

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars

1.

Since Enrique told me about his project and asked me to write this text, a few months ago, I think about Pericastó all the time. I imagine how plants grow there, how they expand and make the land their own, and how, finally, their stems and leaves can thrive without being disturbed. Different wild plants come to my mind, especially those that I was told were weeds and needed to be uprooted because they were annoying. I remember all the species that I pulled from the flowerbeds and orchards of the houses in which I grew up. I remember the directions my father and grandfather gave me to dig them up without damaging what we sowed. Ruderals. Or 'yuyos', as they are called in some places in Latin America, I was told later. I envision them blossoming and spreading unfettered. Pericastó has become almost a fantasy, a place of possibility where what I was always told to kill lives unrestrained.

In addition, Enrique's personal story and his relationship with that plot of land also remind me of my own. There is also a family plot where my grandfather used to grow almond trees, in that same area. After his death, however, we approached that land with a different understanding of the territory and a detachment that invites —despite a will to continue the family legacy— to explore other possible lives for it.

They are different stories, of course, but there are certain parallels, and I find it impossible not to see myself reflected. For the most part, our generation have grown aloof of the way our grandparents understood the land. In addition, the world has changed, and farming is now ruled by the law of productivity and natural necropolitics. Maybe that explains why the idea of Pericastó has been creeping up on me these last few months, even though I have never set foot there.

2.

Pericastó is a plot of land. Acres that for years and years cradled cereal crops are evidence of how the body is inevitably pierced by biographical, political, historical and social matters. It hurts not to be able to completely comprehend how to tackle a commission so close that it feels like skin and, at the same time, impossible to grasp with your fingers. In *Vidas a la intemperie*¹, Marc Badal points to the knowledge emerging from the peasantry, a knowledge personified in the body that perceives reality through sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. A knowledge that is not only known, but also felt, personalized in a specific body and its relationship with its immediate environment. Through his characters, Badal narrates the loss of a world made up of many small worlds that have moved away from our latitudes in silence, victims of an ethnocide with a friendly face.

Does this loss of knowledge and ancestral ways of life bear on Pericastó? The distance between my attachment to the land and my grandfather's is indisputable. Inborn knowledge is being lost

with this estrangement, despite a genuine will to retain it. On the other hand, the radical change in the operation modes registered and the almost inevitable subordination to capitalist forms of agriculture entail an ongoing loss of ancestral and telluric knowledge. Even seeds have become a form of control among different political geographies and a biotechnology aimed at generating economic gain.

Is Pericastó a witness to this ethnocide as well as a form of resistance to it?

3.
Some time ago in Panxón, a coastal town in the Galician Rías Baixas, I was talking with Diego Santomé, an artist and friend with whom I have one of those infinite dialogues about art and life. Santomé has always worked with what is close, with what he knows and affects him, with the stories, materials and ideas that surround his life. His film *Galápago Europeo* (2014),² for example, draws a parallel between the danger of extinction of the European pond turtle in the ecosystem of As Gándaras de Budiño (O Porriño, Pontevedra) and the ideals that underpin the construction of a fairer society presenting images of the turtles and their calm rhythm against the advance of industry and human development. Santomé told me that he has lately been working on projects related to increasingly closer matters, such as: opening new paths in a mountain next to the sea, digging a cave or placing rocks in balance in different places, which he then visits with guests.

The project in Pericastó also emerges from this closeness. And in the face of it, it proposes to stop acting, to move away so that the countryside can become a place seemingly useless and alien to the forms of agricultural governance. A small gesture that stands for a form of resistance against the incessant buffeting of the wind, the attack of modern forms of agricultural exploitation, and against one's own personal position in the passage of time. This gesture also implies a radical alliance with that plot of land. It entails initiating a different conversation with it, assuming an acquired responsibility and doing something personally meaningful. To stop doing. Visiting the field to check how the herbs are growing becomes almost a ritual, an exercise in building an indefinite space, where we do not control what happens, but we let happen what we cannot control.

I'm going to leave you alone, don't you worry, you don't need to do anything. Just rest.

That doing nothing entails an attempt to step aside: a primordial movement to cease to be the centre of the world. It highlights that we cannot control everything as we please, that the Earth is not an unlimited resource for progress and consumption to advance relentlessly.

4.
Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui³ explains that the Aymara notion of 'ch'ixi' alludes to the mestizo, to the ritual and the inclusion of third parties. A talisman word, a motley mixture, a decolonized crossbreeding, a juxtaposition, a contrast, and a collective possibility to make words polysemic.

A collision where the parts do not lose their form or their powers. A marbled grey —an imperceptible mixture of black and white— blurred but never completely combined.

I like to amalgamate my mental image about Pericastó with this idea of 'ch'ixi'. A plot of land where the undefined grows free of human control. A few acres returned to nature. Let the plants decide. Let the indeterminate reign over the productive.

For centuries, language and work have defined the position of what is human vis-à-vis other living beings on the planet. In Pericastó that axiom is contested, or at least there is an attempt to disfigure the prevalence of those human qualities in front of the rest. What gives us the right to decide over the whole? Why should we profit from that plot of land by cultivating it and introducing its production into the market? Why not simply withdraw and let an indefinite tangle of 'bad' plants (weeds) grow and own the land? If we set aside that special attention to the human and attribute an intellectual capacity to every animal or plant, we can introduce unexpected twists in the relationship between thinking and perceiving. As *Monica Gagliano*⁴ states, plants are beings with subjectivity, consciousness and will. They therefore have an inborn capacity on their own perspectives and voices. Emanuele Coccia points out in *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*⁵ that plants embody the most direct and elementary connection that life can make with the world by producing the oxygen that keeps us alive.

In Pericastó, an assembly of weeds discusses nowadays fundamental aspects of life on the planet.

5.

In November 1973, Fina Miralles buried half of her body in another crop field in Sant Llorenç de Munt, in the central region of Catalonia. In *Dona-arbre (Woman-tree)*, the artist herself appears half-buried, proving that the human being is also made of natural matter. Fina Miralles' simple but poetic actions in nature insist on the internal unity of the natural universe in confrontation with the artificial universe born of the contextual modification by human intervention.

In *Song of myself*⁶, the poem from which I borrow the title for these words dedicated to a piece of land in Aragón, Walt Whitman exalts existence itself, highlighting the importance of one's roots and origin as the primary source of identity. But Whitman's is a chant to the individual in connection with the universal, to the unity between human beings and nature, a unity that arises from a deep contemplation involving all senses.

The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields and hillsides,
The feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of me rising from bed and meeting the sun.
Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd
the earth much?

Returning to Pericastó, we can do nothing but pay attention to that tangle of elementary voices that grows sovereign in order to envision other ways of understanding each other on this planet. Let's listen to weeds in order to find the straight and narrow. Let's step aside to give way to their

roots. Let us allow ourselves to be confused and contemplate, once and for all, the possibility of not knowing everything and leaving room for the unpredictable, the unknown, the unexpected, the unproductive. Let's try to understand a common world in which humans are not the centre of everything and where life emerges irremediably in front of everything else.

1 Badal, Marc, *Vidas a la intemperie. Notas preliminares sobre el campesinado*, Editorial Campoadentro, 2015

2 «Galápagos europeo» is the Spanish common name for the European pond turtle (*Eurys orbicularis*)

3 *Una reflexión sobre prácticas y discursos descolonizadores*, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Tinta Limón Ediciones.

4 *Thus Spoke the Plant: A Remarkable Journey of Groundbreaking Scientific Discoveries and Personal Encounters with Plants*, Monica Gagliano, North Atlantic Books, 2018

5 *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, Emanuele Coccia, Wiley, 2018

6 'Song of Myself' is a poem by Walt Whitman (1819-1892) that is included in his work *Leaves of Grass*.