



created one voice, which expressed the need to find a form of social justice, but with complete freedom, with complete independence. This particular phenomena is based in the ancient rituals of the indigenous people of the Americas, especially the people of Chile who created *sonido rajado*, or torn sound. *Sonido rajado* was a way for all people to participate in a ritual and become one instrument.

RAIL: Why make this Llamado—this call—now?

VICUÑA: The United Nations gathered in Lima in December 2014 but completely failed to come to an agreement about how to fight climate change. So in the last few hours of this gathering, they came to the following conclusion: that we have one year for each one of the 126 member countries to produce a concrete plan for what each is willing and able to do. This is to be presented in Paris in December 2015. So I asked myself: What can be done? What can we hope for?

I immediately remembered the ancient spirit of the people of Chile that knew how to create rituals where dissonance and difference is not only allowed, but required. Because the new sound, the new language, is going to be born only out of the total freedom and dignity of each different dissonant voice.

My friend José Pérez de Arce, who has written so much about dissonance, and about this *sonido rajado* of the *Bailes Chinos* of Chile, told me that in Rancagua—just south of Santiago—this past November there was a big gathering of indigenous sages. He spoke to one sage there from Paraguay who told him of the atrocities that his peoples are suffering there. Simply the most brutal form of persecution of contemporary culture: it's not just a desire to take hold of their lands, of their water, of their forests. It's something beyond that. It's a desire to limit the human imagination. Because the ancient peoples have held on to an ability to communicate with different dimensions through rituals, which allow people to enter into a reciprocal exchange with other species, with the dead, with the people of the future. They know how to do that, they have been doing it for thousands and thousands of years. So to destroy these cultures is to destroy a human possibility, a potentiality for the future. Hope, as I understand it, is to carry forth the future and what needs to be done now and that the artists of the world have to create collective rituals where all kinds of people can participate, because everyone has to become a messenger of the civilization of the future. If we don't do that, there will be no civilization in the future, no human language. Look at what just happened in Paris yesterday: 3.7 million people marched for peace. This had never happened. The possibility is there to mobilize for what these indigenous sages call "resisting through beauty, resisting with beauty and in beauty, because beauty will bring back beauty."



Cecilia Vicuña, *SANGRE MAGALLÁNICA / AL SUR DE LOS ECOS*, Conflict, Punta Arena, Chile, January 2015. Photos: Macarena Perich

RAIL: So it's in the creation and performance of rituals that you see the future actually drawing itself toward us? And you make a call to humanity: If we are to continue to exist, we must practice rituals that resist the force that has limited our ability to be in touch with the immaterial dimensions that inform and support our existence.

VICUÑA: I think we have to use every resource of the human sensibility and the human imagination to call the future forth. Because you have forces that are involved in creating artificial human brains to supplant human intelligence. Billions of dollars are being spent in creating artificial intelligence. Which means that the powers of the state are making decisions based on the belief that humans are not able to think properly. That is one view of the future: to be run by machines. Even Stephen Hawking says this is dangerous, because this artificial intelligence will program itself to get rid of us.

On the other hand, we have another possibility, to expand the humanness of the human; to expand our humanity to recover our potentialities of sensibility, of imagination, of connection and empathy, and of analysis and criticism. The system is like a creature. It wants to survive and its survival involves the destruction of the planet, so it's headed in that direction. A lot of people—governments, corporations—believe that is the future, artificial intelligence. The intelligence of the system, the intelligence of artificial technology.

While we humans still have the chance to gather, we must. We need to use our ability to convene, because we have a very small window before the disasters start to take place. The state of terror will prevent people from organizing, will prevent people from voting, will prevent people from having all the rights that they have accomplished through two hundred

years of social movements. We have to be active on all levels, in both the social movements and the political sphere, but above all, we have to be active in connecting. We have to find each other. In this ritual of the Bailes Chinos, the key is to have all the instruments playing a different sound at the same time. What makes it possible that all these different sounds become one? The trick is that they're all playing different sounds, but they're listening at the same time. Listening is the bridge.



Cecilia Vicuña, Galeria D21, Santiago, January 9, 2015. Photo: Christian Pino

RAIL: I've been thinking a lot about response-ability lately, and as the word denotes it is surely a result of deep listening. If I actively listen to another human or an object or an animal, I expand my ability to respond to the subtler calls I hear it emitting. You have an ability to listen that I would call beyond human. How have you fostered this?

VICUÑA: I think I was lucky to be born in a special silence. I grew up in a place called La Florida. Today it's a big shanty town south of Santiago, but when I was born, La Florida was countryside. I was left alone because my father worked in the city and my mother was too bored to stay in this place, so she just left. There was no radio, no television, nothing. So I learned to be in silence, which is critical to be able to listen. During these long, lonely, and silent days, my listening expanded immensely. I learned to listen to the frogs, to the birds, to the animals, to the Earth, to the wind. I became an expert listener, because through listening I felt the presence, the connectivity, and the warmth of everything that was alive. I felt loved, and I recognized my need to be loved. I think it's because I put out this will to be held that they held me. This intense relationship born from listening has never died, and I'm able to go into that space at any moment. I can go into that space when I'm in bed at night dreaming, when I open a book of poetry, or when I meet someone for the first time and I can open up immediately. Because *listening* in Spanish is *oir*. *Oir* is from the Latin root *os*. *Os* is an opening. So listening really means opening up. Each opening leads to a new opening, to a new opening; it's like opening a fractal.

RAIL: As you describe this, I've become very aware of the holes in my head. The two that we call ears, but then we have lots of other holes in our head, including all of our pores. In fact, we are completely permeable. But still, there seems to be a tendency of the mind to consider itself a closed system, an independent system. Solipsistic thinking is a possibility, but it is just one possibility. Yet it is the reigning paradigm, and as such, it marginalizes the playful discovery of our interdependence, of emergence, of coevolution.

VICUÑA: That is so true. It is a belief system. The perception of the mind is really a belief system that has been sort of enthroned by one civilization of the planet, by the civilization that has become the owner of the "right idea." There's a fantastic philosopher, Enrique Dussel, from Argentina, who has really beautifully traced how the Eurocentric view was born, in a given moment in time when Europe started to generate this idea of themselves as being the ones who had this one correct idea and this justified the conquering and exploiting of everybody else.

I think we have already endured too much, almost 500 years of that process, and it is pretty clear that this idea brought about the destruction of the diversity and richness of human possibilities, not the other way around. If it had been the right idea we would now be on fertile ground for new creativity, we would not be in danger of losing fresh water, we would not be in danger of losing the ability to feed each other, we would not be endangering the existence of bees and pollination, we would not be in danger of the oceans losing oxygen. We have to realize that this idea was not such a good idea after all, and ask ourselves: Where are the other ideas? Who's going to create that new vision of the world?

It has to be us, the people who have been in darkness, the people who have been despised. The people who are still attached to the ancient ways of relating to our bodies, of relating to the land, of relating to the wind, to each other. The ones who find joy in making love, in being full of joy and full of abandonment, the ones who know how to do, what in Spanish is so beautifully called *entrega*: the giving of ourselves to others without thinking, without making anything of it, just because that's the way it is and it gives us joy. That's what I'm writing about now: the ancient concept of sacrifice, embedded in one animal, the deer.

I've been investigating the deer, as teacher, for ten years. Why is the deer the master in Buddhism, in South Africa, and in the ancient Americas? I am especially focusing on the people of the Sonora desert, which is where you are from!

When I think of that, that you were born in the land of my devotion, I am moved to tears, because I have no other connection to that land except my devotion. Perhaps my ancestors, coming from the Siberia, walked through that land. There's a vision there and I think it's a vision that's coming from the future, not just from the past. Because these people of the Sonora desert believe that sacrificial poetry has the ability to bring about the future. The people of the Amazon rainforest also believe that the future is always present, and it only comes about when we make it appear through our awareness of it. So it's a mutual,

reciprocal exchange between the potentiality of the future and our perception of it. So we have agency, we have a huge responsibility in opening up to that possibility of a different future, we have to activate a different future in our hearts, in our bodies, in our behavior, in our relationships.

RAIL: The Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro noted so brilliantly that the ancient people of the Americas have themselves lived through the end of the world already. They sacrificed themselves to this new world order and watched the world as they knew it disappear, therefore they hold the knowledge of how to die and then live beyond the end.

VICUÑA: Absolutely. They are the deer. One of the great poems of the Americas is an anonymous, oral poem probably composed sometime in the seventeenth century called *Apu Inca Atahualpa Man*, about the killing of the last Inca by the Spaniards. In the poem, the people who have been destroyed are the deer. They are the sacrificial master, the teacher.

RAIL: To surrender to the worldview of a different species is a truly death defying act. On the one hand, you die to your individuality and on the other you continue to live as the other. For the past couple of years I have been engaged in an inter-species dialog with a group of beavers in Tierra del Fuego. At first this was a speculative exercise, but after a while we broke ground and the listening gave way to a set of torn sounds. Cries of propriety, of belonging, followed by pauses and silence. After the listening, upon the hearing, comes the translation. Could you speak to this?

VICUÑA: Yes, because the book that I'm writing now is about my relationship with this particular Yaqui poem. The Yaqui consider the poem itself to be a translation—the ancient hunters had to learn to translate the language of the deer. The oldest form of hunting that is known to humanity, from South Africa, and is still being practiced there. It consists of the act of translation, of placing yourself in the mind of the animal, so as to anticipate what the animal is thinking. Because if you're going to outrun an animal, you have to know where it's going to run. This is the birth of empathy. So translation and empathy are related. You cannot practice any form of empathy unless you know how to translate the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the other. I see the future of humanity through translation, and the fact that the indigenous poets perceive poetry as the translation has been totally enlightening.

So my book is about the many forms of translation that are involved in the poetic process. What you can translate in a poem is endless. You can translate the languages that no one knows at all, you can translate the feelings, the emotions, the images that don't have words. Because words have the extraordinary capacity to suggest what cannot be named, and that is what makes language powerful.

RAIL: What form do you envision this translation taking? Or is the translation the form itself?

VICUÑA: Tra- means “across,” so how many forms of “across” can we come up with? You were saying before that we are permeable, our imaginations, our bodies are pores. Everything is permeable. Bacterias, cells, particles, everything has a form of communicating, of interacting. So I think we have to tune in to the many forms of going across, back, and forth. Because we cannot be only in the process of emitting, of attempting to control—that is destructive. We have to acknowledge that all these processes are going both ways to begin with. Translation transforms the language itself, so translations are not only about what is being translated, but what the translation is coming into. It’s this reciprocity of the process that is really the translation. The last part of the word, -lation, means “carry.” *Un relato* is to carry something back. To relate is to carry back. So a sense of reciprocity is in the word “relationship.” In translation, what you’re doing is carrying information across, both ways.

RAIL: How do you hope to empower people with this beautiful task of translation? Of going back and forth between the self and the selfless?

VICUÑA: I think by inviting people. And that’s why we come back to rituals, because a ritual is an invitation. My method is to allow for the emergence of what wants to come in of its own accord. That is the principle: that we should allow the translation to transform this world through an invitation to participate in the discovery of what already is.

RAIL: I just had an image of myself packing a knapsack to go on a trek and choosing to leave it only half-full to have space for whatever I might discover.

VICUÑA: And this is what life wants: life wants to delight in life. And so we have to incarnate that which is most delightful to us. But not delightful on the surface, something deeper than that. It’s a vibration, it’s the remnants of the spirit. There is something that makes you be you that nobody else can incarnate. And it’s your mission to listen to that because when you do, you become a delightful life itself. It’s not just your delight. The birds, the animals, everybody will sense it. I know when I am in that state because when I go for a walk, animals will come to me and suddenly I’m being licked by little dogs. They come to me [mocking dog sounds]. “What are they licking?” They’re drinking from the fountain of delight. It is the delight I am in. And they look at me, and I look at them, and there is a spark of recognition: “Yes, we licked that!”

It’s possible to have relationships like that, and to feel not just comfort, but the gift of it being something that is given to all of us. And it’s always available. So our being, our death, our short time in this life is really about that. That is why I think this Llamado is a call for beauty, because that beauty is the delight of life that wants to create more delight, more beauty, life itself.