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On the Practices and Poetics of the Creative Imagination

Imagination
creates the situation
and, then, the situation
creates imagination.

It may, of course,
be the other way around:
Columbus was discovered
by what he found.[1]

We are bereft in our culture of an adequate psychology
and philosophy of the heart, and therefore also of the imagination.
If we would recover the imaginal, we must first recover its organ,
the heart, and its kind of philosophy.[2]

Action and imagination are intimately tied. In recent years, it has emerged with ever greater clarity that transformative social and environmental change requires the ability to imagine a world otherwise. The work of undoing the decaying remnants of the modern colonial world-system necessitates not only engaging with the legal, political, economic, and symbolic narratives that perpetuate the conditions of its reproduction, but also, vitally, includes building the capacities and resources to inspire and catalyze conscious engagement with our creative imagination.

As, in part, a technology of contemplation, art helps us to perceive the nature of reality with fuller depth and perspective; it enables a state in which we can "see through" rather than "look at." Over the centuries, we have discovered in art an array of engaged and poetic tools for awakening to the vitality of life; to its fundamental impermanence and interdependence. Because of its capacious nature, art facilitates insights into how humans participate in worldmaking—how our words, thoughts, and actions impact us, as well as how we shape and are shaped by our environments. The TBA21–Academy artistic

1. James Baldwin, "Imagination," in *Jimmy's Blues and Other Poems* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 32.

2. James Hillman, *The Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World* (Connecticut: Spring Publications, [1992] 2021), 9.

research program Meandering was born from the conviction that an important dimension of its practice is oriented toward not only experiences of inner transformation, but to generating the conditions of possibility for cultural regeneration and social change. That in artistic research we can find the skillful means to reorient hope and reimagine possibility.

In this sense, Meandering contributed a discourse and praxis of artistic research that aimed to renew our trust in art's capacity to unveil and strengthen our collective symbolic agency, while engaging processes that replenish our shared belonging to life and our ability to remain open to its fullness. Crucially, it offered this within the wider context of world-systemic conditions that are endangering planetary life. Inspired by how rivers bend and curve, connecting entire ecosystems, Meandering unfolded the cultural, historical, spiritual, and ecological trajectories of waterways, reflecting the vitality of water, from source to sea. By developing critical-creative insight into the interconnectedness of land and coastal waters, freshwater, and the ocean system, the program and this publication realize a subtle yet active proposition toward what I am calling *live research*.

Referring both to the outline of a river across a plane and to the style of speech, the title of the program, Meandering, was conceived as a means of way-finding and sense-making via uncharted genealogies and new trajectories of global environmental urgencies, while opening courses into the unknown. This framework led Meandering towards an ethos of regenerative cultural practice—to leave more than is taken. This became a way of acknowledging historical violences committed in the name of research—whether by the evangelizing project of the church, the imperialist state, or expeditionary sciences, to name a few. Live research aspired instead to turn inquiry and curiosity towards life-affirming propositions that can renew a sense of belonging in our local and global communities, while investigating the ways we know what we know, and how we come to know it.

In the last decades we have seen how curatorial and artistic practices have contributed to the expansion of knowledge production and research methodologies beyond the rigidity of inherited disciplines. Live research expands these efforts and calls for an experiential and experimental approach to acknowledging the interdependence between theory and creativity as tools of scholarly, sensorial, and spiritual resilience. Moreover, it asks for skillful means to acknowledge the challenges, difficulties, and injustices of our everyday, phenomenal realities with hope, which is itself a desire for change. Ultimately, as we learn to listen deeply, taking up new perspectives and acknowledging the liveness in and around us, we open ourselves to restoring agency to ecosystems long perceived as separate from us, as well as to ourselves, as extensions of the world.

This commitment reaches for a resignification of what we often understand to be the social role of art, public programs, and

participatory artwork as distinct institutional endeavors. Instead, live research centers the joyful effort that arises from connecting bodies, movements, and ideas—the liveliness at the core of research—alongside the reverberant quality of life immanent in all artworks. Unlike how institutions traditionally program (often reproducing the same extractive logics they set out to criticize), live research rethinks how long-term engagement with collaborative and co-creative forms of commissioning and knowledge production can contribute to reconciling the long-standing oppositions through which art has instituted itself.

Live research, then, attempts to delineate a mode of art-making emerging dynamically through processes that embrace non-duality, impermanence, and the vitality of life itself. Artistic research, as it engages with questions of framing our shared humanity, needs therefore to become a methodologically grounded, transformative practice, working not only to remake particular "visions" of the world, but to create new stories, myths, and rituals that expand what it means to be human as both a co-constituted life-force and a co-creative practice.[3]

For Meandering, I proposed a situated approach to research that acknowledges the particularities of a site, while engaging with the global histories it opens to. In this sense, the program encouraged artistic proposals that query, inspire, and challenge the conceptual emergence and unresolved histories of the ecological crisis, taking the Guadalquivir valley in Andalusia, southern Spain, as a starting point. Through a threefold scholarly, sensorial, and spiritual itinerary, live research helped us mobilize both contemplative and engaged propositions, performative vocabularies, and experimental pedagogies. These were, in turn, capable of giving form to creative, conscious, and participatory practices. By bringing communities together through artistic research and public programs, live research demonstrated the potential to foster the kinds of symbolic resources that will enable us to realize ecologically and socially just worlds.

This comprised a necessarily incomplete method for working with artists in finding engaging ways of making their research public, and for learning how to generate and sustain creative communities around their work. Working in public space and outside of the museum—aiming also at those who might be first encountering contemporary art—helped us explore how we are all capable of transforming our inner and outer realities. By committing to longer research trajectories and working processes, and making them public through convenings at the intersection of contemporary art and decolonial, feminist, and anti-racist practices, live research aimed to generate a transnational network of cultural, environmental, and social changemakers.

3. See Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

Through our imagination, we shape this remnant of reality into one of the infinite forms that reality can take.[4]

The dissolution of the wet and dry divide, shown in the pervasiveness of extreme drought and severe flooding across national borders due to climate breakdown, has long been a motif of mythological thinking. From around 4,000 BCE, the emergence of the early states was heavily associated with water availability, soil types, drainage, rainfall, temperature, and altitude. In Mesopotamia, the Nile Valley, the Yellow and Yangtze River regions in China, the Indus Valley in the Asian subcontinent, and the valleys of the Andes, the synchronic push towards the development of complex political structures and the centralization of political power, in what we colloquially refer to as "civilization," was closely linked to the irrigation of fields that enabled a rise in agricultural yields and supported population growth. For the historian Peter Frankopan, the availability and use of water, the expansion of food production, and the geographic challenges and opportunities of local and long-distance trade are not just important factors, but fundamental conditions shaping the broad sweep of history.[5]

Along with the slow emergence of farming cultures that eventually led to the adoption and spread of agriculture,[6] myth and mythology offer us perspectives on how social and environmental changes were once navigated, and how they have come to shape the modern world. By extension, the environmental histories of river valley civilizations, empires, nation states, and self-governed communities can also help us navigate some of the challenges that lie ahead. Agrarian economies, for instance, were particularly dependent on rainfall and water availability, which are intimately connected to climate patterns: "When abundant, the great rivers such as the Tigris and Euphrates, the Yellow River, the Yangtze and the Indus and their tributaries meant that land could be cultivated easily. Scarcity, on the other hand, meant shortages, crop failure and famine, alongside associated risk of disease."[7]

Changes in weather patterns and human intervention in the ecosystems subsequently led to transformations of the role and development of religions and belief systems as a function of climate,

4. Federico Campagna, *The Foundations of the Sea* (unpublished manuscript, 2023).

5. See Peter Frankopan, *The Earth Transformed: An Untold Story* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023).

6. As anthropologist David Graeber and archaeologist David Wengrow argue in *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London: Allen Lane, 2021), the so-called "Agricultural Revolution" that marked the Neolithic era was in fact a process of slow change, taking thousands of years to unfold on each of the world's continents through failed experiments and reversals. Graeber and Wengrow show how ecological flexibility and sustained biodiversity were key to the successful establishment and spread of early agriculture, and they refute the standard narrative of social evolution that frames history as a progression from hunter-gatherer to farmer, and finally to civilization, determined by modes of production.

7. Frankopan, *The Earth Transformed*, 95–96.

environment, and geography. Myth is key to understanding rivers as intermediaries between ecosystems in the watershed, and their entanglement with people through time. From the vibrant pantheons in the Sumerian, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian civilizations to the emergence of Hinduism, Buddhism, the Confucian systems, and Greek rationalism; from the Indigenous cosmologies of First Nations to the rise of the Abrahamic revelation, our founding origin stories speak of human strife in relation to river systems and their shifting margins:

> It is no surprise that some of the earliest ideas that were set down in writing, in the form of hymns, incantations, and ritual formulas that record songs and poems dating perhaps a millennium further back in time, about the origins of the earth were stories about the division of fresh and salty waters turning into the source of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, or deities, such as Indra, who forces the demons of drought to pour down on the scorched earth, swelling rivers and inundating crop fields. Simultaneously, the great cautionary tales of the early states feature the advance of impending deluge, giant floods, and food shortages caused by human action. Take the Babylonian texts, The Sumerian Flood Story, The Epic of Gilgamesh, Inanna's Descent, the Egyptian Book of the Heavenly Cow, and the Judeo-Christian flood story in the Book of Genesis centering Noah, who is one of the five prophets of Islam, and could easily be taken for Manu, the first man, advised by Vishnu to build a giant boat in the Satapatha Brahmana of the Hindu tradition.[8]

Ecology and belief are deeply interconnected. Indeed, in the Indian and Near Eastern mythologies that influenced early Greek thought, water often appears as the substance of cosmogony.[9] The universe is conceived as rising from a primal abyss of water, a cosmic womb from which dualities such as shadow and light slowly form as separations. Since these origin narratives belong neither to what is commonly called "their" time, nor to what is called "time" by historical convention, I feel compelled to draw inspiration from how experiments in civilization-making and collapse in river valleys have been sources for imaginative practice, and how they might, in turn, inform contemporary efforts to address the environmental challenges we face today.

While societies have differed in their devotion to particular gods in polytheistic pantheons, and even elevated specific members of a pantheon a meta-step above the rest in the interpretation of their climatic omens, we can trace certain common features and patterns in approaches to seeing through the nature of reality, which prove fruitful for a transhistorical dialogue.[10] World-making is fundamentally an act of

8. Ibid., 107.

9. Thomas McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought* (New York: Allworth Press, 2022), 29.

10. French philosopher and theologian Henry Corbin used the expression "un dialogue dans la mḗtahistoire" to address the common scheme of various metaphysical and mystical thought-systems developed across different times and places.

storytelling, in which our attempt to understand reality needs to be as imaginative and capacious as possible in order to hold space for everyone within it to thrive. As Sicilian philosopher Federico Campagna notes,

> The fall of a civilisation not only involves the shattering of its social fabric, together with its political, economic, and technological infrastructures, but it also affects that fundamental common sense about the nature of the world, which is the necessary bedrock of any attempt to lead a meaningful existence.[11]

To contribute to a world where everyone's needs matter, we need myths that help us see beyond our historical dimension and experience an "oceanic feeling"; ecomythologies capable of unsettling human exceptionalism and undoing the noxious cosmology of global capitalism. Coined by the mid-twentieth century French novelist, essayist, art historian, and mystic Romain Rolland, "oceanic feeling" describes a sense of communion and affective insight linked to a state of awareness of "being one with the external world as a whole."[12] Through "oceanic feeling" questions around hydric sovereignty, as well as the self-representation of the planet's waters, reemerge as indissolubly woven into our shared belonging to life.

REWRITING KNOWLEDGE

> *Definitions are vital starting points for the imagination. What we cannot imagine cannot come into being. A good definition marks our starting point and lets us know where we want to end up. As we move toward our desired destination we chart the journey, creating a map.*[13]

We know that conventional forms of scholarly knowledge are no longer adequate to the task of remediating the escalating environmental crisis. To paraphrase the philosopher Michael Marder, today's carbon emissions are the epitome of Aristotle's law of non-contradiction, Linnaeus's taxonomies, Spinoza's substance, Descartes's mind-body split, Kant's aesthetics, Hegel's philosophy of history, and so forth—they are the

For an example, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts of Ibn ʿArabī, Lao-Tzu and Chuang-Tzu* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

11. Campagna, *The Foundations of the Sea*, 5.

12. Used by Rolland in his exchanges with Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud between 1923 and 1936, "oceanic feeling" is, according to the author, the source of energy that permeates the various religious systems. Freud discusses the feeling in his *Future of an Illusion* (1927), and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929), where he deems it a fragmentary vestige of infantile consciousness which has yet to differentiate from others. For a deeper understanding of this concept and a refusal of Freud's views, watch Jackie Wang's lecture, "Oceanic Feeling and Communist Affect," in RIBOCA2 online series of talks and conversations, curated and moderated by Sofia Lemos, 23 July 2020. Video, 56:45. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ma6y2IFDfUY.

13. bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 14.

edifices of human exceptionalism and Western European philosophy. In fact, the Aristotelian, Judeo-Christian, and Cartesian worldviews of separateness and differentiation, which sustain the modern myth of capital, have done profound damage to our individual and collective imagination, expressed in the linear progress narratives that continue to structure thought and inquiry across the vast majority of disciplines.

A philosophical canon becomes indispensable in the formation of historical and symbolic consciousness, providing a shared ground, like language, that connects across terrestrial, material, psychic, and spiritual realities. Acknowledging what such a canon makes speakable and, conversely, what it leaves unspoken in our supposedly post-metaphysical age, necessitates a "collective rewriting of knowledge" as we know it.[14] Indeed, conventional knowledge-making practices have led to capital's oppressively racializing, denominational, and egotistical extractive mythology, deeply rooted in unexercised fears and limiting beliefs. Within the fantasy of linear progress, the experience of the world is narrowly indexed in the immutable, empirical, and stable categories that laid the foundations for colonial modernity and racial capitalism. In response to this confining state of "unreality,"[15] we must actively re-examine the common tendency to research and represent the world through time as a universal absolute, as forward-moving, and made up of spatial successions.

For us to deconstruct the myth of capital and its material tenets, and, ultimately, to transform them, our approach must both acknowledge historical violences perpetrated in the name of research and, following philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe, do the regenerative labor of "repairing reason." That is, we must seek a plurality of perspectives, ways of knowing, being, and belonging, epistemologies, and methodologies in which creativity, scholarly inquiry, and political praxis can emerge and converse with one another. Repairing reason, I believe, also cultivates sensorial and spiritual experiences that renew our sense of purpose and our engagement with the narratives we build as social functions of myth and cosmology, within and beyond modernity.

The term "cosmology" gestures toward a symbolic act of world-making that is not only metaphysical but, as writer Ana Teixeira Pinto notes, "a metapolitical narrative"[16] that is collectively enacted. Indeed, cosmology is neither abstract, nor a matter of some distant past or belief. It refers to our ways of knowing and being within a symbolic

14. Sylvia Wynter, "'No Humans Involved': An Open Letter to My Colleagues," *Forum N.H.I.: Knowledge for the 21st Century* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 42–73.

15. For Campagna, "unreality" describes a state of delusion; it is a representational layer imposed by the cosmogony of capital that he calls "Technic," which attempts to veil, and even negate the ineffable dimensions at the core of existence. See Campagna, *Technic and Magic: The Reconstruction of Reality* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 98.

16. Ana Teixeira Pinto, "The Cosmology of Conversation," in *Ceremony (Burial of an Undead World)*, eds. Anselm Franke et al. (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2022), 296.

world and within language. Yet myth, mystery, and mysticism spring from the Greek *mustērion*, a derivative of *-muo* (to silence words) and share a common root in hidden symbolism and the ineffable experiences that lie beyond speech and rational thought. In this sense, theologian Karen Armstrong suggests that "mythology is the discourse we need in extremity,"[17] a discourse beyond the rigidity of linguistic structures and vital to confronting the escalating environmental

Cuneiform tablet telling the legend of Ishtar's descent to the Underworld, ca. 700 BCE.
Clay, 16 × 9 × 3 cm. Courtesy of The British Museum

crisis. As myths tells us, the duality of shadow and light is a necessary balance for continuous emergence; presence is built on the reconciliation of this dynamic movement, rather than on the dialectic synthesis of seemingly oppositional forces.

The emergence of the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, was accompanied in each instance by the claim that the faith was historically rather than mythically based. Influenced by rationalist developments in Ancient Greek thought—notably influenced by Aristotle—the religions of Abrahamic revelation tried to conform to the emerging rational standards of philosophy. These systems of belief

17. Karen Armstrong, *Sacred Nature*, audiobook read by the author (Penguin Audio, 2022).

produced (even required) a contradiction between *logos* and *mythos*, which forms the core of our disconnection from the latter. Contrary to other faiths, Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe their God to be active in history and experienced in worldly events. Yet, with the advent of monotheism, preceding religious orthodoxy held on to the view that the study of the sacred could not be a rational exercise. Around the ninth century, Muslims and Jews followed suit and, by the eleventh century, the proliferation of exegesis such as the Book of Zohar in the Jewish mystical tradition of the Kabbalah, and Sufism in the Islamic and Persian traditions, had fully reconciled philosophy with spirituality, mysticism, and prayer.

In the same century, Christians rediscovered the logos that had been lost to them in the centuries following the fall of the Roman Empire,[18] largely through the translations received from Islamic scholars. It is from the thirteenth century onwards, with a Greco-Roman resurgence in Latin Christian medieval Europe and the imperialist politics of the Catholic monarchs in the Iberian Peninsula, that a new discourse of civilization emerges. This new orthodoxy enshrines logos as a legitimizing rationalization of colonial subjugation, primitive accumulation, and enslavement. Indeed, while Arab dynasties espoused a politics of expansion and spearheaded imperial projects, the philosophies underpinning the two historical trajectories are divergent. Whereas the Qur'an places accountability on human stewardship of the earth, medieval Christian theology explicitly authorized the subduing of "nature" through necropolitical rule over vegetal, animal, and human life, which became a distinctive feature of European colonial expansion.

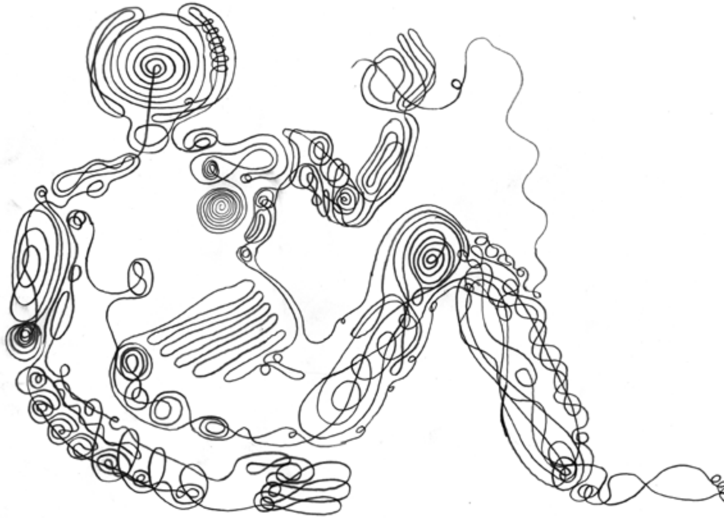
Logos would be at the base of the great transformation that followed, further dislocating us from myth and leading to the *longue durée* that culminated in a second "Axial Age,"[19] and the Cartesian and Kantian divides.[20] Because mythology imparts cosmological knowledge—that is, the building blocks of our reality—it can only be understood in the context of spiritual, psychological, and social transformation. As such, we cannot counter the myth of modernity with reason alone. Indeed, to position myth in contrast with enlightened rationality is

18. In the ensuing centuries, left-field Christian theologies, such as that of the twelfth-century German Benedictine abbess Hildegard of Bingen, would also incorporate mysticism, while pantheistic syncretism became fundamental to the evangelizing mission of the Christian faith. See Michael Marder, *Green Mass: The Ecological Theology of St. Hildegard of Bingen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021) for a more detailed account of the ecological premises of Christian mysticism.

19. German-born philosopher and psychiatrist Karl Jaspers described the "Axial Age" as a great cultural turning towards transcendence in the Eurasian civilizations that dwelled in modern-day China, India, Persia, and the Mediterranean between 900 and 300 BCE. During this period, we can identify sociocultural structures being formed and re-formed to make sense of (or exert control over) a changing world. A second shift marks the instigation of a sharp divide between what is commonly understood as immanent infrastructure and the transcendentalist superstructure of most capitalist societies, which still colors our discussions of archaeology and anthropology, among other disciplines, today.

20. Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions* (Random House Audio, 2006), audiobook read by the author, and *A Short History of Myth* (Canongate Books, 2012), audiobook read by Sandra Burr.

to rehearse the same colonial, racialized binaries, separations, and oppositions that take hold under racial capitalism.[21] This imaginary of cosmology as being irrevocably split between logos and mythos shows the challenges of enclosing our imagination in a dualistic symbolic system that reproduces historical power formation. Indeed, while we find ourselves structurally incapable of reconciling the inner and outer divisions raised by their opposition, we remain limited in our resistance to alleged representations of origin.



Eduardo Navarro, *Self-Portrait*, 2022. Charcoal on paper, 21 × 29.7 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

MYTHOPOESIS

We are unable to act differently, or to think and imagine differently, because of the absence, within the present system of unreality, of the basic requirements to implement any alternative course of action and imagination.[22]

For the Jamaican playwright, novelist, and scholar Sylvia Wynter, *mythopoesis* (from the Greek *poiesis* or creation, meaning myth-making) describes how these human-invented and retroactively projected origin stories produce the causes and conditions of what they institute. In other words, stories such as the Abrahamic chronopolitical claim to history—and the Christian teleology of capital it legitimates—establish the grounds and codes by which they then performatively validate themselves and, in so doing, become origin stories. Our present inter-locking crises demand that we not only acknowledge but also repair the

21. See *Ceremony*, eds. Franke et al.

22. Campagna, *Technic and Magic*, 88.

"storytellingly chartered, symbolically encoded, [and thereby] self-organizing living autopoetic systems," which Wynter saw as constituting our law-like globalized order of knowledge.

This manifold crisis—at once brought about by and destabilizing of the capitalist world order—repeatedly recreates the causes and conditions of our suffering, which are inevitably tied to the limits we impose on our action and imagination. Recreation is the matter of cosmology, in this case by drawing boundaries around ourselves. These imagined borders define what or who belongs, who is kept out and, ultimately, which bodies deserve our empathy and compassion. This seems to us a natural assumption, especially given that what most of us call human is implicitly imagined to be in opposition to, or split off from, other beings and lifeforms. To this end, Wynter discusses the "dynamic reciprocal interaction of our modes of being/knowing," which ontologizes a specific mode of being human, "of being I/We as 'natural beings.'"

The capitalist mythopoesis, as such, erects architectures of knowledge as much as of being—what Wynter calls "genres of the human"—which historically serve only one definition of human: the white, propertied, liberal self; the legal-rights-holding figure of man. His universality is defined against the proliferation of liminal figures that it negates: the colonized, the enslaved, the racialized, the illed and the dispossessed, as well as those who elude the increasingly normalizing regimes of capitalist labor along a continuum of different degrees of ability and cognition. Under this orthodoxy, our origin stories are defined as a stable, fixed category, synonymous with the linguistic and material structures that negate all other forms of humanness, and reverberate through the growing numbers of stateless peoples, refugees, undocumented immigrants, and those who live in the shadows of Islamophobic, antisemitic, anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and anti-ecological violences.

In her extensive body of work, Wynter distinguishes between different figures of Man at various historical cross points and in the context of a deeper notion of the history of *Homo sapiens*, through the particular modes by which our species has perceived its own lived reality. Her reconceptualization of the human in relation to concepts of Blackness, modernity, or science attempts to rehabilitate the universality of our shared human condition against the universalizing vistas of global capitalism. Following her, in Meandering I wanted to illuminate the cosmological features of the figure of man, which emerged in the early days of European capitalism and colonial conquest, under whose heavy pall we still live today.

According to Wynter, around 1492, the foundational structures of Christian cosmology underwent a "mutation" with the establishment of a new system of international relations founded in Columbus's so-called discovery of the Americas, alongside the scientific revolution and Renaissance humanism as they broke with the old rules of Latin Christian medieval Europe in favor of a new regime. This regime was

the rule of law, and it reified through new political and cultural norms the Aristotelian idea that "it is impossible to hold the same thing to be and not to be..."[23] This propelled European enlightenment thinkers to invent nature as readily "out there," and culture as "rationally ours," ultimately through the establishment of colonial difference via African enslavement, Latin American conquest, and Asian subjugation.

This epochal shift, with its profound implications for how humans understood themselves and their place in the world, had its starting point in Andalusia, Spain, from where Columbus set sail in the fifteenth century.[24] Written in response to the 1992 Columbus Quincentenary, her essay "1492: A New World View" critiques dualistic perspectives of Columbus's arrival in the Americas that understand it only as an event of pioneering triumph, or else as one of brutal invasion and conquest. While highlighting the devastating human and ecological consequences of the events of 1492, Wynter encourages new insights beyond these partial, binary premises—insights which frame them in the context of the interconnectedness of creative and theoretical resistances.

Both the geographical revolution of Columbus's voyages and the horrors inflicted upon the Indigenous peoples of the Americas were, Wynter argues, effects of the same shift in Western European knowing and being. This entailed a replacement of supernatural modes of understanding—an omnipotent God and life lived with the goal of otherworldly salvation—with a concept of secular redemption in the name of an earthly nation-state, in which the world had been created for the sake of Christian peoples. Conditioned by this narrative, Columbus saw the expropriation of the peoples of a supposedly "uninhabited" new world only in terms of its function in confirming his God's intentions and entrenching the political power of the Spanish state, as though he were acting on behalf of all humankind. Likewise, Wynter argues, both the cultural achievements and apparent atrocities of the leaders of the Aztec Empire were motivated by their own subjective understanding of their obligations in their symbolic universe.

Columbus disputed the orthodox knowledge categories of his time, just as the upheaval of the anticolonial and Civil Rights movements challenged the conventional social reason of the 1950s and 1960s, according to Wynter's assessment. Drawing on the insights of the Caribbean psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon, she calls for a

23. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vols.17, 18, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), Book 3: 996b30.

24. An unfinished Meandering research piece looked at an early form of ecocide and internal colonialism in Andalusia coinciding with Columbus's arrival in the Americas and the Caribbean, which is yet to be researched in-depth. The Spanish Crown's first forestry policies emerged as late as 1733 to study the feasibility of continued logging in Sierra de Segura, from where the timber travelled downstream along the Guadalquivir to Seville for the naval construction of the *Armada Invincible*. These practices continued well into the nineteenth century across Spain, including in Cantabria—which is currently undergoing an extensive privately-funded re-forestation project. See Vicente Ruiz García's doctoral thesis, *La provincia marítima de Segura (1733-1836): poder naval, explotación forestal y resistencia popular en la España del Antiguo Régimen* (University of Mũrcia, 2018).

new poetics that understands human behavior in terms of the socialized narratives and systems of symbolic representation that institute it—a "concept of human history as the history of how we represent the life that we live to ourselves."[25] Wynter sees 1492 as a function of an incompleteness in our self-recognition as a thinking species; a failure to envision concepts beyond our own prevailing notions of being human.

Instead, Wynter calls for imaginative and theoretical practices which awaken knowledge outside our specific culturally-bound understandings, and which narrow the rift constructed between the natural sciences and the arts. She imagines a new "new world" of narratives, beliefs, and images, one expanding beyond the conventional reason of our times, yet which takes into account both the well-being of individual people and humanity as an entire group. She uses the term "ecumenically human," using "ecumenic" to mean "universal human species," rather than to refer to an undivided Christendom. For Wynter, undoing the world-system of colonial modernity and racial capitalism that emerged with it, and so also unmaking the modern understanding of the cosmos and the human as a planetary species within it,

> must necessarily entail the un/writing of our present normative defining of the secular mode of the Subject. Defining, rather than definition, because the latter does not exist as a reality except by and through our collective system of behaviors, systems which are themselves reciprocally 'verified' by those modes of knowing or epistemes of each human system.[26]

As curator Anselm Franke and his co-creators note in their essay-exhibition *Ceremony (Burial of an Undead World)*—which centered Wynter's critique of the Christian teleology of capital in the construction of what the authors call the "white mythopoeia" of resurgent fascism—the post-Columbian figure of Man is at the core of the same origin story that reduces the cosmos to an object of scientific inquiry subject to natural laws, whilst limiting our collective symbolic agency within the individual's inner world of the mind.[27] Collective symbolizations are meanwhile estranged and rendered discrete objects of study for anthropology. They are perceived as situated, traditional, and pre-scientific belief systems that secular reason has overcome with the autopoetic power of logos, which is at the core of what Wynter calls the "normative order of knowledge." This is why, instead of speaking of "cultures" or "ideologies," Wynter speaks of "cosmogonies and counter-cosmogonies."

In our ever-accelerating state of climate and ecological collapse, developing beyond this deadly and deadening definition of the human is a prerequisite for an emancipatory political project that will be able

25. Sylvia Wynter, "1492: A New World View," *Race Discourse and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex M. Nettleford (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1995), 48.

26. Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," *Boundary* 2, no. 12/13 (1984): 22.

27. See *Ceremony*, eds. Franke et al.

to enter a stream of ecological understanding that does not spring from, nor lapse into, capitalist modes of production. As Franke continues, "To describe capitalist modernity in cosmological terms (...) is only the precondition for breaking free from the comprehensive spell that its origin stories hold over our cosmological imaginaries, in order to then be able to conceive of a "we" that is not the modern "universal subject," nor one defined solely by its negation."[28]

THE CONFLUENCE BETWEEN TWO SEAS

Whosoever knows that the Real is identical with the path, knows life as it is.[29]

In the *Kitāb ʿAnqāʾ mughrib*, the great twelfth-century Al-Andalus poet and mystic Ibn ʿArabī's earliest surviving poetic work, he writes, "I marveled at an Ocean without a Shore / and at a Shore without an Ocean," the waves of which heave and overflow into a state of communion. Within this placeless and limitless expanse, historically divided perceptions of reality, both spiritual and material, come into communion, flowing into a single topography—a shoreless reach which, for Ibn ʿArabī, is *barzakh*, or the creative imagination.[30] As an intermediate reality revealing our fundamental interconnectedness and interdependent co-arising with all life, his proposal for a seaborn sociality forms a scene of reconciliation between fresh and saltwater,[31] the spiritual and material, the visible and the invisible realms, the subtle and the sensible.

Lying at the confluence of these seemingly separate planes, the intermediate realm is neither one nor the other, but inhabits both spaces. While reason may denote barzakh as a barrier that separates them, it is merely a line of difference—similar to the subtle parting of shadow from light. Can we distinguish between one side and the other? For the Sufi sage, barzakh is "neither existent nor nonexistent, neither known nor unknown, neither negated nor affirmed (...) it is intelligible in itself, yet it is nothing but the imagined-image (*al-khayal*)."[32] This

28. Ibid., 150.

29. Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 109, cited in Andi Herwati, "Concerning Ibn ʿArabī's Account of Knowledge of God *al-Haqq*," *Kanz Philosophia: A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* 3, no. 2 (December 2013): 219–242.

30. I adopt the expression "creative imagination" from Corbin, one of the foremost translators and commenters on Ibn ʿArabī's work, for whom the human imagination is a reflection of the divine imagination, and, at its best, our only true connection to the divine. See Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Al-Arabī* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1969] 1998). The American philosopher, translator, and interpreter William C. Chittick, in turn, prefers the term "nondelimited imagination" because, according to Ibn ʿArabī, the imaginal is the revelation of the Beloved and, as such, cannot be bound. See Chittick in *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989).

31. According to the Qur'an, God merges the two seas of fresh and saltwater, yet between them lies a boundary they do not cross, 25:53.

32. Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, cited in William C. Chittick, "The World of Imagination and Poetic Imagery According to Ibn al-Arabī," *Temenos* 10 (1989): 104.

idea-image, in turn, is perceived through the psycho-spiritual organ of the heart (*qalb*), which, in Ibn ʿArabī and Sufism in general, is the organ that produces imaginative awareness and comprehensive intuition of the mysterious and the miraculous. The heart is the center by which the "eye" learns to see reality as it is—without separateness. In this context, it is understood not as an organ of flesh, but as subtle physiology to which mystics of all times and places have given importance "on the basis of ascetic, ecstatic, and contemplative experience expressed in symbolic language."[33]

By encouraging a relational poetics between the material and the spiritual, the heart has the capacity to give presence (*hymna*) to these ideas-images; that is, by meditating, imagining, projecting, and desiring, the thought of the heart is so powerful as to manifest subtle forms into the sensible world.[34] The image (or form) manifested through the heart then designates a mode of being "in suspense" since it creates a reality which is independent from pure spirit and from the material body, and yet relates closely to both. In this way, the image becomes a third possibility between mind and world. This imaginative intelligence, barzakh, expressed through the heart, connotes a simultaneous knowing and loving. Ibn ʿArabī distinguishes between three kinds of love, each entwined with different kinds of imagining:

> Divine: the love of the Beloved[35] for the creature in which it creates itself and emerges as the form in which it reveals itself; that is all our extended-material reality.
>
> Spiritual: the love lives within the creature who is always in quest of the Beloved whose image they are created after. This love aims only to fulfill the needs of the Beloved, and to comply with its wishes and those of its *fedele*; in other words, its loving fellows, which is another name for Sufi.
>
> Material: the search for satisfaction of our needs and desires without concern for the Beloved and its community. "And that, alas," writes Ibn Arabī in the twelfth century, "is how most people understand love today."[36]

The experience of love felt through the creative imagination is the "con-spiration" (the breathing together) of the spiritual and material loves. This dual love can be articulated as an essential reaching to know oneself, and thence to know the Beloved. When these two expressions of love are reconciled, the Beloved manifests themself to the

33. Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 221.

34. These, in turn, are communicated as symbolic language to prophets and mystics (Corbin [1969], 1998). For an overview of the importance of the symbol in mystical thinking and how it offers a model distinct from that of representation and allegory or conscious figuration, see Federico Campagna, *Prophetic Cultures: Recreation for Adolescents* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

35. Other spiritual traditions refer to this ineffable excess as God, the divine, the absolute, or, simply, consciousness.

36. Cited in Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 149.

heart as barzakh in the form of a revelation or "unveiling."[37] According to the French philosopher and theologian Henry Corbin, who translated and commented on the work of Ibn ʿArabī, their reconciliation reveals the balance in creation, for the material apprehends and contemplates a concrete image, whereas spiritual love does not take hold of the image, but is instead wholly invested in it. In other words, the material causes spiritual realities to appear to the reality of the image, while the image itself transmutes the sensible world into subtle forms. In the experience of intermediary love, visionary experiences, prophetic knowledge, and symbolic visions appear in their undivided form.

For Corbin, barzakh corresponds with the "imaginal world" (*mundus imaginalis*),[38] a spiritual topography, where "as strange as it may seem, the reality which has been an inner and hidden one turns out to envelop, surround, or contain that which at first was outer and visible."[39] Corbin's imaginal is coterminous with other Persian and Arabic expressions, such as *alam al-mithal* (the world of images and archetypical ideas), *malakut* (the subtle world of souls), *hurqalya* (the world of the celestial Earth), and *nâ-kojâ-âbad* (the land of nowhere) all of which express the contrary to *ʻaql* (reason) which delimits, defines, and analyzes by means of difference and distinction. While the imaginal may seem akin to the term *ou-topia*—adopted from the Greek by Thomas More to denote a place that is no-place, somewhere recognizable and yet beyond our reach—I wonder, under what circumstances have so-called utopian modes of critique become possible only because of their apparent unchartability?

Instead, for Ibn ʿArabī, the creative imagination is the widest known thing, and sits at the core of his metaphysical epistemology.

37. This sympathy between the two loves is reminiscent of Plato's definition of *eros*. In his cosmological dialogue *Timaeus*, Plato distinguishes between what he calls the lower soul, connected to bodily pleasures, and the higher soul, the spiritual part whose ambition is to transcend bodily reality. For Plato, the higher soul desires to be reconciled with the *Anima Mundi*, which Plato describes as the pure form of eros—the desire for supreme knowledge. When the soul is embodied and the perception of phenomenal diversity (understood as separation from the One) takes hold, eros reverts to the lower soul and is converted into sexual desire. Plato goes on to describe the physiology of sex through an explanation of a subtle vascular system wherein vital energy flows through a caduceus that passes through the center of the spine. In Plato, as in the Hindu concept of *kundalini*, the image is of entwined serpents slithering up the marrow channel. The Eastern and Indian cosmologies that consider the serpent iconography as a representation of a life-force have been an inspiration for the title of Meandering, which translates in Spanish as *serpentear*. This argument is developed later in this publication for Isabel Lewis's research commission. See Lemos, "Devotional Listening," included in this publication, 99–103.

38. Originally the title of a paper delivered at the *Colloquium on Symbolism* in Paris in June 1964, the Latin expression reflects the ecumenical scope and fundamental force of the imagination that he found in the Arabic and Persian texts. He found it challenging to content himself with the word "imaginary," which, for him, is equated in contemporary common sense use with the unreal, with something that is outside the framework of being and co-existing; in brief, with something utopian. Instead, for Corbin the imagination is the most fundamental form of cognition and is central to his perceived necessity of a "perpetual hermeneutics" to combat the forces of certainty and dogma. See Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis or The Imaginary and The Imaginal," in *Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme* 6 (1964), 3–26, and "Towards a Chart of the Imaginal," in *Spiritual Body & Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran* (Princeton University Press, 1977).

39. Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal", 5.

Yet, he writes, "in spite of this tremendous wideness by which it exercises its properties over all things, it is incapable of receiving meanings disengaged from substrata as they are in themselves. That is why it sees knowledge in the form of milk, honey, wine, and pearls."[40] This is what art critic and scholar Thomas McEvilley called the "problem of the One and the Many," an age-old metaphysical conundrum that expresses in an impulse to find a principle unifying apparent phenomenal diversity.[41] If aided by reason alone, we are bound to see only milk, honey, wine, and pearls by their representational qualities, as independent and self-sufficient, and lose sight of the life pulsating through the world's phenomena.

As Japanese Zen and Islamic scholar Toshihiko Izutsu writes, such a representation "is nothing but a groundless image produced in the mind of man."[42] Instead, Izutsu suggests, "The right attitude (…) is, in short, to see the One in the Many and the Many in the One, or rather to see the Many as One and the One as Many. The realization of this kind of *coincidentia oppositorum*[[43]] is called by Ibn ʿArabī 'perplexity' (*hayrah*). As such, this is a metaphysical perplexity because here man is impeded by the very nature of what he sees in the world from definitely deciding as to whether Being is One or Many."[44]

In Ibn ʿArabī's shoreless ocean of barzakh, the Earth's waters flow and multiply to eventually become one with it. In their confluence emerges imaginative awareness of our interbeing,[45] which enables us to release the false dualisms such as world-self, or nature-culture, which frame the world as composed of distinct parts—extractable and independent from the whole—and condition our ability to act within it. For the poet, this revelation is equated with unveiling, or "clear sight"—the capacity to see beyond dualism and separation—and with understanding the meaning of what is seen. Hence, the discovery of "illuminated vision" is not a matter of rational understanding, nor of philosophy or theology; rather, it is metaphysical insight.

To deepen this point, I want to focus on what remains an extraordinarily significant philosophical encounter, which took place in twelfth-century Córdoba, Andalusia between the pre-pubescent Ibn ʿArabī and the city's chief judge, Ibn Rushd (latinized as Averroes),

40. Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 3:361 cited in Chittick, 1989, 122.

41. See McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, 24.

42. Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 68.

43. Term first used by German polymath Nicholas of Cusa in his *De Docta Ignorantia* (1440).

44. Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 68.

45. An expression coined by Vietnamese Buddhist monk and scholar Thich Nhat Hanh to describe the dependence of any one person or thing on all other existents. In Buddhist ethics the doctrine of *paṭicca samuppāda*, or dependent co-arising, considers that reality emerges from an interdependent process of mutual causation. In other words, one element exists because all other elements condition its existence. Driven by Indigenous leadership and advocacy, the Aotearoa/New Zealand Māori concept of *kaitiakitanga* emphasizes stewardship rather than ownership over natural resources, based on a similar understanding of interdependence, while the South American Kichwa notion of *sumak kawsay* conceives it as essential to leading a plentiful or good life (*buen vivir*).

who was one of the most influential Islamic scholars and jurists of his time. In particular, he was famous among contemporary philosophers for his translation and commentary on Aristotle. An elderly man by this stage, Ibn Rushd had written his *Book of the Decisive Treatise about the Connection between the Law and Wisdom*, where he seeks to define the ultimate interpretation of the Qu'ran by introducing a particular hermeneutic order into it. Inspired by the rationalist approach of the Greek philosophers—specifically an understanding of the Aristotelian logic of syllogism as a means of demonstration—he intended to establish a measure starting from which all interpretations can be classified as types. Ibn ʿArabī later wrote an account of his electric meeting with Ibn Rushd:[46]

> I went to Cordova, to the house of Abu-l Walid Ibn Rushd. He had expressed the desire to meet me personally, because he had heard of the revelations that God had accorded me in the course of my spiritual retirement, and he had made no secret of astonishment at what he had been told. For this reason my father, who was one of his intimate friends, sent me to his house one day, pretexting some sort of errand, in reality to enable Ibn Rushd to have a talk with me. At that time I was still a beardless youth. When I entered, the master arose from his place, received me with signal marks of friendship and consideration, and finally embraced me. (…) He asked me this question: "What manner of solution have you found through divine illumination and inspiration? Is it identical with that which we obtain from speculative reflection?" I replied, "Yes. No. Between the Yes and the No, spirits take their flight from their matter and heads are separated from their bodies." Ibn Rushd turned pale. (…) He was a great master of reflection and philosophical meditation. He gave thanks to God, I was told, for having allowed him to live at such a time and permitted him to see a man who had gone into spiritual retirement and emerged as I had emerged. "I myself," he declared, "had said that such a thing was possible, but never met anyone who had actually experienced it. Glory be to God who has let me live at a time distinguished by one of the masters of this experience, one of those who open the locks of His gates. Glory be to God who has accorded me the personal favor of seeing one of them with my own eyes."[47]

Ibn Rushd, judge of Córdoba, was bewildered by meeting a child in the state of knowing. As philosopher Steffen Stelzer writes,

46. Ibn ʿArabī met Ibn Rushd twice more thereafter; once in the visionary world, and another at the latter's funeral in Marrakesh, then part of Al-Andalus: "[he appeared] to me in an ecstasy in such a form that between his person and myself there was a light veil. I saw him through this veil, but he did not see me or know that I was present. He was indeed too absorbed in his meditation to take notice of me. I said to myself, "His thought does not guide him to the place where I myself am." I had no further occasion to meet him until his death, which occurred in the year 595 of the Hegira [1198] in Marrakesh. His remains were taken to Cordova, where his tomb is." Quoted in Steffen Stelzer, and نيفيتشرزليتش., "Decisive Meetings: Ibn Rushd, Ibn ʿArabī, and the Matter of Knowledge / ةفرعملاو يبرع نباو دشر نبا : ةلصاف تاءاقل." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 16 (1996): 36.

47. Stelzer et al, "Decisive Meetings," 35.

> No books were read, no accounts written, and it is said that the boy did not even intend or desire to acquire what was given to him. He entered, probably at the hand of a grown-up, into a spiritual seclusion and emerged in the way he emerged, showing signs of knowing which alarmed the scholar who had settled in his knowledge and was open for new views only insofar as they were not unsettling.[48]

Both Ibn Rushd and Ibn ʿArabī were believers, a group which the sage states can be categorized into two kinds of knowers: "the official scholars" who hold knowledge that is given by the Beloved only to prophets and emissaries as prophecy, and which requires individual interpretation; and the second kind, called by Ibn ʿArabī "the Folk of Allah," who consider knowledge to be a gift that continues to be given as long as the giver exists. While Ibn ʿArabī did not reject the validity of knowledge gained through reflection and consideration, he claimed that it has its limitations in unveiling acts of world-making, which comes to us in ways that are beyond reason.

Furthermore, for Corbin, unveiling offers something which is still in a state of potency, and which calls for the engagement of those who will transform it into action: a kind of *intelligentia spiritualis*.[49] Ibn Rushd, "a Peripatetic [who] had no use for the idea of creation," accepted the "existence of a human intelligence independent of the organic world,"[50] excluding from his cosmology barzakh, the realm of visionary events, and symbolic visions. "The magnitude of this loss," he concludes, "becomes apparent when we consider that this intermediate world is the realm where the conflict which split the Occident, the conflict between theology and philosophy, between faith and knowledge, between symbol and history, is resolved."[51]

I believe the encounter between Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn Rushd in Córdoba, Andalusia, is a timely—and timeless—reminder of our need for a path of reconciliation and acknowledgment of the interconnectedness of creative and theoretical resistances. It provides us with a method—the creative imagination—to realize Mbembe's proposition to repair reason, and to respond to Wynter's call for re-writing knowledge. In Ibn ʿArabī's metaphysical epistemology, the path to knowledge reveals a mode of perception where the knower, the known, and the knowledge are one and the same. It is a kind of "deep seeing," where the way to know the world is to look deeply in ourselves, which, in turn, generates a new world view.

In this journey, I am reminded of artist James Bridle's recent book, *Ways of Being: Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for Planetary Intelligence*, where he writes,

48. Ibid., 37.

49. Henri Corbin, *En Islam Iranienne: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, Vol. IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 443–4.

50. Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 12.

51. Ibid., 13.

> More than ever, it is time for re-imaginings. Yet this act of imagination cannot be ours alone. To think against human exceptionalism requires us to think outside and beyond it, and to recognize in Blake's vision the deep truth of his words: "nature is imagination itself." [...] The task that lies ahead of us involves less a novel change in ourselves than a recognition—in the sense of a re-cognition, a realization and a rethinking—of our place in the world.[52]

In Ibn ʿArabī's creative imagination, as in William Blake's verses, nature precedes any particular form in which it manifests. In this sense, these poets move in direct contravention of the Aristotelian law of non-contradiction, as they celebrate the paradox at the core of being: nature as one and as the many. Had this understanding of paradox, also suggested by Campagna,[53] entered European Catholic theology instead of Aristotle's law of non-contradiction, what would have become of racial capitalism, white supremacy, and the myth of human exceptionalism?

THE SPRING OF RECONCILIATION

To create peace, we require a leap of the imagination.[54]

We are witnessing an unprecedented assault on our collective symbolic agency by rising state repression, growing inequality, resurgent nationalisms, unrepentant fascism, environmental disruption, human rights violations, and white supremacist ideologies, all heightened by ever-accelerating digital technologies. As sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos writes, "it is as difficult to imagine the end of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy as to imagine that they will have no end. The imagination of the end is being corrupted by the end of the imagination."[55] The persecution of spiritual communities, social movements, and Indigenous leadership through centuries of racism, imperialism, enslavement, enclosure, extraction, incarceration, and genocide is not only the product of a fearful culture resulting from a logic of exclusion, division, and discrimination, but also the consequence of a perceived inability to imagine integrity, interdependence, and communion as fundamental ways of expressing and experiencing the world.

It is perhaps due to the perceived scarcity of our creative imagination that the current reality system has reached a historical nexus where it is prepared to respond to any attempts at liberation with

52. James Bridle, *Ways of Being: Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for Planetary Intelligence* (London: Allen Lane, 2022), 17.

53. For a resignification of paradox in opposition to the Aristotelian law of non-contradiction, see Campagna's proposal for "resolution through integration," in *Technic and Magic*, 170.

54. Françoise Vergès, "A Leap of Imagination," in *Slow Spatial Reader: Chronicles of Radical Affection*, ed. Carolyn F. Strauss (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2021).

55. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), ix.

increasingly virulent forms of violence. Paradoxically, in this hegemonic form of worlding, the imagination has been equally valuable for accumulation by dispossession.[56] As James Baldwin's poem at the start of this essay gestures to, imagination has also been exploited for the purposes of colonial expansion; in the realm of technological development and market-oriented economies, it has become synonymous with the crescendo of triumphalist, linear progress narratives. This provokes the question: how might we inhabit such a state of contradiction, and discover within its multifarious complications, implications, and co-implications a source of vitality?

By bringing awareness to our ways of perceiving, feeling, sensing, and knowing, reconciliation enlists our bodies as sites of knowledge, imagination, and inquiry—as guides for feeling into our dreamed futures. Ibn ʿArabī's creative imagination describes both a political consciousness and a sensuous knowledge of lives lived in the key of resistance and possibility—what sociologist Avery F. Gordon terms "being in-difference."[57] Radical utopian thinking, from science fiction and abolitionism, to mysticism, and Indigenous worldviews, often holds ritual and convening as embodied resources that bring forth both individual and collective acknowledgments of the interconnectedness of all life. As a transcultural, transtemporal mode of doing that refuses the dominant, prescriptive ways the world is imagined through crisis and catastrophe, reconciliation takes the creative imagination as a vital proposition, joyfully anchoring it as a method for living otherwise.

Acknowledging the creative imagination as an energy to be continuously preserved and engaged with—against competing extractive imaginaries—requires our commitment to an expansive departure from harmful capitalist beliefs and origin stories. As noted by philosopher Astrida Neimanis—who coined the term hydrofeminism to describe a set of ethical propositions which learn from bodies of water, including ourselves—an aqueous imaginary requires grace, concern, and curiosity to keep negotiating and proposing realities anew.[58] This commitment to a state of continuously renewed perception is perhaps the wisdom that rivers and the riparian communities on their banks can offer in an ecologically damaged world.

56. For David Harvey, "accumulation by dispossession" describes the world after 9/11, with the combined wars in Afghanistan and Iraq marking an economic turning point in imperialist projects. In this new epoch, primitive accumulation, or the forced extraction and privatization of the commons, regains dominance in neoliberal governance contingent upon the use of force, with the effect of strengthening the power of global empires. Paula Chakravarty and Denise Ferreira da Silva add the 2008 subprime crisis to this model as the latest in the succession of historical developments suggested by Harvey's term, showing how raciality continues to operate as an economic referent and category of extraction. See Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and Paula Chakravarty and Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Accumulation, Dispossession and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism," in *American Quarterly* 3, no.64 (2012): 361–385.

57. Gordon notes that, whilst often hidden from view, utopian modes of life and critique spatialize pasts, presents, and the not-yet, embodying possibilities for living along the lines of, as Gordon articulates it, "what if as if." See Avery F. Gordon, *Letters from the Utopian Margins: The Hawthorn Archives* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

58. Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 175–176.

"There are 60,000 miles of waterways in our bodies—veins and arteries—the red lines of our own lives," writes Mojave poet Natalie Diaz in "*exhibits from* the American Water Museum."[59] Part of the 2020 collection *Postcolonial Love Poem*, this poem, alongside "The First Water Is the Body," expresses the inseparability of the human body from freshwater ecosystems. Diaz writes, "How can I translate—not in words but in belief—that a river is a body, as alive as you or I, that there can be no life without it?" Drawing out from within her the wisdom of her Mojave ancestors, her discursive poetic mode is interspersed with meditations on our fundamental interconnectedness with rivers:

> 'Aha Makav is the true name of our people, given to us by our Creator who loosed the river from the earth and built it into our living bodies.
>
> Translated into English, 'Aha Makav means the river runs through the middle of our body, the same way it runs through the middle of our land.[60]

Diaz's poems draw connections between experiences of environmental racism tied to the afterlives of slavery and systemic racism, accumulation by dispossession, and climate injustices perpetrated by depredatory corporations. Her poetry collection refers to the degradation of the Colorado River in the U.S., the Indigenous resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline, the U.S.-headquartered companies that purchase water rights in South American countries, and the lead poisoning of the drinking water in Flint, Michigan. These are a few examples of the colonial continuities between the 1500s and today, all marked by a self-rationalizing thirst which extracts, drains, and depletes the planet for profit margins. The extractive economies that affect bodies of water, from stream to ocean, and aquifer to rainwater, affect the floodplain as much as the human body. Abused and exhausted, "*even a river will die of thirst,*" Diaz warns us. And, "as we die of drought," so does our capacity to thrive in and with the world.

The manifold threats to the planet's many bodies of water, including rivers and freshwater ecosystems, have created momentum for the recognition of the rights of nature and, in certain instances, the granting of legal personhood status.[61] This shows how histories of rivers'

59. Natalie Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2020), 63–72.

60. From "The First Water Is the Body," in Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem*, 46.

61. Most legal precedents for the rights of nature have emerged in the last 15 years as a direct result of the failures of existing law to address the escalating ecological crisis. In most cases, Indigenous jurisprudence against modern states set as a continuation of colonial rule, reflects a combined approach to spiritual practice and environmental action. Led by a deference to Indigenous world views, peasant knowledge, and ancestral wisdom, in 2008 Ecuador became the first country to enshrine the legal rights of nature in its constitution. In 2011, Bolivia established 11 new rights for nature, including: the right to life and to exist; the right to continue vital cycles and processes free from human intervention; the right to

destruction and dispossession co-exist with the resilient and vibrant aspects of river life, such as the intertwined living, culture, and activism that takes place in riverbank communities. As decolonial feminist scholar Macarena Gómez-Barris shows, these histories point to how the river itself is enlivened by modes of human activity that do not merely extract from and deplete its ecological life. Gómez-Barris suggests that, "we might imagine how the river possesses its own form of memory, as a witness to the dialectic between life and death of damming, as weighing in on the contradictions between converting value and devaluing, and as a source of flow that energizes against its own erasure."[62] By listening closely to these stories, we understand how rivers have always been guides for their own regeneration. Rivers are flowing and forgiving.

In the river's flux, "there is no post- or pre-version of history that is not linear or teleological but rather moves in cycles and spirals and sets out on a course without neglecting to return to the same point."[63] Similarly to myth and mythology—whose structures, as anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss suggested, are dynamic, and by their nature synthesize the synchronic and diachronic aspects of language—rivers reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable tensions of a forward-moving narrative. Instead of a linear history, the cosmologies of river valley communities and civilizations like Ibn ʿArabī's barzakh or Wynter's mythopoesis, meander and whirl. In their intertwined origin stories, past and future are nestled into one another and contained within the present in overlapping time frames.

clean water and air; the right to balance; the right not to be polluted; the right to oppose genetic modification, and the right not to be affected by mega-infrastructure and development projects that disrupt the balance of ecosystems and local communities. The basin of the Atrato River was recognized as a legal entity by the Constitutional Court of Colombia in 2016, a landmark decision in the social call for the protection of ecosystems affected by alluvial gold mining, carried out by a Collegiate Body of Guardians. In 2017, the Te Awa Tupua Act granted the status of legal personhood to the Whanganui River in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The act assigns the "rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a legal person" to the river and declares two guardians responsible for ensuring its well-being: a representative of the New Zealand Government, and a representative of the Whanganui Iwi. In the same year, the High Court of Uttarakhand in India recognized the legal personhood of its sacred rivers, the Ganges and Yamuna, and in 2019, Bangladesh became the first country to grant all of its rivers the same legal status as persons in a court of law. More recently, in September 2022, the Spanish Senate recognized the legal personhood of the Mar Menor lagoon in Mũrcia, a highly significant result from the concerted efforts of a civil society initiative, which reclaims the lagoon's "fundamental right" to conservation and protection. In 2023, a proposal for the recognition of legal personhood to the marshlands in the Doñana National Park in the lower Guadalquivir valley was submitted to the Spanish Congress by the left-wing coalition "Unidas Podemos."

62. Macarena Gõmez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 95.

63. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: On Decolonising Practices and Discourses* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 48.

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.[64]

Over centuries and across the world, rivers have been artificially diverted, narrowed, shortened, widened, channeled, straightened, dredged, deepened, dammed, embanked, and altered by human action in countless ways. Despite this, rivers cannot be entirely contained. Far from being stable, fixed entities, rivers overflow and become barren, waxing and waning along their course. They are fully present with their surroundings in a continuous flux that is recreated every passing moment. Their flow, much like Ibn ʿArabī's creative imagination, is one of "continual change in every state and manifestation in every form."[65]

Perhaps for this reason, rivers have long been central to the ways in which different civilizations have imagined the origins and nature of the world. Enmeshed with the fragility of ecosystems and ecological balance, the belief systems of river valley civilizations traveled widely across historical and transnational boundaries to reach us today, through song, poetry, and praise. From the Yangtze and the Ganges to the Euphrates and the Nile, and from the Guadalquivir to the Congo and the Mississippi, civilizational and cosmological experiments have borrowed from rivers' drawn-out endings and new beginnings, possessing no single source or point of origin.[66] Instead, as the American poet Langston Hughes intimates, rivers flow through a socio-spiritual continuum that not only flows against the kind of fiction created by historical time, but also carries forward our shared humanity.

As we have seen, a great number of the world's civilizations blossomed along riverbanks and in river valleys. When the early states and empires were born at the convergence of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in Mesopotamia—Greek for middle (*mesos*) and river (*potamos*), literally "between two rivers"—different cultures began prospering in the middle and lower basins of the Yellow, Yangtze, and Liao rivers, and a few centuries later, the Ancient Egyptian civilization thrived along the Nile. Meanwhile, the Caral-Supe civilization emerged along the rivers Fortaleza, Pativilca, and Supe in modern-day Peru, followed

64. Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, [1921] 2002). Hughes dedicated the poem to W.E.B. Du Bois, author of the seminal *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), in his first poetry collection, *The Weary Blues* (1926).

65. Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 3:313.

66. The structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss saw myth as a complex linguistic structure that is itself the amalgamation of its many versions and variations. See Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

by the Harappans who flourished in the Indus valley circa 2,500 to 500 BCE. Based on the archaeological evidence unearthed to date, these are some of the oldest-known civilizations on our planet, and the study of their settlement on floodplains continues to raise important questions around social organization, spirituality, and ecology.

The Guadalquivir River, coursing through a valley that was once ocean,[67] emerges in the clouds of Sierra de Cazorla and flows southwest to the Atlantic in the Gulf of Cádiz—which was a fertile cradle to Tartessian, Phoenician, Carthaginian, Roman, and Arab settlements in the region of Andalusia. The river has been a vital force for their ecomythologies and respective systems of representation, from Indo-Greek cultural exchange to monotheistic revelation, to the later Greco-Roman resurgence, through to the launch of the Spanish colonial project, which from 1492 onwards led to the forced conversion and Catholic expulsion of practicing Jewish and Muslim populations from the area. Approaching the Mediterranean and the Atlantic as mythopoetic spaces that connect the extension of Al-Andalus from East to West, as well as to the Global South, through the extraction of people and natural resources in what cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy terms the "Black Atlantic", we find that Andalusia is a place of cosmological invention, a vast space of the imagination rather than simply a product of cartography.

This region has encountered fundamentally different imaginations about reality and what the world "is", as shown in the stream of archaeological imagery and scholarly knowledge which blanket the region.[68] And, as each reality changed, their world also changed with it. In the period of Islamic rule over Spain (circa 711 to 1492), the stretch of the Guadalquivir from the Atlantic to Seville continued to be navigated along what the Almoravid geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi (1100–1165) called "the way of the river" (*tarik al-Wadi*). Having been called *Baetis* by the Romans, among other appellations by other groups, when the Arab and Muslim peoples settled in the Iberian Peninsula, they gave the river a name of their own: the Guadalquivir, *(al-) Wadi 'l-Kabir*, meaning "the Great River." Idrisi's contemporary, the Granadan author of *Kitāb al-Jughrāfiyya* (Book

67. As paleoceanography studies show, ten million years ago Andalusia was covered by the Tethys Sea under the line of Sierra Morena, which gradually receded during the late Miocene age (the geological time between ten and five million years ago). During this period, the Guadalquivir Basin was open to the Atlantic Ocean, a remarkable history preserved in the growth structure of fossilized reefs and corals, which are visible in the sedimentary rock used to erect the Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba and much of the city's architecture. When the sea begins to retreat, the coastline moves away from the Sierra Morena and many of the flooded areas become part of the great sedimentary basin of the Guadalquivir, where sediments slowly give rise to mineral, vegetal, and animal life, and later human settlements.

68. Many Sufi and Shi'ite mystics and thinkers from Al-Andalus were Neoplatonists or inspired by Platonic texts. A number of these were translated and commented on by Persian polymath Ibn Sina (980–1037, Iran), latinized as Avicenna, and the Peripatetic school. In turn, Avicenna's comments inspired the schools of Suhrawardi (1154–1191, Syria) in the Islamic east and Ibn 'Arabī in the Islamic west. The coordinates set by Suhrawardi and Ibn 'Arabī in the spiritual topography found in Oriental Platonism and the Zoroastrian Neoplatonism of Iran escaped the rising tide of Aristotelianism that inundated Latin Christian medieval Europe through Averroes.

of Geography), Muhammad al-Zuhri, compared it to the rivers Tigris, Euphrates, Nile, and Jordan.

Around the tenth and eleventh centuries, and synchronous with a reinvigorated importance of myth in Sufism, a new way of relating to the watershed formed in Andalusia. What has been dubbed the "Arab Green Revolution of the Middle Ages" centered the river through agronomical expertise and botany, as well as related studies in medicine and pharmacology. These show how the spiritual ecology of the region "took into account soil health, water management, seed saving, the development of new cultivars, companion planting, composting, pest control, and plenty more in a circular flow that continuously returned fertility to the soil."[69]

As Sufi poet and contributing presence in this volume, Medina Tenour Whiteman notes, this knowledge remained in Spain after the fall of Al-Andalus, as numerous Muslims became nominal converts to Christianity (the Moriscos) carrying forward techniques for sustainable farming and water management: "The irrigation channels, *acequias*, the veins of these otherwise arid landscapes, is derived from *assaquiyya*, while the water wheels that drew from rivers such as the Guadalquivir carry the name norias, from *na'urah*. The underground water tank that stored this water was known as an *aljibe*, from *al-hubb*, and an open-air reservoir is called an *alberca*, from the *al-birka*, itself rather poetically derived from *b-r-k*, "to kneel," as of an animal drinking at a water hole, or of a person in prayer."[70]

Today, the Guadalquivir is experiencing turbidity and drought at historic levels, endangering three of the most important natural reserves in Spain—the Cazorla, Sierra Morena, and Doñana—which are unified by its riverbed. Largely due to monocultural agricultural activity based on water-intensive crops, nearby lakes, tributaries, and springs are drying up, thereby increasing salinity in the soils. Alongside the use of synthetic fertilizers and petroleum-based weed killers, this excess salinity leaves soil exposed to the heat of the sun, depleting it of nutrients. In such desiccated condition, topsoil is easily washed into the river by rains, where it prompts the overgrowth of algae, which can destroy entire aquatic ecosystems. As landscapes are molded and altered through erosion, encounter, and contamination, or created anew through deposition, navigation, and flood-farming, waterways continue to lay down the sediment layers of our civilizational narratives.

69. Medina Tenour Whiteman, "Listening for God in the Garden: The Spiritual Ecologies of Al-Andalus," https://ocean-archive.org/view/3535.

70. Medina Tenour Whiteman, "The Olive of Al-Andalus," https://ocean-archive.org/view/3534.

The Sufi sages of Al-Andalus believed that humans could be ford-makers.[71] At its greatest expanse, the Umayyad dynasty covered most of the Islamic world, extending from the Middle East to the Iberian Peninsula, from Damascus to Córdoba. In the form first of an emirate and then of a caliphate,[72] Córdoba became the largest city in Europe, and a leading cultural and economic center of science, medicine, philosophy, and invention during the Islamic enlightenment. Between the eighth and twelfth centuries, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity shared their philosophies fruitfully with one another,[73] and this creative confluence continued its way through Latin Christian medieval Europe through the dissemination of Arab, Aramaic, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin printed translations.[74] This intellectual and spiritual environment,[75]

71. In Jainism, a *Tirthankara*, or "ford-maker," is a spiritual leader who can cross, or transcend, the perpetual flow of earthly life. More broadly, "crossing over to the other shore" names an expression of transcendence across different spiritual traditions.

72. The archaeological ruin of Madinat al-Zahra, a palace-city built on the western outskirts of Córdoba between 953–957, illustrates the flourishing of inter-faith governance and law for 75 years until the collapse of the Caliphate in 1011, destroyed by an Amazigh rebellion that would overthrow the Umayyad dynasty for the Almoravid dynasty, an imperial Berber Muslim dynasty centered in Morocco (c. 1062–1150), and later the Almohad dynasty, the last Amazigh confederation that ruled Islamic Spain (c. 1130–1269) until the Nasrid Emirate of Granada (1238–1492) that ends with the conquest by a Catholic coalition from León, Castile, Navarre, and Aragón.

73. Though a threefold process of "orientalization" that included the spread of Arabic as spoken and scholarly language, and of Islam as faith, alongside differential taxation policies brought in by the Caliphs, many hispano-Christians and hispano-Jewish living in the Peninsula converted to Islam. This process is, however, historically and materially different from the forceful conversion and expulsion of the Jews in 1492 with the Alhambra Decree, and from the series of Catholic edicts outlawing Islam that eventually culminated in the Inquisition in the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

74. The first paper mills in Europe arrived in Córdoba through the Middle East in the eleventh century after the Arab-Chinese conflict, which spread papermaking to Central Asia in the eighth century. Between the ninth and early twelfth centuries, libraries in Cairo, Baghdad, and Córdoba held collections greater than the ones in China, and incomparable in size to those in Latin Christian medieval Europe. Of the many scribe workshops and more than 70 libraries that existed in Al-Andalus, only a few remain. With the fall of Granada, the new governing powers ordered the forceful collection of books and manuscripts of Al-Andalus and Nasrid cultures for a period of seven years, culminating in the fires of 1492 and 1499/1500, ordered by Cardenal Cisneros on behalf of Catholic Queen Isabel I. See Richard Ovenden, *Burning the Books: A History of the Deliberate Destruction of Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020). For a museological account of the history of papermaking in Córdoba visit La Casa Andalusí, Calle Judíos, 12, 14004 Córdoba.

75. To name a few enlightened thinkers from this period who were relevant to our research: Ziryab (c. 789, Mosul–c. 857, Córdoba), a singer, oud player, composer, poet, and teacher who established the first music conservatory of Europe in Córdoba, also known as a polymath, with knowledge in astronomy, geography, meteorology, botanics, cosmetics, culinary art, and fashion; Ibn Masarra (883–931, Córdoba), an ascetic scholar, considered one of the first Sufis as well as one of the first philosophers of Al-Andalus; Ibn Hazm (994–1064, Córdoba), the Muslim historian, jurist, and philosopher; Ibn Barraŷān (d. 1141, Seville) one of the foremost Sufi masters in Al-Andalus; Judah Halevi (1075–1141, Toledo), the Sefarad Jewish physician, poet and philosopher; Ibn Bayyah (1085–1138, Zaragoza), latinized as Avempace, a Muslim polymath, whose writings cover astronomy, physics, music, philosophy, medicine, botany, and poetry; Maimonides (1138–1204, Córdoba), the Jewish philosopher who became one of the most influential scholars of the Torah during the Middle Ages; Ibn Rushd (1126–1198, Córdoba), latinized as Averroes, the Aristotelian philosopher, polymath, and jurist, who expressed his eagerness in meeting the great Sufi mystic and poet Ibn ʿArabī (1165–1240, Múrcia). Notably, Ibn ʿArabī's spiritual masters included the ascetic women sages, Shams Umm al-Fuqarâʾ or Shams of Marchena, and Mûnah Fâtimah bint b. al-Muthannâ or Fatima of Córdoba, whose biography is largely missing from the historical records. See forthcoming publications by Gracia López Anguita, also featured in this book, for the histories of Islamic feminine sainthood and mysticism in Al-Andalus and the Maghreb region.

distinguished by its embrace of difference and plurality, continues to define how the city tends to mythologize itself today.

Between the fall of Granada and, as we have seen, Columbus's departure from Palos de la Frontera for the Americas and the Caribbean, 1492 marks a major material and spiritual turning point for Andalusia and our world. The centuries-long cultural exchange between east and west through the Mediterranean basin gives way to the historical plunder of Earth's waters, which hinges on the fungibility of Black and Brown lives and has fueled global capital ever since through systems of oppression and accumulation. For over 200 years of Spain's colonizing crusade, the Guadalquivir constituted one end of the country's main maritime slave-trading route, while in 1519, Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan weighed anchor from its estuary to begin the first circumnavigation of the Earth.[76] Gaining form through a series of developments between then and the seventeenth century with the establishment of colonial difference, Andalusia's early opening to the Atlantic became the backdrop against which a "new world view" crystallized; one in which oceans, lands, and peoples are forcefully brought together into a single field of power in a still-ongoing ecological disaster unprecedented in human history.[77]

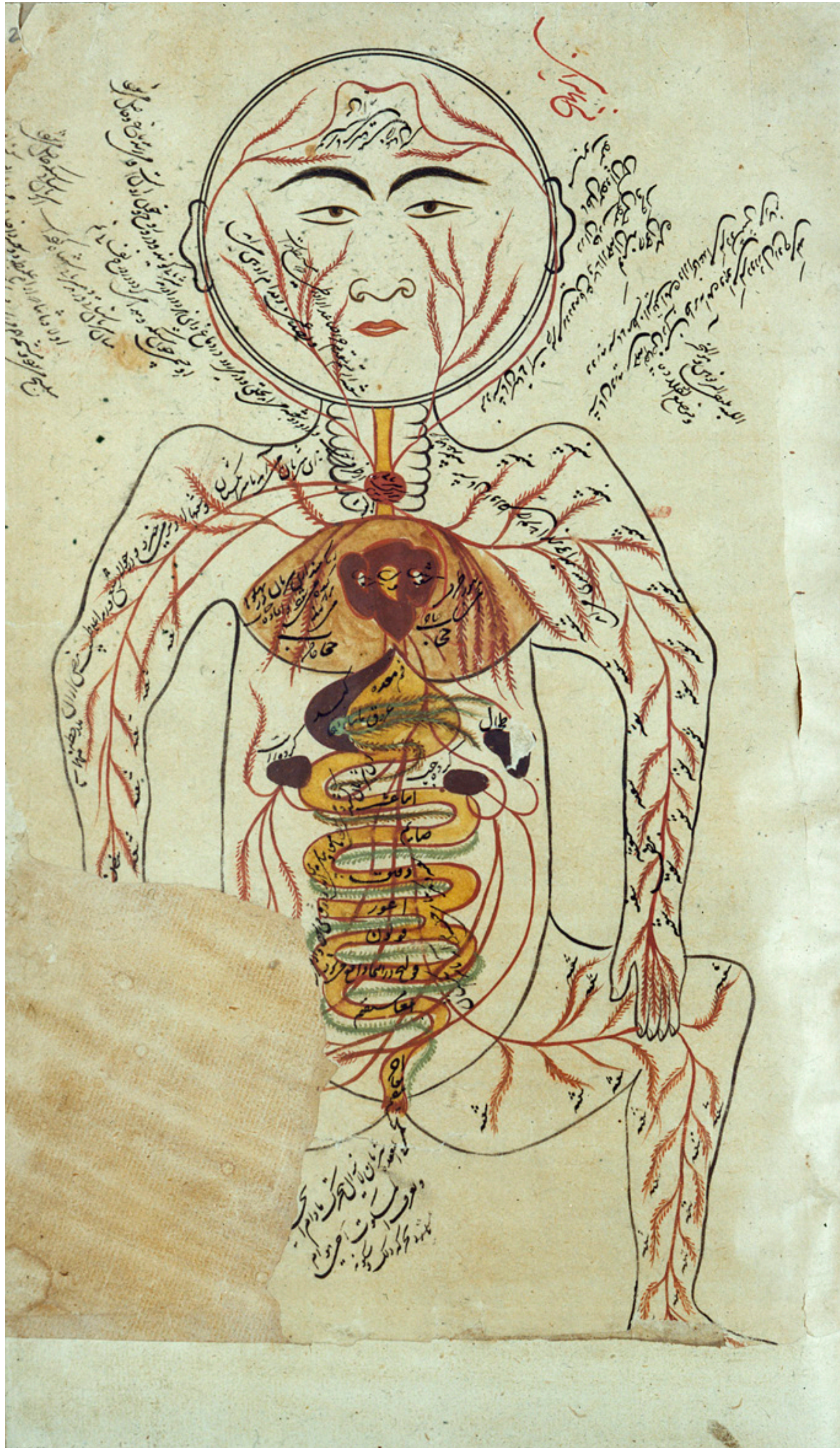
One starting point for this violent carving-up and remaking of the world could be located at the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, which divided the world outside Europe between the Portuguese and Spanish Empires along a meridian 370 leagues off the west coast of the African continent. Decades later, the Valladolid debate (1550–51) between Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas and humanist scholar Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, centered on the treatment of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and the Caribbean by Spanish colonizers. This debate played out while the Spanish state pursued its ongoing expropriation of New World lands, decimating Indigenous peoples and subjecting them "to being a landless, rightless, neo-serf work force," alongside ramping up the slave trade out of the African continent to build the plantation system, which was intended "to seem just and legitimate to its peoples."[78]

Commissioned by the Spanish Crown in response to the Spanish-made Indigenous genocide in the sixteenth century, in the infamous debate, Las Casas raised a moral and metaphysical case for the less violent treatment of Amerindian people in the newly colonized territories. He stood in opposition to court, scholars, theologians, and priests, including Sepúlveda. His view of the Indigenous peoples

76. There is controversy about who completed the first circumnavigation of the globe, though it is said to be the enslaved Enrique of Malacca, a Malay member of the Magellan expedition that completed it in 1519–1522.

77. Wynter, "1492: A New World View," 5.

78. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument," in *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 290.



Ibn Sina (980–1037), *Drawing of Cardiovascular System and Viscera* (from *Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb*), 1025
Courtesy of the Wellcome Collection

was paternalistic and, at root, still colonial, though he believed that the peoples of the Americas and the Caribbean did not conform to Aristotle's category of "natural slaves." His contention was justified by a racial argument that harked back to Aristotle's assertion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that some human communities are naturally meant to dominate others. Although Aristotle did not make a statement relating directly to racialization or skin color, his principle formed the defining property of civilization in the humanist discourse emerging from the Valladolid debate, a discourse that acted as the founding narrative for the Indigenous genocide at the root of the Spanish Empire and European enlightenment.

While the argument for natural slavery was vehemently defended by the humanists—based on the so-called inconstancy of the Amerindian soul and supposed immorality of sacrificial rites and cannibalism against their own defining principle of the rationalized human—Las Casas represented the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and the Caribbean as reliable recipients of Catholic doctrine, which put him in a position to safeguard the evangelizing mission of the church, as expressed through the forced conversion of Amerindian peoples to the Christian faith. As Wynter writes, "[T]he clash between Las Casas and Sepúlveda was a clash over this issue—the clash as to whether the primary generic identity should continue to be that of Las Casas's theocentric Christian, or that of the newly invented Man of the humanists, as the rational (or ratiocentric) political subject of the state."[79]

In Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul: The Encounter of Catholics and Cannibals in 16th-Century Brazil*, he examines the Jesuit missionaries' accounts of attempting to convert Indigenous Tupi people. The Jesuits' complaint about them revolved partly around a belief that they were superficial, fickle; that they would seem to take in these new Catholic ideas only to discard them again, returning to their cannibalism and their "vengeful" in-fighting.

In fact, as Viveiros de Castro explores, the Tupi people appear to have known the world very differently: humans were animals, like other animals, all of whom had souls, and all of whom were forever in society with one another, negotiating and interrelating. Violence was inevitably part of this, but what the Spanish colonizers labeled "inconstancy" of soul or belief was perhaps more like dynamism, fluidity, and an understanding of the mutable, multiplicitous liveness of the world. This understanding of unending flow—continual living and dying—and a reality filled with many interweaving subjectivities, might in fact be described as "constant" in a different sense, though it failed to make itself amenable to the unbending teleological belief system of European Catholicism.

79. Ibid., 288.

In various Amerindian Indigenous worlds, as Viveiros de Castro notes, the soul is understood as a manifestation of "the conventional order implicit in everything." On the basis of this immanent socio-spiritual continuum, he states that,

> Amerindian ontological regimes diverge from the widespread Western ones precisely with regard to the inverse semiotic functions they respectively attribute to the soul and the body. The marked dimension for the Spanish… was the soul, whereas the Indians emphasized the body. The Europeans never doubted that the Indians had bodies – animals have them as well – and the Indians in turn never doubted that the Europeans had souls, since animals and the ghosts of the dead do as well.[80]

European colonizers, however, interpreted this conceptualization of the body-soul as a proof of baseness and inferiority; in any case as an adequate justification for the subjugation of peoples and their lands, life-ways, cultures, and knowledges.

Wynter describes the debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda as an "epochal redescription" of the political subject of the state in Latin Christian medieval Europe's founding narrative of the human as primarily the religious subject of the church.[81] Consequently, the peoples of the Americas and the Caribbean, and the enslaved peoples of the African continent became "physical referents" of "medieval Europe's Untrue Christian Other," which thus far had been expressed in religious terminology "as heretics, or as Enemies-of-Christ infidels and pagan-idolaters (with Jews serving as the boundary-transgressive "name of what is evil" figures)."[82] Their otherness was the first "degodded" referent of the idea of "the irrational/subrational Human Other" which is foundational to the white mythopoesis[83] that defines modernity and its wake. Moreover, as an origin story, this redescription produced and stably reproduced a continuum of new categories such as "mestizos" and "mulattos" as modes or genres of being human, which continue to mark the ways in which we relate to one another and produce knowledge today. To turn again to Wynter:

> The analogy I want to make here is this. That if the ostensibly divinely ordained caste organizing principle of Europe's feudal-Christian order was fundamentally secured by the Absolutism of its Scholastic order of

80. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Peter Skafish, "Cannibal metaphysics: Amerindian perspectivism," in *Radical Philosophy* 182 (Nov–Dec 2013): 21.

81. According to Viveiros de Castro, the notion of the soul has since been repressed, disguised, and rechristened as culture, the symbolic, the mind, etc. The theological problem of other souls currently extends so far as to include neurotechnological inquiries into human consciousness, the minds of animals, and the intelligence of machines. See *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul: The Encounter of Catholics and Cannibals in 16th-century Brazil*, trans. Gregory Duff Morton (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2011).

82. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 265–266.

83. See *Ceremony*, eds. Franke et al.

> knowledge, (including its pre-Columbus geography of the earth and its pre-Copernicus Christian-Ptolemaic astronomy), the ostensibly evolutionarily determined genetic organizing principle of our Liberal Humanist own, as expressed in the empirical hierarchies of race and class (together with the kind of gender role allocation between men and women needed to keep this systemic hierarchies in place), is as fundamentally secured by our present disciplines of the Humanities and Social Sciences.[84]

To repair reason, we need to adopt a nonlinear approach to history and, by extension, to our experience of time. We need to create methods and knowledge-making practices that reckon with how cosmological experiments in civilization-making are passed down as origin stories within our historical dimension of time, space, and form; and how, while these stories are woven through art, poetry, prophecy, and song, they are not exclusive to them. In order to expand our political horizons as a planetary species, we must acknowledge how we engage in cosmological experimentation on a day-to-day basis. We can simultaneously recognize a realm beyond the historical dimension, where our imaginations of the world precede reality as it "is" and where we can reconcile with the realities we wish to create.

As we have seen, the ideas-images we collectively build play a fundamental, cosmological role in ordering the building blocks of our societies. Following both Wynter and Ibn ʿArabī, they can be understood as the founding acts by which human communities give themselves a social order. In this sense, our collective symbolic agency can not only establish a decolonial continuity between so-called "pre-modern" and modern forms of world-making, but can also effect an epistemological and experiential shift that recovers alternatives from the colonial grip. This recovery importantly recognizes the efforts of the bearers, visionaries, mystics, sages, artists, scholars, and activists who have made significant strides in bringing these to the fore.

In this sense, Ibn ʿArabī's conceptualization of the creative imagination is redolent of Wynter's reconceptualization of the human expressed through mythopoesis, where our origin stories are "auto-poetically" instituted, subjectively experienced, and performatively enacted. These would appear historically unrelated, and whereas Ibn ʿArabī's account participates in a transcendentalist mode of knowing the immanence of creation, Wynter's political thought is expressed through a sustained agnostic interest in the transcendental horizon of "being" and "non-being". However, the Sufism of Ibn ʿArabī and Wynter's decolonial critique share common concerns about knowledge, ecology, and existence, which prove fruitful for a transhistorical dialogue that is situated yet global in its scope.

84. Wynter, "'No Humans Involved,'" 7.

Their works dispute universalist and dualistic thinking and enable a dialogue about relational politics and poetic world-making while prompting reflection on the dichotomy between humanity as a historical construct shaped by the stories it tells itself, and a self-awareness that understands humans as an extension of the world. Both thinkers' meta-trajectories through Andalusia unsettle metaphysical realities that present themselves as irresistible by offering modes of critique that ask us to look deeper into our surroundings and recognize what is already there. Moreover, they propose genealogies of environmental thinking that do not fall prey to the white liberal environmentalist accounts inherited from the European enlightenment. This cross-reading of their work encompasses a mode of knowledge-production that recognizes the interconnectedness of theory and creativity, and values interfaith, interdisciplinary, and practice-based approaches.

REFLECTED IN THE RIVER'S CLEAR SURFACE

May I be a guide for those who journey on the path.
For those who wish to cross the water,
May I be a boat, a raft, a bridge.[85]

In a journey, then, comprising both practice and destination, Ibn ʿArabī's and Wynter's guidance recalls the counter-cosmogony narrated in the twelfth-century epic poem *The Conference of the Birds* (1177) by Farīd ud-Dīn Attār, a Persian mystic-poet born at Nishapour in northeast Iran. The poem narrates a convening of all the world's birds to appoint their sovereign. The wisest bird, the hoopoe, proposes that they ordain Simorgh, a mythic bird possessing great wisdom and said to abide across seven valleys in Mount Qaf. The birds are initially excited by the idea, but upon hearing the description of the seven valleys, they bow their heads in distress. They fear that the differences between them will be too great for them to bear the journey. Upon realizing how long the passage will take, the uncertainty of the path, and how distant the destination, they become discouraged, and begin, one by one, to withdraw. However, the wise one reminds the group of the integrity of their purpose and the intention that orients them toward liberation.

The hoopoe goes on to tell of how in the first valley of "quest," the birds had to cast aside all dogma concerning the nature of "reality." Later they had to abandon rational, logical thought in order to cross to the second valley, "love." At the valley of "knowledge," they found that worldly ways of knowing were meaningless, while unlearning guided their way to the valley of "non-attachment," where their

85. Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva* (Bodhicaryāvatāra), trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Boulder: Shambhala, 2011) Section 3, 7–34.

perception of "reality" vanished altogether. Once they reached the valley of unity, they realized that everything is interconnected and the Beloved is beyond all, including multiplicity and time. Entranced by the beauty of the Beloved, and with newly clear vision, the birds surrendered their selves to bewilderment. In the seventh and last valley of impermanence, they learned that they exist in all temporalities, as everything in every way.

On the way, many birds perish from thirst, injury, and illness, while others fall prey to fear, conflict, and violence. Encouraged by the hoopoe, however, thirty birds reach Mount Qaf, the dwelling place of Simorgh. During their pilgrimage, the birds have learned to see through the nature of reality. As they lean over a mountain spring to quench their thirst after the long journey, they see themselves reflected in the mirror-image of the river's clear surface. The birds are Simorgh—composed of *si* (thirty) and *morgh* (bird), Persian for "thirty birds." What the birds have journeyed for has all along existed within their collective self and in their interbeing. Their liberation has always been within them.

Their realization or collective insight brought me to Córdoba joined by Wynter and Ibn ʿArabī as well as an incredible group of artists, activists, thinkers, poets, performers, chefs, scientists, neighbors, and spiritual practitioners, many of whom are reflected in this publication, so that together we could peer into the Guadalquivir's surface and find ourselves reflected, in all our potential. Like the hoopoe, I believe in the integrity of incorporating "social and ultimate liberation"[86] as our shared purpose to find the wisdom and compassion that lies in each of us while disrupting systems of power; of becoming Simorgh to ourselves and to our communities.

The crossing in Attār's epic poem is a symbol of presence and connection held by hope, which is a belief in change. The complex political and narrative structures that emerged in river valley civilizations, from visionary experiences and prophetic knowledge to myth, are modes of crossing too, and of arriving at oneself.[87] These, I believe, can be a raft for crossing over with, without seizing hold of. When we are engaged with myth and mythmaking, we learn to see through origin stories and understand the political systems and economic structures they produce. If we want to undo the realities they create, we must become aware of our individual and collective symbolic agency; learn to gaze at the river's surface and see clearly into the interdependence and impermanence of all things.

86. Rev. angel Kyodo Williams, Lama Rod Owens, and Jasmine Syedullah (eds), *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2016).

87. Corbin speaks of this journey as a topographical inversion, a return *ab extra ad intra* (from the outside to the inside). See Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis or The Imaginary and The Imaginal."

Habiballah of Sava, *The Concourse of the Birds* (Folio 11r from *Mantiq al-Tayr*), ca. 1600
Ink, opaque watercolor, gold, and silver on paper, 25.4 × 11.4 cm
Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

We cannot look directly at the past because we cannot imagine what it would mean to act responsibly towards it. We yearn for different futures, but we can't imagine how to get there from here.[88]

Meandering's course along the Guadalquivir traced river systems through the sierras and forests of southern Spain, to the heartlands of the Americas and the undersurface of the Mediterranean, in a complex cartography of cultural, ecological, and spiritual exchange. For this journey, pop polymath Lafawndah (b. 1984, Paris, France), philosophy-trained choreographer Isabel Lewis (b. 1981, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic), and visionary artist Eduardo Navarro (b. 1979, Buenos Aires, Argentina) received a two-year fellowship and were invited to develop new participatory research commissions. Alongside these, photographer Lourdes Cabrera (b. 1979, Córdoba, Spain) was commissioned to document the program and undertake the art direction for this book. German-born Puerto Rican artist Chaveli Sifre (b. 1987, Würzburg, Germany) developed a series of olfactory interventions for our convenings and has created a scent for this book.

In addition to these longer trajectories, a series of site-specific commissions comprised our public programs. Three convenings surfaced in and around Córdoba to publicly share and expand on the research: "The Journeying Stream" [Pasaje del agua] (co-curated with Daniela Zyman, June 3–5, 2022), "An Ocean without Shore" [Un oceano sin orilla] (November 9–12, 2022), and "Third Margin Deepest Spring" [Un manantial entre dos aguas] (November 10–12, 2023) alongside a dedicated digital platform at Ocean-Archive.org. Spanning scent, song, laughter, poetry, spoken word, ceremonies, dance, listening sessions, roleplay, meditation, walks, films, communal meals, and dance parties, these convenings were conceived as spaces where conviviality and knowledge-sharing thrived as vital practices for learning how to better inhabit this world together—with openness and curiosity.

Our first convening, "The Journeying Stream," was a tribute to—and borrowed its title from—the 1976 album *Pasaje del Agua* by flamenco duo Lole y Manuel, speculating on the *cante jondo* in flamenco singing, which is said to come and go like a wave. We opened with a meditation guided by Navarro on the banks of the Guadalquivir, whose script is included in this volume. In this contemplation, Navarro proposed an experience of time travel: to the Mesozoic Era, 252 to 66 million years ago, during which the Guadalquivir Basin was uplifted from the remnant Tethys Ocean, and to an unspecified hereafter of drought or transformation. Time travel resolved into the poetic intention of

88. Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 6.

Navarro's research commission, where the far-reaching river became the background against which we learned to surrender our sense perception fully and deeply to its impermanence.

"The Journeying Stream" continued with a performance by Isabel Lewis, *Urban Flourishing: Córdoba* (2022), at the city's Archaeological Museum. She shared new lyrics and research around her emerging interest in the river's sediments, spirals, and flows, which led into an exploration of *sema*—the movement meditation of the Whirling Dervishes—and the *floreo* hand gestures of flamenco. Lewis concluded this research with *Walking Spirals: An Occasion to Consider Other Ways of Getting to Know This River* (2023), first realized during "Third Margin Deepest Spring" at the Claustro de los Abrazos Perdidos (literally "cloister of lost embraces"), part of a former Dominican-Order convent built in 1241 over an Almohad palace that itself had been constructed on top of a Roman circus. For this book, Lewis offers a tripartite work that makes of the performance texts a choreographic space in itself.

Finally, a dance party closed "The Journeying Stream": *Ancestral Rave* (2022) by Lafawndah introduced her research commission centered on the sonic and narrative trajectories of one of the first-known epic poems in human history, *The Descent of Inanna*. She invited us to traverse musical scales that have traveled from Syria to Spain, and from flamenco to opera. Lafawndah's research presentations also included a participatory choir in collaboration with Berlin-based artist Colin Self—set inside a Roman and later Arab stone quarry—and the concert *The Dawn of Everything* (2023), which premiered as part of "Third Margin Deepest Spring" as a vigil for the Palestinian peoples. They were designed to share new lyrics penned during her residencies in Córdoba; one of which, *Laments for Dumuzi*, is included in this book.

The title of our second convening, "An Ocean without Shore" borrowed from and paid homage to the metaphysical poetics of Ibn ʿArabī, introducing the concept of the creative imagination. Site-specific commissions by Edgar Calel (b.1987, Chi Xot/San Juan Comalapa, Guatemala), Ana María Millán (b. 1975, Cali, Colombia), Rosa Tharrats (b. 1983, Barcelona, Spain), Lorenzo Sandoval (b. 1980, Múrcia, Spain), and Sifre, which are documented in the following pages, complemented talks by Amina González Costa, Coco Fusco, Francisco Godoy Vega, Gracia López Anguita, Juan López Intzín, Michael Marder, Claudia Pagès, and Medina Tenour Whiteman. An installation by Carolina Caycedo (b. 1978, London, United Kindgom) titled *Serpent River Book* (2017) alongside new artworks by Millán, Navarro, and Sifre set the stage for the public program events, which also included a poetry recital organized by Córdoban members of Young Poets for the Climate, Victoria García Gómez and Carmen Pérez Cuello, as well as music by Jessica Ekomane and a performance by Fernanda Muñoz-Newsome.

Invited into dialogue with Ibn ʿArabī's concept of barzakh, López Anguita, an Arab philologist, expanded on the mystic's cosmology of the human interdependent sociability; while Intzín, a Mayan Tseltal thinker, shared a constellation of concepts around what he dubs "epistemologies of the heart," an important axis of Mayan culture, cosmology, and worldview. Finally, Marder, a philosopher known for pushing the boundaries of the environmental humanities, presented new work on what he terms "exilic ecologies" emanating from the Jewish mystical tradition of the Kabbalah. The three contributions are included in the reader that bookends this publication and also contains excerpts from foundational texts for this program, such as Wynter's "1492: A New World View," and Campagna's *Technic and Magic: The Reconstruction of Reality* (2018).

Structured around the *Pāramitā* of giving, integrity, skillfulness, enthusiasm, meditation, and wisdom,[89] the introductions to each chapter of this book were designed as blueprints or orientations for practice. They were also the basis for an invitation to the storyteller, meditation guide, and transformation researcher Sally F. Barleycorn, to develop a set of guided meditations growing out of her initial contribution to "An Ocean without Shore" found in this book.

As part of this volume, we have also included recipes from our communal meals conceived by Navarro and Godoy Vega for "An Ocean without Shore," as well as three recipes from an artistic-culinary research project by Caique Tizzi (b. 1985, São Paulo, Brazil) presented at "Third Margin Deepest Spring" and inspired in the *Córdoba Calendar*, an agricultural, astronomical, and astrological treaty from 961. Initially intended for neighbors, contributors, teams, publics, and participants of the programs, these offerings can now be prepared and experienced at home. This chapter concludes with a research piece by Tenour Whiteman, which looks at the tragic trajectories of sugar cane plantations from Al-Andalus to the Caribbean and the Americas.

For our final convening, "Third Margin Deepest Spring," we considered the Guadalquivir as a third margin at the confluence of two seas, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, and like the river in *The Conference of the Birds*, as a deep spring for knowing ourselves as extensions of the world. Its Spanish title, *Un manantial entre dos aguas*, took inspiration from the celebrated 1976 song "Entre dos Aguas" by the musician, composer, and flamenco guitar virtuoso Paco de Lucía. We opened the weekend-long program with a river walk

89. There is controversy about the translation of *Pāramitā* in the different Buddhist lineages. The one I am familiar with is *para-* for "beyond" or "the further bank or shore," and *mita*, meaning "that which has arrived." Pāramitā, then, means "that which has gone beyond" and names a set of practices concerned with stepping away from self-centered ways and meeting the needs of others.

and a site-specific installation in memory of the Córdoban artist Pepe Espaliú on the 30th anniversary of his passing due to HIV/AIDS complications. Guided by curator and researcher Jesús Alcaide, the event reflected on the *avant-garde* ecological consciousness of two of Espaliú's last works, *Este río es este río* (This river is this river, 1992), and *El nido* (The nest, 1993), which brought together physical, social, and ecological bodies.

We continued with a sound-walk by German-Colombian anthropologist Elizabeth Gallón Droste, attuning to the echoes of alluvial gold mining that connect the Atrato River in Colombia and the Guadalquivir River, across geographical and geological borders through mercury contamination. Her script can be read in the pages that follow. A poetic intermezzo by Palestinian poet and translator Mohamad Bitari opened to newly commissioned talks by López Anguita on the question of union and multiplicity in Ibn ʿArabī's cosmology, and by Tenour Whiteman with an in-depth overview of the spiritual ecologies of Al-Andalus. Based on fieldwork in a mining town along the Timbiquí River on the Pacific coast of Colombia, anthropologist Michael Taussig offered us a perspective on the entanglement between the Guadalquivir and Colombian rivers through gold, enslavement, and the resistance of maroon communities, asking whether colonial trauma could awaken a new fluvial consciousness, a re-enchantment. Finally, sociologist Mar Griera i Llonch contributed an urgent discussion on the immanentist and transcendentalist divides that organize our contemporary, supposedly secular, and post-metaphysical societies, and the significant role of spirituality in the imagination of possible horizons to address the social and climate crisis.

This gathering of texts and photographs from our convenings sets out to enliven the reader's creative imagination. My hope for this volume is that it contributes not only to contemporary debates on justice in river governance and the transformation of freshwater eco-systems, but also to good practice within the contemporary art field, by making an argument about the need and possibility to engage arts organizations in generating more richly community-engaged futures for social and environmental justice. By cultivating the compassion, aspiration, and motivation to inspire change, Meandering makes a case for the role of artistic research and public programs in reading anew and creating ecomythologies; offering spiritual-scientific entanglements and non-dualistic philosophies that might seed a more encompassing sense of self, a richer experience of community, and an expanded view of time. With this book, I invite readers to widen our imagination toward becoming oceanic, to deepen our souls as rivers, and to connect—with conscious creative engagement—the many tributaries of our shared humanity.