for instance, we meet Martín González Calderón again, but this time at much greater length. The documentary's directors Alberto Serrano Fillol and Cristóbal Azócar do not provide an explanatory voiceover. Instead, the camera follows González Calderón as he goes about his daily life, and then seeks to build a boat in which he can recreate a childhood trip around the False Cape Horn, near the southern tip of the continent, that he undertook with his father. González Calderón explains the intertwining of his memories and the landscapes and seascapes of the archipelago in fragments, and on his own terms: local ecological knowledge is not offered up to the viewer for easy consumption in this case.

Another documentary from 2016, *Alas de mar*, exhibits some similar characteristics. Here, the director Hans Mülchi does provide a voiceover, but it is intermittent and reflective. The film follows the journey by boat of two Kawésqar women, Rosa, and Celina, back to the region where they grew up. The voices of Rosa and Celina are much more prominent than that of Mülchi, or indeed that of the European anthropologist who is traveling with them. It is not only the human voice that counts, though. Both *Tánana* and *Alas de mar* contain long sequences in which the only sounds audible are the sounds of travel by sea: the flapping of a sail, the rush of the wind, the crash of waves against the hull, or the roar of a motor. This openness to the sounds of the marine environment allows the spectator to share in

⁵ This is without even considering Rapa Nui (Easter Island), the island some 4,000 kilometers from the South American continent that is administered by Chile.

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of how Guzmán consistently relegates indigenous experience to a separate timeframe, or even a separate world, see Merchant 2022.

the embodied experience of the protagonists in a way that escapes any definitions that might be imposed by spoken or written language. It is precisely because *Alas de mar* and *Tánana* do not offer definitive answers to the question of the relation between indigenous identity and Chilean identity that I find them valuable to think with. The people whose stories are told in these films have been displaced from their childhood homes (as is the case for Rosa and Celina) or are held in place by the state's unwillingness to allow maritime travel outside of specific, limited purposes (in the case of Martín). And yet we see them strive to retrace past journeys and reclaim certain modes of mobility as an essential part of their heritage. In fact, indigenous identity itself appears as fluid and mobile in these films. Martín notes that while he understands much of the Yaghan language, he cannot speak it well himself, and in *Tánana* we see him teaching boatbuilding techniques to family members who are clearly of mixed heritage. In *Alas de mar*, Rosa and Celina share weaving and construction techniques with their fellow travelers.⁷

These films' acts of representation, their visions of mobile and changing identities, present a source of inspiration for a plurivocal or even plurinational political order, of the kind that was represented by the formalized participation of many indigenous groups, including the Kawésqar and the Yaghan, in the Constitutional Convention, and eventually codified in the 2022 proposal, which describes Chile as "plurinational, intercultural, regional y ecológico" (plurinational, intercultural, regional and ecological) (Propuesta 2022, 5). The fact that 61.89% of voters rejected this vision of the country in September 2022 makes it evident that there is still much work to be done in communicating the value of such visions. This much was becoming clear even before the 2022 referendum: the house of the Kawésqar representative at the Constitutional Convention, Margarita Vargas, was burnt to the ground in October 2021 (though no one was harmed) ("Incendio destruye vivienda de convencional Kawésqar en Magallanes" 2021).

Might there still be room in an eventual new constitution for the varied "ecological epistemes" on display in these films (Escobar 2020, 62, quoting Leff, *La apuesta por la vida*)? Paradoxically, perhaps, the failure of the 2022 constitutional proposal makes the persistence of cultural objects that articulate such ideas even more important, even when the very limited distribution circuits for documentary film in Chile restrict the extent to which the works discussed above can be seen to act in the modes that Sommer envisions in her articulation of cultural agency.

⁷ Portions of this paragraph and the preceding one were first published in a blog post by the author (Merchant 2021).

It is for this reason that I turn, as a form of provisional conclusion, to a multimedia project titled *Archipiélago*, which began in 2018 and has evolved across several platforms and formats. In 2018, the artists Fernando Godoy, Esteban Agosín and Carlos Lértora hired a boat and undertook three journeys of 4-10 days each around the archipelago of Chiloé. During these journeys, the artists lived on the boat, which they thought of as a kind of laboratory, and used hydrophones and other recording equipment to capture the sounds of the underwater seascape around the islands, paying particular attention to how the sounds of human activity (for instance through salmon farming) were interfering with sounds produced by other actors within the ecosystem. Godoy has stated in an interview that the group set out to understand the impact of 'extractivism in the sea', in the form of the extensive salmon farming that takes place in the south of Chile, by exploring its sonic effects. In addition to recording the sounds, Godoy and his collaborators also turned the boat into a broadcaster, sharing the underwater seascapes online via radiotsonami.org.

However, in Godoy's account of the project, this activity soon proved unsatisfactory, and the group of artists realized that in order to make sense of the sounds they were recording, they needed to turn to local residents, and record the stories of those who had lived on and interacted with the ocean, whose way of life was on the brink of disappearing. This content, alongside the underwater sounds, was then also transmitted via FM radio, so that it could reach local communities (*Panel 1*, 2021). The documentation of the project includes a documentary directed by Lértora (2019), an installation at the Museo de Arte Moderno Chiloé in 2019, and a book (Godoy 2023). Thus *Archipiélago*, which started in response to a particular ecological disaster (the *marea roja*, or toxic algal bloom, of 2016, which may have been caused by the dumping of dead salmon) (Armijo et al. 2020), has evolved in relation to the people and environments with which it has interacted. The project is both singular and multiple and seeks a variety of forms of representation. These two facts alone render *Archipiélago* a helpful model for considering the possible forms of a new ecological constitution. Godoy, Lértora and Agosín's project illustrates why the archipelago as lived and imagined space is a useful conceptual tool for articulating the complexity of human-nonhuman (and human-human) relations in contemporary Chile. As Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel and Michelle Stephens put it:

the archipelago calls for a meaning-making and rearticulation that responds to human experiences traversing space and time. Archipelagoes happen, congeal, take place. They are not immanent or natural categories existing independently of interpretation. Yet

they can also become an episteme, an imaginary, a way of thinking, a poetic, a hermeneutic, a method of inquiry, a system of relations. (Martínez-San Miguel, Stephens 2020, 3)

This conception of the archipelago as a plurivalent episteme is consistent with Gudynas's call for a new Chilean constitution to embrace, or at least engage with, multiple values for nature. Writing elsewhere, Gudynas has argued that "the recognition of plural valuations, including intrinsic values in non-humans, is an openness to other sensitivities and practices that generate different moral mandates, public policies, understandings of justice" (Gudynas 2019, 241). The aftermath of 2019's *estallido social* has to date seen two failed attempts to generate consensus around a new set of constitutional principles, in 2022 and 2023. A question thus remains: how can artistic interventions of the kind examined here generate such "openness to other sensitivities"? Might we imagine a Chilean variant of Boal's "legislative theater" (Sommer 2014, 50-60), a kind of 'constitutional theater' embracing an archipelagic vision of the nation, as a mechanism for achieving a still-elusive consensus on new shared values within a constituent process? There is no guarantee of success, but where constituent assemblies, conventions and councils have failed, perhaps creative methods should be given a chance to take on Latour's challenge of composing a common world.

Bibliography

- Alaimo, S. (2012). "States of Suspension. Trans-Corporeality at Sea". *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 19(3), 476-93.
- Alas de mar* (2016). Directed by Hans Mülchi. Blume Producciones.
- Armijo, J. et al. (2020). "The 2016 Red Tide Crisis in Southern Chile. Possible Influence of the Mass Oceanic Dumping of Dead Salmons". *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 150, 110603. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpolbul.2019.110603>
- Barros, M.J. (2020). "Delight Lab en Wallmapu. Descolonizando la mirada y las aguas". *Revista Endémico*, 17 July. <https://www.endemico.org/delight-lab-wallmapu-descolonizar-la-mirada-las-aguas/>
- Budds, J. (2004). "Power, Nature and Neoliberalism. The Political Ecology of Water in Chile". *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 25(3), 322-42.
- Chandler, D.; Reid, J. (2020). "Becoming Indigenous. The 'Speculative Turn' in Anthropology and the (Re)Colonisation of Indigeneity". *Postcolonial Studies*, 23(4), 485-504.
- Comisión sobre medio ambiente, derechos de la naturaleza, bienes naturales comunes e modelo económico (2021). *Sesión N° 8 del jueves 4 de noviembre de 2021*. https://www.cconstituyente.cl/comisiones/verDoc.aspx?prmID=714&prmTipo=DOCUMENTO_COMISION
- "Convocatoria abierta para campaña 'Carteles para una constitución ecológica'" (2020). *Revista Endémico*. <https://www.endemico.org/carteles-para-una-constitucion-ecologica/>
- Cossio López, H. (2021). "Convención ambientalista. Más de un 70% de constituyentes respalda cambiar modelo de gestión del agua". *El Mostrador*, 18 de mayo. <https://www.elmostrador.cl/destacado/2021/05/18/convencion-ambientalista-mas-de-un-70-de-constituyentes-respalda-cambiar-modelo-de-gestion-del-agua/>
- Delight Lab (2021). "Espíritu del agua". *Santiago a Mil*. <https://teatroamil.cl/en/que-hacemos/circulacion-nacional-e-internacional/catalogo/espiritu-del-agua/>
- "Delight Lab recurrirá ante la CIDH tras rechazo de la Corte Suprema a reconocer censura en su contra" (2021). *El Mostrador*, 29 de abril. <https://www.elmostrador.cl/cultura/2021/04/29/delight-lab-recurrira-ante-la-cidh-tras-rechazo-de-la-corte-suprema-a-reconocer-censura-en-su-contra/>
- El botón de nácar* (2015). Directed by Patricio Guzmán. Atacama Productions, Valdivia Film, Mediapro.
- Escobar, A. (2020). *Pluriversal Politics. The Real and the Possible*. Durham (NC): Duke University Press.
- Ghosh, A. (2017). *The Great Derangement. Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Godoy, F. (2023). *Archipiélago*. Valparaíso: Tsonami Ediciones.
- Gudynas, E. (2019). "Value, Growth, Development: South American Lessons for a New Eopolitics". *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 30(2), 234-43.
- Hau'ofa, E. (1994). "Our Sea of Islands". *The Contemporary Pacific*, 6(1), 148-61.
- "Incendio destruye vivienda de convencional Kawésqar en Magallanes" (2021). *BioBioChile*, 25 de octubre. <https://www.biobiochile.cl/noticias/nacional/region-de-magallanes/2021/10/25/margarita-virginia-vargas-convencional-pide-que-se-investigue-incendio.shtml>
- Latour, B. (2004). *Politics of Nature. How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Transl. by C. Porter. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

- Martin, D.; Shaw, D. (2021). "Chilean and Transnational Performances of Disobedience. LasTesis and the Phenomenon of *Un Violador En Tu Camino*". *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 40(5), 712-29.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.13215>
- Martínez-San Miguel, Y.; Stephens, M. (2020). "'Isolated Above, but Connected Below': Toward New, Global, Archipelagic Linkages". Stephens, M.; Martínez-San Miguel, Y. (eds), *Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking. Toward New Comparative Methodologies and Disciplinary Formations*. Lanham (MD): Rowman & Littlefield, 1-44.
- Merchant, P. (2020). "Cecilia Vicuña's Liquid Indigeneity". Blackmore, L.; Gómez, L. (eds), *Liquid Ecologies in Latin American and Caribbean Art*. New York: Routledge, 188-206.
- Merchant, P. (2021). "Mobility and Identity in the Patagonian Archipelago". *Migration Mobilities Bristol*, 2 November.
<https://migration.bristol.ac.uk/2021/11/02/mobility-and-identity-in-the-patagonian-archipelago/>
- Merchant, P. (2022). "'Collecting What the Sea Gives Back'. Postcolonial Ecologies of the Ocean in Contemporary Chilean Film". *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 41(2), 209-26.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.13231>
- Merchant, P. (2024). "Speculative Ecology: Huidobro, Parra, Zurita, and Chile's Pacific Futures". *MLN*, 139(2), 330-52.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2024.a940711>
- Neimanis, A. (2017). *Bodies of Water. Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Panel 1: Arte y ecología en Chile* (2021). Directed by Fundación Mar Adentro.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKgwGm4Q-3Q>.
- Pérez, C.S. (2020). "'The Ocean in Us'. Navigating the Blue Humanities and Diasporic Chamoru Poetry". *Humanities*, 9(3), 66.
- Propuesta de Constitución Política de la República de Chile* (2022). Santiago de Chile: LOM Ediciones.
- Pugh, J.; Chandler, D. (2021). *Anthropocene Islands. Entangled Worlds*. London: University of Westminster Press.
- Ramírez Nova, M. (2020). "Crisis socioambiental y zonas de sacrificio: propuestas para una constitución ecológica". *Revista Debates Jurídicos y Sociales*, 7, 93-104.
- Roberts, B.R.; Stephens, M.A. (eds) (2017). *Archipelagic American Studies*. Durham (NC): Duke University Press.
- Sommer, D. (2014). *The Work of Art in the World. Civic Agency and Public Humanities*. Durham (NC): Duke University Press.
- Tánana, estar listo para zarpar* (2016). Directed by Alberto Serrano and Cristóbal Azócar. Producer: Alberto Serrano.
- Whiteside, K.H. (2013). "A Representative Politics of Nature? Bruno Latour on Collectives and Constitutions". *Contemporary Political Theory*, 12(3), 185-205.