WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE EARTH?

In the posthuman future, the sacred is lost. Technology becomes the new god, and humanity is its obsolete priest.
—Alexander Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*

In 1550, the antagonists of a debate faced off in what could be summarized by the question, 'Do extraterrestrials have consciousness?' Now known as the Valladolid Debate, it was perhaps one of the most important debates of the last millennium. This discussion took place around a very long wooden table situated in the main hall of a stark but imposing stone building, whose high walls were decorated with intricate religious carvings. The thick walls echoed the voices of the two contenders: a Dominican missionary and a humanist jurist. The former wore a simple, long, loose black wool tunic that fell in heavy folds to the floor. The latter wore much more sophisticated attire, a brown silk tunic to the knees, accompanied by a short cloak with subtle embroidery on its edges. They were Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda.

The 'extraterrestrials' they discussed were none other than the millions of indigenous people who inhabited the new domains of the Spanish Empire, which had taken over a vast expanse of the American continent, covering an area larger than all of Europe. If these inhabitants of the 'New World' indeed had a 'rational soul,' many at the time wondered, what was the quality of that soul? De las Casas argued that the soul of these humans was as well articulated as that of any European Christian, while for De Sepúlveda they were merely prototypes that 'needed the help and charitable guidance of Christians' to care for them (by means of the unorthodox method of slavery), which was seen as a moral obligation. In reality, the organizers of the debate—an administrative body known as the Royal Council of the Indies—could have cleared their heads if they had simply called upon indigenous intellectuals of the time, such as Antonio Valeriano, a Nahua ethnographer and judge. While the Valladolid controversy was taking place, Valeriano was engaged in the epic compilation and translation of much of the ancient history of central Mexico from Nahuatl to Spanish and Latin, documented in a series of volumes known as the Florentine Codex.

Officially, the debate ended in a technical tie, although, in practice, De Sepúlveda clearly triumphed. The soul and body of these beings, who had literally appeared from another world, came to be 'entrusted' to pious Christian masters. The form of slavery legitimized as a consequence of the Valladolid Debate was known by the charitable euphemism of 'encomienda,' a system where indigenous people were entrusted to colonists for forced labor in exchange for supposed protection and religious instruction.

It is plausible that De Sepúlveda was not cynical or opportunistic but sincere in his argumentation. However, his eventual sincerity was built on poor data: he never traveled to the Americas. By contrast, De las Casas' data was reliable, precise, and warm. He lived for many years in the Americas among the Taínos, Ciboneys, Arawaks, and Mayas. De las Casas knew that their 'extraterrestrial-ness' was not such, and that any perceived differences should not be understood through hierarchical assessments, but as a manifestation of the infinite multiplicity of the human, that is, the divine. But perhaps De Sepúlveda better understood the real purpose of the debate; for in reality, this was not a theological or ethical problem, but a design issue. Sitting at the table with prominent members of the Royal Council, it was more about pitching the most user-friendly interface for the purposes of conquest and colonization. In this, De Sepúlveda wiped the floor with De las Casas; the former proposed a simple and elegant system of hierarchies that minimized the complexity on the ground, while the latter described a much more intricate system of relations—a system that was less favorable because, by treating the indigenous peoples as equals, they could not be optimized for value extraction—a conclusion that would hinder the huge returns on investment demanded by the Spanish crown. Moreover, by making an argument based on the ideas of Thomas Aquinas—the theologian who had designed the operating system of the Catholic Church—De Sepúlveda ensured that the software and the interface he proposed were fully compatible.

If for a moment we set aside the financial considerations of the colonial enterprise and return to the theological controversy, it is clear that the Valladolid Debate lacked an adequate method to determine the 'quality of the soul' of those seemingly different from 'us.' In reality, it would take hundreds of years for that method to appear. Named 'the imitation game,' it is a postulate proposed by mathematician Alan Turing in 1950 that inquires about the soul of computers starting from the question: Can machines think? In the face of radical otherness—such as a visitor from the Andromeda galaxy or a general artificial intelligence—,Turing proposed that if a machine can successfully imitate a human to the point of being undetectable, we should simply accept it as having a consciousness like ours. The novelized version of this premise became the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip K. Dick, which subsequently gave birth to the film *Blade Runner*.

While it is a mistake to equate humans and machines, even metaphorically, this supposed equivalence has generated persistent cultural bugs that are difficult to overcome, such as assuming that the human brain is a computer or that our memory capacity is similar to that of a hard drive. It would be equally wrong to assume that minds can only emerge from a brain like ours. In fact, that is the premise that concerns me in this essay and in my work as an artist: what other configurations could give birth to minds?

OTHER-THAN-BRAIN INTELLIGENCE

> *Our forest is not an empty land. It is full of spirits and life.*
> —Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*

Relationships are often mediated by an instinctive 'theory of mind' aimed at effectively assessing those in front of us. Consequently, our ability to read and predict the intentions of others stems from our own deep-seated beliefs. This consideration brings to light two major issues that were already delineated at the Valladolid Debate: the first is 'Who has a mind?' and the second is an even more elusive question, 'Where does beingness end and thingness begin?' Or 'What does the spectrum between a mind and an object look like?'

Theories of mind are widespread and idiosyncratic. For example, a family member of mine habitually speaks to old cooking devices. When pressure cookers reach their tipping point, they release a forceful stream of steam, producing a loud whistle. Whenever this occurs, this family member inevitably reacts by comforting the pressure cooker, reassuring it with words like, 'I'm coming, sweetie! Hold on,' as they hurry into the kitchen to address the situation. Some might argue that this behavior

reflects a, let's say, overly generous or perhaps even careless theory of mind that assigns sentience too freely. However, it would be unfair to mock this behavior, considering that we often unthinkingly endorse very similar habits. For instance, years ago, amid the excitement over so-called 'intelligent devices' and soon after the massive introduction of AI agents Siri and Alexa, it became trendy to suggest that we were entering a new era of panpsychism. This time, however, instead of spirits animating matter, it was algorithms animating objects. Therefore, the only valid criticism of my family member's actions might be that speaking to old pressure cookers isn't in fashion, not that it is arbitrary.

Nowadays, the term 'intelligence' seems to embody a common ground easily inhabited by beings and things. The term, in its adjective incarnation, can be indistinguishably assigned such that both you and your fridge can be factually intelligent. Let us remember that intelligence conveys the capability of adapting to and modifying one's circumstances. Being so fundamental, intelligence is not a rare occurrence; if it were, life on Earth could not exist. Pretending that the human cognitive configuration is the only valid form of intelligence is to diminish the compelling complexity of life that leads cells to build bodies and atoms to become galaxies. The universe thrives on self-organizing structures arising from matter itself. This kind of emerging complexity can be defined as other-than-brain intelligence.

Our minds are shaped by a civilization that for far too long cemented the belief that human brains were THE synonym for intelligence. In reality this belief was a dangerous fantasy capable of convincing us that thinking is exclusive to us humans, although some charitable souls may kindly extend crumbles of this privilege to bonobos, elephants and dolphins. Rene Descartes, one of the philosophical pillars of the West, can be counted as one of the superspreaders of human exceptionalism with his assessment that non-human animals are automatons incapable of thinking: a mechanistic body without a mind. For him, animals were only capable of 'expressions of their fear, their hope, or their joy' which 'can be performed without any thought'. Not everyone in the early 17th century held those beliefs; the very same day that Descartes wrote those influential remarks, one could have asked an inhabitant of the Amazon if animals can think, and you would have heard a more sophisticated answer, freed from the rational argumentation mastered by the French philosopher. Anthropologist Eduardo Kohn, who spent years with a Runa community in the Ecuadorian Amazon, recounts that a certain night in the rainforest he was warned to 'Sleep faceup! If a jaguar comes he'll see you can look back at him and he won't bother you. If you sleep facedown he'll think you're aicha (prey; literally "meat" in Quechua) and he'll attack.' This warning made Eduardo aware that 'a jaguar sees you as a being capable of looking back—a self like himself,' and that 'how other kinds of beings see us matters. (…) Such encounters (…) force us to recognize the fact that seeing, representing, and perhaps knowing, even thinking, are not exclusively human affairs.'[1]

1 Kohn, I

The mirroring gaze or, rather, what other animals see in the mirror, has been tested in the lab by painting a spot on the body of animal subjects that is visible only by means of a mirror. The test is called MSR (Mirror self-recognition). While a few species—from Asian Elephants to Bottlenose Dolphins—have passed the test by noticing the whimsical mark, our beloved cats and dogs did not make it through. Many researchers have raised their concerns about the test: Primatologist Frans de Waal reminds us that 'some animals may not care about paint on their bodies (…) others avoid looking at 'another' in the mirror, [and the] visual paradigm may not suit an olfactory species.'[2] For us, audiovisual-excited humans, it is hard to even imagine what selfhood means when it flees from our perceptual center of gravity. While embracing cognitive continuity among mammals is a step in the right direction, we should be aware that simply moving the 'intelligence fence' from the boundaries of human uniqueness to those of mammal uniqueness does not account for the whole scope of intelligence on Earth. What about insect colonies, plants, and, why not, a pond, an island, or Earth herself? Said otherwise, what if we were to seriously consider the possibility that our planet may be largely constituted by 'decentralized cognitions' that do not emerge from a central brain?

This issue of other-than-brain intelligence has been extensively debated within the field of plant neurobiology, which studies the complex behavior of plants; all plants being capable of adaptability and memory in the absence of a central brain carrying out those functions. These impressive attributes clash against 'long-standing biases that have proscribed plants from the spheres of intelligence, agency, and ethics,'[3] in the words of botanist Monica Gagliano.[4] Those biases can be traced back to what may be one of the most ambitious publications ever written, Systema Naturae. The 18th century magnum opus systematically classified everything on Earth into three kingdoms: animal, plant, and mineral—a system that continues to shape the scientific and public imagination even today. This is how the West compressed reality into taxonomy. The plausible conclusion, derived from such a mindset, is that intelligence is the exclusive domain of those who have the power to classify. Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with classifying as a way of making sense of the chaotic universe we inhabit, but we should not forget that early modern science's 'will to classify' was also, inherently, a will to dominate. This becomes crystal clear when observing the long period that gave birth to the enterprise of modern science, which intersects with the Renaissance and with the conquest wars against the indigenous peoples of the Americas, and their successive colonization. It was precisely there, here, on the American continent, where chroniclers extensively documented this fixation with classification.

From the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, the Spanish colonizers carried out their 'Campaigns for the extirpation of idolatries,' as they called them, which had the mandate to destroy all

2 De Waal, 2019

3 Gagliano et al, introduction

4 Only recently is the field of neurobiology opening unexpected frontiers for our relationship with vegetation, rejecting the old paradigm that claims that '85% of Earth biomass (plants) is made up of organic semi-living machines and that intelligence is a gift belonging only to 0.3% of life (animals)' (Baluška and Mancuso)—a fossilized frame of reference to which too many scientists remain attached.

forms of knowledge production considered dangerous to their faith, political, and economic interests. It was in the Andes that the 'extirpators' faced an insurmountable problem: Their superiors had requested that all huacas (sometimes spelled wak'as) were to be destroyed, but the conquerors were confused about this label. They used the term to refer to the 'idols' that the locals seemed to revere, but for the indigenous peoples of the Andes, the notion of huacas is much more nuanced. They understood matter itself to have an inner quality—a vital force that is not caused by a god or a spirit but that rather emerges from matter itself,—known as camay, which both animates and grants agency to all natural phenomena and objects. This understanding translates into distinctive worlding practices and ways of relating to others, departing from the premise that humans and non-humans, even human-made artifacts, are active participants in the world. Since the material vitality of camay manifests in endless configurations, so too do huacas: for example, they can take the form of a lagoon, a peculiarly shaped potato, an exceptionally large tree, a person with a birth defect, or even a mummy; they can be located in a fixed place, but also can manifest as a transportable object; and they can be anthropomorphic—for example, carved by humans—or can be naturally occurring, like a rock seemingly identical to other rocks. Since huacas cannot be defined strictly by their morphological or visible properties—they are inherently anti-taxonomic—it was impossible for the colonizers to identify them by means of the categories they were familiar with. As a result, the dubious term came to designate that entire universe of places, objects, and relationships, such that any manifestation of the Indigenous worldview could be considered an 'idolatry' to be destroyed.

Anthropologist Tamara Bray has explained that huacas are physical embodiments of power that, by acting out their power, participate in the social relationships of those communities who recognize and honor them. Thus, the Andean approach seems to depart from an acceptance that there are endless ways in which decentralized cognitions can emerge in the world—in opposition to the Western taxonomic approach meant to compartmentalize reality, stripping entities away from relationships, and, once again, optimizing their use for value extraction. In this manner, when the material force of camay manifests through an entwined ecological reality—for example, a mountain—is sometimes referred to as a tirakuna, a term whose literal translation from Quechua is 'Earthbeing.'[5] An Earth being such as a mountain may be described as a three-layered reality: the ecological, the sacred, and the cognitive. The first two layers can be understood from a Western perspective, but not the last one, which asserts that the mountain is beyond a geological event and a place for pilgrimage; the mountain is a cognitive spring that emanates from its own materiality. It is important to emphasize this aspect. Decentralized cognitions—such as Earthbeings—emerge from physical and social relationships; they are not a theater activated by a local god or spirit. Therefore, Earthbeings may be able to pass the MSR test, though we would need to adjust the scale of the mirror to be as large as the stratosphere.

5 The concept of Earthbeings has been extensively studied by anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena. When she asked her Quechua interlocutors Mariano and Nazario Turpo if a certain mountain (tirakuna) in the Andes was a sacred place, their answer was 'Yes, but not only.'

They understood matter itself to have an inner quality —a vital force that is not caused by a god or a spirit but that rather emerges from matter itself, which grants agency to all phenomena and objects.

BIOLOGICAL COMPUTERS EVERYWHERE

All the times he slept with her, they were both aquatic plants.
—Edmundo Paz Soldán, *Las Visiones*

Extraterrestrials tend to be depicted as big-headed humanoids who are deeply concerned with the future of humanity. Those human-centric aliens fit quite well within normative Western assumptions about intelligent beings. A story that fundamentally challenged that mold—and that has had a significant impact on my own artistic practice—came out in 1961 under the title 'Solaris.' Polish writer Stanislaw Lem's novel introduced a profoundly alien form of life: the sentient ocean of planet Solaris. An entity that, clearly, did not look like a human, nor had any interest whatsoever in communicating with humans. The ocean in Solaris possesses non-human cognition that is expressed via non-verbal communication (simulacra). Its intelligence is purely performative: it does not represent the world (as does verbal language or figurative painting), but rather becomes the world itself.[6] Solaris hints at forms of cognition that exceed our civilization's horizon. That excess cannot be solved by adding another drawer to the taxonomic bureau of the West; rather, in order to be fully accounted for it may require an entirely different imaginary matrix.[7]

Coincidentally, the same year that Solaris was published, 1961, two curious minds carried out experiments attempting to 'enroll nature to be a computer.' They were convinced that natural systems are 'biological computers' with whom humans have not yet learned to interact. Stafford Beer and Gordon Pask were among a small group of unorthodox scientists and thinkers who, in the mid-twentieth century, gave rise to the paradigm of self-regulating systems, called 'cybernetics'. Cybernetics understood the continuity between organic and artificial systems at a time when those imaginaries had been the sole domain of sci-fi stories—though soon these disruptive ideas were channeled into new technologies and a new cultural mindset. During that same decade, the term 'cyborg' (short for 'cybernetic organism') was coined, the concept of 'Gaia' (the entire planet conceived as a holistic system) was first discussed,[8] and techno-ecological utopias were fostered at counterculture communes.

Cyberneticians like Beer and Pask questioned going through the mess of building electron-

6 Just as with huacas, simulacra are 'physical embodiments of power,' and, like huacas, simulacra are morphologically boundless. Therefore, one can conclude that the simulacra in Solaris might be redefined as 'exohuacas' (using the prefix 'exo' commonly used in astrophysics to refer to bodies outside the Solar System).

7 There are striking similarities between Earthbeings and the Solaris Ocean, creating an unexpected continuity between Andean and scifi cosmologies. Indeed, Lem's alien entity could be understood as an 'extraterrestrial Earthbeing.'

8 Lynn Margulis and James Lovelock's remarkable Gaia hypothesis carved in the public imagination a vision of Earth as a superorganism: our planet understood as the aggregation of countless systems woven into networks of feedback loops. From this techno-animistic perspective, Earth is entitled to its own will and capable of defending itself as a whole. Lovelock invokes this intuition with a certain sci-fi tone: 'If aliens saw (…) anti-asteroid rockets emerging from Earth's atmosphere, they might reasonably conclude it had been launched by the planet itself. They would be right, precisely because it is the entire system—Gaia—which has produced that rocket.' (Lovelock, 14)

ic computers if perhaps, instead, nature could be convinced to compute for us. They claimed that natural systems use the same computational sequence as our computers: there is an input, which is processed to produce a distinctive outcome; for example, if sunlight is the input for a plant, then photosynthesis is the processor, leading to the production of sugars as an outcome.[9] Following this computational logic, one realizes that the plant is more complex than the computer: the plant is self-programming while anelectronic computer needs to be assembled and programmed. According to Beer and Pask, we should accept that in biological computers, self-programming is a 'black box'[10] to be embraced. They felt at ease with what lays beyond modern science's explanatory powers by assuming an 'ontological' or 'performative' approach. Attentiveness is the method: you do something and wait to see what happens. Moving forward from this emerging reality you find a way to adapt or 'dance with nature,' as suggested by Andrew Pickering, the philosopher who rescued biological computers from the footnotes of obscure journals.[11] Pickering describes how, for Stafford Beer, 'the cybernetic ontology (…) entailed a faith in the agency of matter,' in direct challenge to the modern paradigm that asserts materials as 'inert lumps' to make machines with. Instead, this rare branch of cybernetics argues that 'ecosystems are smarter than we are' as they perform appropriate responses to their environments in a decentralized manner; there is no need for a mastermind. Quoting Beer, Pickering explains that 'In biological computers, the hope was that "solutions to problems simply grow."'[12]

In practice, Beer and Pask encountered that enrolling nature as a computer is really difficult. For one experiment, Beer, exhibiting the curiosity of an amateur, gathered water from a pond inhabited by 'daphnia'—a colony of tiny crustaceans popularly known as water-fleas. In order to communicate with the colony, a magnetic field was installed around a large tank where the pond water was poured. Consequently, aiming to couple the daphnia to the surrounding magnetic field, Beer proceeded to feed them with iron. This coupling was intended to serve as the computer's processor. Besides getting this biological processor to work, a controlled electrical input was meant to disrupt its magnetic field, causing the daphnia to rearrange—said otherwise, to compute—resulting in a distinct electrical output that could be measured. The difference in electrical current would represent the answer provided by the biological computer.

Beer's expectations for the biological computer were inspiringly epic: he foresaw its role in managing large factories and, one day, even the economy of an entire country. His experiment with the daphnia failed—the water-fleas pooped the iron and the entire tank was infested with metallic residues—, but at the core of the experimental setup there was a faith in life, a belief that living systems strive towards their

9 This is a rough compression of more complex interactions and behaviors that plants undergo, not to speak of how these dynamics expand exponentially at the scale of ecosystems.

10 The term 'black box' refers to an opaque system whose inner workings are unknown to us. Both inputs and outputs of such system can be witnessed, but the way in which those inputs are transformed into distinctive outputs remain unexplained.

11 Pickering advocates for 'convincing' rather than 'commanding' as the way to recognize the agency of natural systems. Without falling into the trap of mechanizing or anthropomorphizing nature, this approach attempted to engage with the 'cognitive otherness' of non-human life.

12 Pickering (2007), 237

survival or, in Beer's terms, their 'viability.' Nevertheless, theories in support of the subjective agency of natural systems—and the notion that Earth itself could compute, even if marginally—were soon crushed by the technological realism of more 'efficient' silicon-based computers. Today, however, the promise of the biological computer may be gaining new ground. It is conceivable to envision worlds in which ecological and artificial systems interact with each other in an extended field of cognitive kinships, both with and without the mediation of human engineers—building bridges between decentralized cognitions such as Earthbeings, daphnia, and, why not, AI agents.

PLANETARY GENERAL INTELLIGENCE

'The imagination is continually at work filling up all the fissures through which grace might pass.'
—Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*

In the same way that Earth's atmosphere is the geo-infrastructure enabling life to thrive, AI is a form of cognitive infrastructure destined to become air: an abundant medium that we will soon take for granted. In that sense, if AI were an alien life form, it would more closely resemble the Solaris ocean than an individual entity.

Discussions about AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) have been present in the tech world for a number of years, with many optimists eagerly awaiting the moment when machine learning algorithms land on the surface of consciousness. This assumption is twofold: it presumes that an increment in computational power will trigger the eruption of consciousness, and it assumes that once this occurs, technologists will be able to identify it—AGI certified. I suspect that both notions are flawed. Consciousness does not emerge from a surplus of accumulated intelligence; and even if it did, the Western matrix would likely prevent us from recognizing that presence. The signal of consciousness might be mistaken for noise.

In 'Empty and Full,' a philosophical treatise on the history of Chinese painting, François Cheng proposes that, 'Far from being a kind of no-man's-land (...), emptiness makes possible the process of interiorization and transformation through which each thing actualizes its sameness and otherness and, in so doing, attains totality.'[13] In other words, emptiness is not the mere absence of action; on the contrary, it is the medium that allows the world to enact its potentiality. Just as air or water escapes the constraints of scale, there is no S, M, L, or XL emptiness. Earth is not big or small; it is empty.

13 Cheng (1994), 38

Said otherwise, to be Earth is to be empty.

With this in mind, perhaps it would be useful to shift our AGI concerns toward a different paradigm, one that could be called PGI—Planetary General Intelligence. While concepts such as 'planetarity' or 'planetary intelligence' have been formulated in recent times, the word 'general' may be the most crucial here. Beyond acknowledging that planetary cognition is profusely distributed throughout Earth, 'general' points to the quality of that cognition: simultaneously multi-purpose and adaptive in its singular nodes, like a cell, while integrative and expansive when it manifests as a vast collectivity, like an ocean.

In this sense, PGI would be a medium powered by Earth's own materiality—an immeasurable breath allowing all beings to realize their relationships and purposes. Planetary cognition is not only widespread but abundant. There is already significant evidence of the computational processes that enable PGI. For instance, many animals, insects, and plants are in continuous correspondence with this distributed cognition through the planet's magnetic field. While Stafford Beer's experiment failed to link his daphnia to the magnetized water tank, we now have compelling evidence that this is exactly what robins effortlessly achieve during their annual migrations. Every year, hundreds of thousands of these birds migrate from Europe to Africa, navigating via the geo-computation enabled by the iron in their bodies as it interacts with the real-time data of Earth's magnetic field. This is a sophisticated form of PGI that, for now, we can only admire and aspire to.

In the end, I wonder how to embrace these ideas beyond mere 'feel-good' interspecies declamations. How can such concepts be transformed into acts of sensing that might drive us to enact real alternatives to the Western matrix? Confronting this question, I must admit that I have more enthusiasm than viable tools, many stories and zero solutions. Mostly I see tensions that cannot always be resolved rationally or ethically. As I write this, my home country, Ecuador—one of the most biodiverse places on Earth and also host to large oil reserves—is enduring 14-hour power outages caused by a climate-change-induced drought, which has crippled hydroelectric power generation. The situation is exacerbated by governmental incompetence, leading to accelerating impoverishment, rising criminal violence, malnutrition, and child mortality. Faced with this real scenario, where hydroelectricity fails to meet demand, should fossil fuel generation be increased to alleviate people's suffering? I have no definitive answer, only the awareness of the ethical tension between planetary dignity and human dignity—between the planet and its messy nodes. Here, I dare to whisper that entitlement to moral virtuosity is useless, careless, self-comforting, it is no answer whatsoever.

Yet, acknowledging unresolved tensions must not lead to paralysis. Considering the future requires proposing inspiring imaginaries that can be acted upon, and an expanded set of terms with which to describe them. Without this, we risk falling into an endless reactive loop—a true tragedy. Engaging with a fuller spectrum of our planetary reality demands a new vocabulary for the future, and I propose a word to add to it: presentir. In Spanish, this verb means 'pre-feeling,'

suggesting the act of sensing before an experience reaches the body. A way to understand it may be by contemplating one's body profusely covered by perspiration: as one zooms into these countless beads of sweat emerging from the skin, it can be observed that each of them is but a receptor synced to the planet, at the very intersection between the body and the atmosphere. Not unconsciousness, but a pre-feeling—a barely visible space where an uncharted form of material communication drips.

In the spirit of emptiness and the vital forces that animate decentralized cognitions, I propose that we continue adding to this Earthly vocabulary for the future. Let us now augment it with other words, other dimensions, other materialities, ghostly songs, and scents through which answers we cannot yet imagine might take form. This way, perhaps we will finally begin not only to more fully know ourselves as beings of the Earth, but also to sense—to pre-feel—what it is to be the Earth itself.

A text by Oscar Santillán

This essay will be published in Strauss, C.F., ed.,
Slow Technology Reader (Valiz, 2025)
Not for distribution

With gratitude to the generous minds at Holt/Smithson Foundation and Colby College, whose influence and support helped shape the ideas presented here.

REFERENCES

František Baluška and Stefano Mancuso, 'Plants are Alive: With All Behavioural and Cognitive Consequences.' Embo Reports, 2020.
Bray, Tamara L., 'An Archaeological Perspective on the Andean Concept of Camaquen: Thinking Through Late Pre-Columbian Ofrendas and Huacas.' *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 19(3): 359-368, 2009.
Cheng, François, *Empty and Full: The Language of Chinese Painting*. Boston: Shambala Publications, 1994.
De la Cadena, Marisol, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice Across Andean Worlds*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.
Gagliano, Monica, John C. Ryan, and Patricia Vieira, eds.,*The Green Thread: Dialogues with the Vegetal World*. Lexington Books, 2015.
Kohn, Eduardo, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.
Lovelock, James, *Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence*. London: Penguin Books, 2019.
Mancuso, Stefano, *The Revolutionary Genius of Plants: A New Understanding of Plant Intelligence and Behavior*. New York: Atria Books, 2018.
De Waal, Frans B.M., 'Fish, mirrors, and a gradualist perspective on self-awareness,' 2019.