

# Introduction

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**M**osaic issue 52.2 begins with three contributions on water. Over the course of the eight remaining essays that constitute the issue this freezes up, slows to a trickle, dries, and flows otherwise.

The issue opens with a short photo-essay comprised of unusually sized, cryptic, and conceptually dry photographs of numbered stone masonry by the Basque artist Ibon Aranberri. These fragments stand as proxies for a range of monuments and historical architectural structures that were dismantled and relocated as a result of various mega-dam projects in the Iberian peninsula. Aranberri has spent years investigating and documenting the modernization and centralization of hydrological resources in Spain under Franco and afterward. His work—which always shuttles between sculpture, image, page, archive, performance, map, and flow-chart—is one response of many to a global water crisis. In “Groundwater as *Hyperobject*,” Deborah Wardle introduces readers to the many perspectives, obstacles, and imponderable dilemmas to thinking the question of groundwater in Australia. Her poetic, at times prosaic, and equally scientific pursuit of groundwater takes her from Indigenous storytelling to the poetry of Banjo Paterson, and, ultimately, to Timothy Morton’s notion of the hyper-object with its molten temporality, interobjectivity, phasing, mesh-like spatiality, and viscous character. Finally, in “Living, Land-Broken Waters: Epistemological Resistance in *Solar Storms*,” Ned Schaumberg discusses water’s uncertain place and time in Linda

Hogan's novel *Solar Storms*. With a sharp eye for the distinctions between colonialist discourse and Indigenous knowledge, the author feels out the deeply occluded ground that differentiates anthropocentric romanticisms in North America from what he calls "other-than-human-agency."

Wardle and Schaumberg's contributions were originally written as submissions for a call on the Decolonizing of Water that was distributed in 2016.<sup>1</sup> In an effort to avoid abandoning the call for lack of submissions and as a practical way to build on these important essays, we have added Aranberri's uniquely European and specifically Basque perspective to a ready core of general submissions. The basic hunch is that in retaining water we not only keep the possibility of a sub-issue on water alive, but, more importantly, allow water to move and flow in ways only it can. Working through erosion, finding weakness in topography, collecting in depressions, trickling along secret channels, filling voids: this is water's work. Thus if the first contributions are on water specifically, and the remaining eight essays are decidedly not about water, one finds traces throughout. A receding glacier etches striations in the bedrock of Maine, flow lines that reveal other hierarchies that are equally scarring. A vampire secures passage across a stretch of water; its "horrid cargo" of "imported earth" gestures in turn to the circulation and flow of what Bram Stoker imagined as British colonialism in reverse. A missing person from the period of Columbia's civil war comes into fragile visibility, but only as a function of proximity to the image's support and the precipitation left there by one's breath. And what of stormy weather and passion set on the moors in *Wuthering Heights*, a blushing face in a play by Margaret Cavendish, or a frog found waiting in a poem by Emily Dickinson? Are not frogs always on their way to water? In other cases not even a divining rod will help locate a place to dig. These are all moments when water most needs attentive critics. And it is this kind of intentness of thought—precisely where the issue of water is not present as such—that most acutely demands decolonization.

Thus the arid formalizations, the ellipses, the provisional arrangements, and the obvious strain these place on legibility in Aranberri's photo-essay. How is one to think the problem of decolonizing water in this context? In a number of ways. First, Aranberri's contribution is derived from a series of twenty-three photographs titled *Obstacles for a Renovation, 2005-2015*, which was first exhibited in Suzhou, China. From the title of this precursor we glean that the cropped images—in fact, a patrimony of ancient monasteries and churches near the artist's home—present a complication or a kind of mute resistance to various modernization projects. The modest question that the artist attached to the work was whether or not the relocated and reconstructed buildings will preserve the "historical spirit" of the original structure

(more on this *genius loci* and its reproduction in a moment). Second, *Obstacles for a Renovation* itself emerged as an extension of another of Aranberri's long-term research projects that came to a provisional conclusion in the artist's well-known photo-installation *Política hidráulica*, 2004-2010, first shown at Documenta 12. With its palimpsest-like stacking, covering, and leaning of framed aerial photographs of dams in the Iberian peninsula against the gallery walls, the work focuses not only the artist's interest in illegibility and the sculptural aspects of the image, but also orients us to the importance of duration, the sense that form only completes itself over time—say, as a function of leafing through the stacked photos—and more precisely out of the darkness of an unknown future. *Política hidráulica* crystallizes many of the artist's recurrent motifs of land use and abuse, solitary wandering, ecological observation/critical activism, inter-generational tensions and relations, and the slow processes of historical transformation where ideology becomes visible by virtue of incremental changes over the *longue durée*.



Ibon Aranberri, *Política hidráulica (Water Policy)*, 2004-2010, 98 photographs, variable dimensions, installation view. Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sophia.

Naturally enough, the Pyrenees has always served as a special focus for the artist. In fact, we know that Aranberri's research on the administration and management of water in Spain began with investigation keyed to the Itoiz valley in the Pyrenees (his home), and then, over a period of years, grew to include many other reservoirs in the Iberian Peninsula. This origin acknowledged, Aranberri resists the traps of a romantic notion of landscape championed by many of his generation and equally distances himself from the monumental restructurings of the environment that were typical of the provincial modernisms celebrated by his parents' generation. His universe is one

constantly reinvented on the basis of this recursive structure grounded in Spanish modernization. Works emerge from other works on the model of what the Italian avant-garde of the 1960s would call the “continuous monument.” And by virtue of this adopted structure, his powerful dialectic and its emphasis on technics, Aranberri privileges becoming over being or ontology. Even in the example of (*Ir.T.n \*513*) *cave*, 2003-2005, which focuses on a grotto in the Aitzgorri Mountains where archaeological evidence was found of early hominids, the artist does not let ontology rest easy. Aranberri designed and constructed a sculptural modification, which prohibited entrance to the cave to all but bats.<sup>2</sup> In effect then, Aranberri provides us with a semi-autobiographical family drama specific to *Euskal Herria* (or the Basque Country), but with stakes in more general cultural dynamics as well as Spanish nationhood that readers of Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* and *Philosophy of Right* will recognize as the inner workings of spirit or *geist* in its successive trappings as “family, bourgeois society, state” (Derrida 12).

In short, fragmentation, formalization, and a kind of cryptology are all keys to Aranberri’s project. Fragmentation, because in the Spanish context modernization, which began in earnest with Franco’s systematic control and management of natural resources, has over the decades become part of a far more disparate and uneven project for the reconstruction of the earth that the artist attributes to “technolog(ies) stripped of all ideological commitment.” Formalization, because we should feel the sculptural pressure on the image in as acute a way as water presses against rock, bends to the concrete curve of a dam, or is heightened and shaped by a winter’s snowpack. Cryptology, not only because of the paucity of memory that surrounds these fragments, the forgotten structures to which they are a part, or the protective spirits for which they were erected, but also because the tension between form and content in these images is pushed to such an extreme. If one is to go beyond formalism, the artist once told me, formalism has to be taken seriously. Aranberri’s great hunch here is that in this form the image possesses a kind of primordial possibility that its dialectical reconciliation prohibits. And possessed of so little content, it is as if the ruination of form begs the kind of threshold condition of a vacuum where the world can but rush in and fill the void in a new way—perhaps, this next time, with content edging out form to create undreamt of possibilities. This is progress for Aranberri. Dam busting has never been so poetic.

In this final sense, Aranberri’s exaggerated work on form gestures toward a rigorously a-presentational mode of design and display, which variously abrade institutional protocols and curiously demand we turn the pages of this journal with a kind of flow that is not natural to it, but instead must be seen in relation to a set of side effects that unfold over time, as a form that is completed as if from behind, by which I mean in a future that is as yet to be decided.

Hopeful stuff in the end, for it heightens the importance of each of the contributions that follow in its wake. It showcases their strength and highlights them in ways that encourage a kind of reading that flows with and against the respective arguments of the authors. And I have little doubt a number of these essays will remain high-water marks for the journal. Marion K. McInnes's "Looking for Louis Agassiz: A Story of Rocks and Race in Maine" is as strong an argument for interdisciplinary work as one will find, traversing as it does geological fieldwork, archival research, social history, and critical race theory. In Thorell Porter Tsomondo's "The 'Nineteenth Century Up-to-Date with a Vengeance': From Dracula's 'Horrid Cargo' to 'Ghastly' Millennial Freightage," the author argues that the figure of Dracula is an embodiment of the xenophobic threat posed by unwanted immigration from the colonies back to the metropole—and further, an early indicator of twentieth- and twenty-first century worries. In "The Imitation of Christ: Michael Moorcock's *Behold the Man*," Rowland Wymer unpacks a fascinating exemplar of the Jesus novel as part science fiction and part quest for the modern self, involving a healthy mix of Nietzschean scepticism, Freudian sexuality, Jungian individuation, and time-travel. In Reena Thomas and Ethan K. Smilie's "*Vitium Curiositatis* and Stereotypes in Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*," the authors argue that in spite of promoting stereotypes of the orient, Chaucer carefully thematizes wonder and fragmentation so as not to fall into those stereotypes himself, thus teasing out an important exception to Said's critique of orientalism through careful textual analysis.

In "Liminal Encounters: Ethics of Anthropomorphism in the Poetry of Levertov, Szyborska, and Fulton," Christopher Kelen and Chengcheng You provide a provocative analytic of the ways in which three poets have navigated the problem of locking gazes with the animal other. Finally, in "'No Crime to Be Bashful': Social Anxiety in the Drama of Margaret Cavendish," Jes Battis provides an insightful reading of the seventeenth-century playwright's work through the optic of disability studies. The author discerns a string of concerted attempts on the part of Cavendish to dramatize anxiety, introversion, and speechlessness, and suggests the world staged as such is a world which can only be celebrated as different. No doubt, the essentially Diderotian aesthetic here will one day offer the terms of a fruitful dialogue with Michael Fried's work on the anti-theatrical tradition, for it seems possible that one of the heirs to Cavendish's stage work are the stained or poured paintings of the American abstract painter Morris Louis.

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NOTES

1/ In Dawne McCance's original call, the special issue on water was to "focus on what meaning cultures, and not the least Indigenous cultures, have given to water in their historical literatures and practices, and how a rethinking or reimagining of water might contribute to alleviating the current status of fresh water as an increasingly scarce and inequitably distributed resource." On rereading the call I note too a particular emphasis "on ways of responding to the water crisis that were not rooted in a modern Western and colonialist discourse of privatization, or in a discourse of 'rights,' that is itself based on the conceptualization of rights as the private and adversarial possessions of rational, traditionally male, subjects."

2/ It turns out that Iretegi is one of a number of sites in the Basque region where archaeological work concerning the origins of Basque civilization has been carried out. Joseba Zulaika tells us there is a biographical link. It was in Aranberri's own village of Itziar in the 1930s that the science of origins first gained a foothold: a set of skulls believed to represent the roots of the Basque race was discovered in the local cave. In this sense the sculptural capping the cave mouth blocked access to one of the raw resources that nationalism in the Basque County has traditionally mined.

WORKS CITED

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