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BEYOND
HUMAN



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*Decentring the Anthropocene in
Spanish Ecocriticism*

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Chronicling sixteenth-century Spain to the present day, *Beyond Human* aims to decentre the human and acknowledge the material historicity of more-than-human nature. The book explores key questions relating to ecological equity, justice, and responsibility within and beyond Spain in the Anthropocene.

Examining relations between Iberian cultural practices, historical developments, and ecological processes, Maryanne L. Leone, Shanna Lino, and the contributors to this volume reveal the structures that uphold and dismantle the non-human-human dichotomy and nature-culture divide. The book critiques works from the Golden Age to the twenty-first century in a wide range of genres, including *comedia*, royal treatises, agricultural reports, paintings, satirical essays, horror fiction and film, young adult and speculative literature, poetry, graphic novels, and television series.

Chapter Twelve

Trans-Corporeal Matter Narratives in *Hierro*

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M^a CONCEPCIÓN BRITO-VERA

No man is an island entire of itself; every man
Is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

John Donne, *Devotions: Upon Emergent Occasions*

El Hierro, also called the Meridian Isle or the Island of One Thousand Volcanoes, is the youngest and most south-westerly Spanish land mass forming part of the Canary Islands archipelago. El Hierro is uniquely positioned in the Atlantic Ocean, which lends the location its distinctive character. The island sits just off the shores of Africa, and no other land mass stands between it and the American continents. This means that until the arrival of Columbus in the Americas, this location was considered by Europeans to be the last territory of the known world. According to José de Viera y Clavijo, the isle's distal position from Europe, Africa, and the rest of the Canarian archipelago induced Claudius Ptolemy to locate there the prime meridian. Thus, unfurling from this point westwards, the Atlantic Ocean, also known historically as Mare Tenebrarum or the Dark Sea, was considered a horizon of uncertainty.

El Hierro defies any preconceived ideas that one may hold about a paradise island as an oasis of palm trees, turquoise waters, and white-sand beaches: its shorelines are abrupt; its cliffs are sheer. This means the island has neither beaches nor places to sunbathe. Consequently, El Hierro has virtually no tourist industry, much unlike the other islands of the archipelago. However, this perceived commercial disadvantage has actually played an important role in the island's development as an ecologically equilibrated enclave. El Hierro covers an area of just 278 square kilometres and has a population of approximately 11,000 human inhabitants.¹ In 2000, the island was declared a World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO, and in 2015, it was also declared a UNESCO

Global Geopark. The park itself, including both the land and the marine surface, measures a total of 595 square kilometres.² At this point in time, the political authorities of El Hierro, together with other organizations, aim for the island to become the first in the world to be 100 per cent sustainable.³ As for its geology, this oceanic island was the last to emerge from the sea and is still at a relatively early stage of development. Its most recent submarine volcanic eruptions took place on 10 October 2011. Due to its relative infancy, the ground on this isle is unstable, which has led to spectacular landslides, including the one that took place 50,000 years ago and that caused the current horseshoe shape of the north face of the island. The valley that resulted from this geological cataclysm is now called El Golfo; not surprisingly, The Gulf's incredible beauty dominates the visual portrayal of the island in the television series *Hierro*.

Released in June 2019 and jointly produced by Movistar+, ARTE France, Portocabo, and Atlantique Productions, the series *Hierro* is a Franco-Spanish co-production whose first season takes the form of an eight-episode police thriller.⁴ The island, with its singular traits, becomes an additional character as the drama unfolds. In this chapter, we hypothesize that by focusing on the island's distinctiveness as an agent with the capacity to affect and alter the course of events, the series, led by brothers Pepe Coira (creator, scriptwriter) and Jorge Coira (director), reflects the trans-corporeal nature of matter, a central tenet of material ecocriticism. In addition, by addressing island living in its relationship with the continent, we further demonstrate that these trans-corporeal manifestations evince a cultural ethos that is dependent not only on the island's human and non-human materiality but also on non-material global networks that contribute to the shaping of an *herreño* self-awareness.

According to new materialist Stacy Alaimo, trans-corporeality implies the "recognition that one's bodily substance is vitally connected to the broader environment" (63). Such recognition is not new, as can be inferred from the verses by the seventeenth-century English metaphysical poet John Donne quoted in the epigraph to this chapter. By showing the relational capacity of matter, trans-corporeality highlights the networks of interconnections, crossings, and assemblages that exist among all entities in the material world, be they animate or inanimate. As corporeal bodies, human beings are enmeshed in this fabric of relationships, together with immaterial domains such as culture, discourses, feelings, or emotions. In this sense, trans-corporeality blurs hierarchical boundaries between the material and the cultural or between matter and meaning, thus affirming the immanent relationality from which all

entities emerge. Therefore, trans-corporeality unifies the human and the non-human, and in so doing, calls into question any human centrality.

As a product of television, the series *Hierro* displays this porous quality of matter through both its visual narrative and plot structure, finding its iconic expression in the opening credits. Here, body parts of the human characters are fused to or confused with other material elements, including a bush, a tree branch, or the island's contour, while close-up shots unravel the delicacy and intricate texture of other material elements, such as a stone or a piece of wood. As the opening sequence concludes, the contorted and tortured image of the Sabina is brought into focus. Having withstood over five hundred years of battering by the trade winds, this iconic tree has become a symbol of the island and its islanders. Today its twisted and bent limbs have found their way back to the soil from which it grows. The Sabina now takes hold of the ground not only by its roots but also by its crown; having grown full circle, its circumference affirms its willingness to live on and to survive against all odds. In its synecdochical solitude and tenacity, the Sabina tree encapsulates the island's and the islanders' long history of isolation.

While El Hierro's remoteness constitutes a recurring theme in the television series, one should refrain from interpreting the island as a passive victim of adversity. Quite the contrary: the isle is portrayed as an active agent in the thriller's investigation, one who exerts influence over the environment by altering the speed of the inquest and by assisting in the discovery of a hidden body. This fact draws attention to the interplay, connections, and relationships that arise from the material world, whose networks can be varied and wide in scope: a chemical substance reaching the bloodstream, the action of the wind on a tree, or the erosion of soil after a fire (Alaimo). By asserting matter's agentivity, trans-corporeality interrogates the traditional association of agency with intentionality and shows that matter should be studied "not in terms of what it *is* (i.e. essence) but in terms of what it *does* ... in terms of its capacities to act and affect (i.e. agency)" (Monforte 380; emphasis in the original). Furthermore, focusing on matter's agency implies a repositioning of the category of human and blurs any human-non-human opposition. The television series *Hierro* demonstrates that just as the material world is not secondary to the human, so too the human cannot be considered a separate island estranged from a supposedly external world.

In tune with this re-categorization of matter, we analyse the series' ecocritical representation of El Hierro as an assemblage of earth, air, and maritime elements that together defy the conception of an island

as a separate piece of land. As shall be seen, the series predicates on the tension derived from the intermingling of two potentially opposing forces: on the one hand, *Hierro* explores notions that equate island living with oppressive confinement of the type that might catalyse criminal activity; on the other hand, the series foregrounds the island's extensive connections to and communication with its surrounding environment. For instance, the diamonds that trigger the criminal investigation come from mainland Africa and the drug dealers who want to recover those same diamonds travel from the neighbouring island of Tenerife. This bidirectional emphasis on both the island's isolation and on its connectivity gives meaning to an apparent paradox: despite its seeming separateness, El Hierro's contiguity with human and non-human matter is indicative of the enmeshment that epitomizes an *herreño* ecoconscious and naturecultural identity.

Finally, we study the meeting of matter and non-material elements such as perceptions, feelings, and ideas in *Hierro*, since, as a moving-image thriller, the text exploits productively the confluence of material ecocriticism's central tenets and the conventions of crime fiction. Commonly, island detective fiction builds on both the mysterious atmosphere frequently ascribed to insular spaces and on the sense of enclosure felt by their human characters, elements also present in *Hierro*. Stereotypical island elements notwithstanding, the series' originality stems from El Hierro's agentivity, founded not simply on the pervasive presence of landscape, nor on the usual references to traditions, but rather on the dynamic character that the island acquires as a material element. In this vein, critics Ralph Crane and Lisa Fletcher have identified the power of islands not only for their function as settings, but also insofar as "they can also operate on the level of character, and influence plot" (6). What is more, extrapolating from structuralist Tzvetan Todorov's renowned assertion that crime fiction contains "not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation" (44), in island crime fiction, Crane and Fletcher rightly underline, there are not just those two, "but also the story of the island" (7). This singularity in the portrayal of El Hierro is better understood if we compare the series to other visual productions.

For instance, in the Anglo-French whodunnit-style detective series *Death in Paradise* (2011–), the imaginary island of St. Honorée is not depicted as an active agent taking part in the plot and affecting the denouement. If the murderer is found, it is only due to the detective's intuition and ability to decipher the clues left by the killer; if a crime is committed, its motivation is usually ascribed to prior conflicts that tourists bring to the island from their country of origin. The island serves

merely as a paradisiac background against which tragic crimes occur and on which human-centred agency dominates. Virtually the same can be said of *Maltese* (2017), produced by RAI and Palomar, in which the island and the people of Sicily are just the passive victims of mafia schemes and Sicily, as an insular space, is not a necessary condition for the storyline. Both series visually and narratively centre the human.

On the official web page of the series *Hierro*, Pepe Coira observes that “[e]s bueno que el lugar donde ocurren las cosas importe, que tiña con algo de su carácter lo más sustancial, que es el carácter y la suerte de los personajes” (“it is good that the place where things happen matters, that [place] tinges the most substantial elements with some of its personality, which is the nature and the fortunes of its characters”; Movistar+ 31).⁵ If it is true that the thriller is constituted “not around a method of presentation but around the milieu represented,” as Todorov observes, then it is also true that the characters, their behaviour, and the space that produces and is produced by them must necessarily determine plot and structure (48). This generic predisposition to elucidate the trans-corporeal relationship between the codependent agencies of the land and of its human inhabitants is reinforced by the series’ disclosure of the murderer’s identity at its midway point, in the fourth episode. The remaining four chapters elaborate on the murderer’s personality and explore his motive for committing the crime, namely the island’s lack of prospects, which he attributes to El Hierro’s small size and to its distance from large urban centres. As we shall demonstrate, however, the series does not assign ethical responsibility for the human misbehaviour to El Hierro itself, but to the very real danger of human evaluations of the island territory as a remote, unproductive, or disconnected entity.

Indeed, the greatest distance between the island and the continent – one that propagates inaccurate ideas about a superior, continental life – is not only geographic but also representational, originating in social and other digital media.⁶ As geographer and island researcher Jonathan Pugh rightly observes, “[E]ven if islands are not directly involved in new data production processes, in the Anthropocene it is increasingly difficult to undertake island studies in complete isolation from them” (101). The series *Hierro* offers an exceptional example of these other ways to understand island connectivity through Daniel’s and other youngsters’ self-perception. *Herreños* (people from El Hierro) are commonly bombarded with disempowering discourses that stem from the continent and that portray a neoliberal fantasy of individual success according to which economic affluence stands for personal improvement and comfort. This neoliberal, individualistic myth, together with the island’s past of colonization and abandonment, defines the average

islander’s spatial self-awareness detrimentally: first, as a resident of a minuscule – and therefore devalued – island and, second, as physically and therefore symbolically distanced from continentally centred power. Recognizing the substratum of inferiority and disadvantage with which *herreños* such as those portrayed in the television series perceive themselves vis-à-vis mainlanders, *Hierro* proposes that a productive antidote to this kind of imperialistic centring of power on the continent is an ecocritical, new materialist, trans-corporeal reading of a territory that is in fact highly integrated and whose value can be perceived in proportion to its discerned material, human, and non-human interconnectivity within and beyond the island.

Hierro tells the story of examining magistrate Candela Montes (Candela Peña), who, for reasons unknown but that relate to a problem on the mainland, has been appointed to work on the island.⁷ Once on El Hierro, she encounters a community in which everyone knows one another and where secrets are impossible to keep. Residents become suspicious when a young local named Fran (Alex Zacharias) is found dead, murdered on the day of his wedding. The prime suspect is Antonio Díaz Martínez (Darío Grandinetti), the bride’s father and a wealthy businessman with a turbulent past. Their portrayal as oppositional characters notwithstanding, Candela and Díaz engage in a parallel investigation to discover the real killer. The viewer will eventually find out that Fran and his friend Daniel (Saulo Trujillo) had found some smuggled diamonds on a sunken ship and that the murder was motivated by Daniel’s discovery that Fran planned not to share the spoils of the treasure with him. During the investigation, Daniel will also kill Reyes (Mónica López), a civil guard and the mother to one of his friends, when she accidentally uncovers the fact that he is the murderer for whom the whole island searches. The situation complicates further when Samir (Antonia San Juan), Díaz’s boss in the drug-trafficking business, travels to El Hierro from Tenerife to recover those same diamonds. The climax is reached during *La Bajada*, a religious festival that takes place every four years and that brings together many *herreños*, including those living abroad. Eventually, Samir will also be killed by Daniel, who will finally get caught when trying to escape from the island.

The story of *Hierro* is told primarily from the point of view of the magistrate Candela, a fact that indicates that the series is targeted at mainland audiences. Through her eyes, the viewer is exposed critically to perceptions about the Canarian ethos: the stereotypical slowness usually confused by foreigners with laziness; the importance of *La Bajada*, which Candela reduces to a mere rural festivity; and, likewise, the absence of facilities and commodities – for instance, there are no

large shopping malls on El Hierro – that consistently characterizes this place as small and distant. Díaz is also a mainlander and typifies the *godo*, a pejorative term that is used by Canarians to refer to mainlanders whose attitudes reflect those of the islands' colonial past. Individuals such as these are characterized by a sense of self-perceived superiority towards the islander; they are money-oriented and hold no regard for the land, nor concern for correctly interpreting the rhythms of the islanders. Díaz, for instance, has appropriated his Canarian wife's lands and transformed them into banana plantations. Through Candela and Díaz's portrayal, therefore, viewers are made aware of the dominance of mainland perspectives on island living and are prodded to question imperial, neoliberal, and other anthropocentric discourses that simultaneously devalue human and non-human *herreñidad*.⁸

In contrast, the civil guard Reyes epitomizes the sweetest and most amiable traits of the *herreño* people. She embodies their love for the land, as well as the know-how and patience required to confront difficult situations, whereas Daniel represents the angst experienced by islanders, especially of those who live in the remotest part of what constitutes political Spanish territory. In addition to having an abusive father and unlike most of his friends, Daniel has to work hard as a baker to earn his living. When envisioning his future, he foresees a life in which he is confined to the bakery with few other prospects. Although there exists the potential for Daniel to make the bakery more profitable, he instead becomes misguided by dreams of remote lands that would distance him from his father and from his feeling of imprisonment. In this way, Daniel personifies the long history of trials and tribulations undergone by *herreños*, which, in turn, have often precipitated a journey across the sea to begin anew elsewhere.

As living and lived matter, place produces meaning; it tells stories and can therefore be the subject of critical analysis. This vision is shared by new materialists, who, drawing on Spinoza's seventeenth-century neutral monist and epicurean materialist philosophy, defend the relentless "intra-activity" of matter in all its manifestations and argue that "matter is one" (Barad, *Meeting* 235; Braidotti 170). As one of the series' protagonists, El Hierro is much more than an innate setting; the island is a living entity that is still shaping itself and that determines the tempo of the plot.⁹ Despite not being *herreños* themselves, the Galician directing duo shows great respect for the local: their cast is predominantly Canarian, as are their accents, and the creators undeniably project the idiosyncrasy of such a small place, accurately portraying popular and colloquial expressions, traditions, customs, and celebrations.

Since place links the human and non-human in equal measure, it affirms the non-hierarchical networks, relationships, and interdependencies between the two. In this sense, new material feminist Karen Barad's distinction between interaction and intra-action proves useful when reading *Hierro* ecocritically; while interaction implies the existence of pre-established bodies that later get involved in the action by primordially human intervention, intra-action entails the constant interflowing of forces working together (Barad, "Intra-actions" 77). Thus, intra-actions encompass the manifold assemblages of human and non-human matter. The Coira brothers' success in authentically evoking El Hierro's singularity through their focus on place evinces the agentive character of matter and the intra-active relationships entwining human with non-human elements. The intra-active relations between the island and its inhabitants are expressed in part through El Hierro's volcanic and climatic agentivity, which, like the series' human characters, drives the plot. In episode 1, it is a volcanic tremor that leads to the discovery of Fran's body, hidden in an undersea cave (00:10:28–00:11:25); similarly, in episode 5, the rain that extinguishes the fire that would have destroyed the traces left by the murderer on his victim's car facilitates the disclosure of the murderer's identity (00:08:15–00:09:30).

However, it is important to underline that these examples do not anthropomorphize the island as an agent intentionally helping in the human investigation. Rather, and in concrete terms, there is a volcanic tremor and it rains, and these two facts have significant consequences for the course of events plotted by the murderer and for the series' denouement. *Hierro* shows that humans merely comprise one small link in a complex network that constitutes the world of "vibrant matter" in which all manifestations of existence coexist and intra-act (Bennett). Entangled in endless ways, this "'more-than-human' materiality is a constant process of shared becoming that tells us something about the world we inhabit" (Iovino and Oppermann 1). Thus, a turn to matter enables us to listen to stories told by these phenomena and to acknowledge their agency in shaping human–non-human assemblages while asserting their ecological relevance.

Indeed, the trans-corporeal character of matter asserts place's agency as an imperative, which in turn provides a useful frame for a consideration of the material implications of island living. The sense of isolation and imprisonment expressed by the youngest characters in *Hierro* ultimately leads the series' murderer to a life of crime and reflects these humans' inability to acknowledge the extent of their interconnectivity with all human and non-human matter. For instance, when one of Fran's friends is interrogated about his possible involvement in the trafficking

business, he answers, “Si llego a ser yo, con tanta pasta no me quedo aquí ni loco” (“If this were the case, I wouldn’t have stayed here with all that cash, no way”; episode 6, 00:40:40). This sense of imprisonment on the island, from which Fran’s friend would flee at his first opportunity, is reinforced by his human-centred focus on El Hierro’s reduced dimensions and on the limited means of available transport to other territories. In the small and closed community where the *herreños* live, “[s]olo hay un barco ... y varios aviones al día. Nadie sale de El Hierro sin que se sepa” (“there is only one boat ... and a few planes per day. Nobody leaves El Hierro without the rest knowing it”; episode 1, 00:20:49–55). Rather than acknowledging the human–non-human interconnection that island life provides, characters like the young murderer feel watched, stifled, and surrounded by monotony. Profoundly frustrated and unsatisfied, the young baker Daniel dreams of leaving El Hierro, a desire instantiated in episode four, which opens with a general shot of a cityscape at night. This image confuses the viewer because it depicts an urban scene that would be impossible on the island. As the camera slowly pans out, the illusion is shattered: the shot reveals Daniel’s eyes gazing upon beautifully lit high-rises, which the viewer then realizes are nothing more than enticing posters hanging on his bedroom wall. Dreaming of a bustling life in the metropolis, Daniel fails to recognize the material interconnectivity of his own island; instead, he seeks a more densely human-centred existence that popular imaginaries of the continent continually promote as desirable.

The islander’s perception of the continent, expressed through Daniel’s fantasy about urban areas, recalls the imaginative geography of Orientalism, which Edward Said has defined as an othering discourse on colonized people that empowers the colonizer. In *Hierro*, the imaginative geography works in the opposite direction to translate instead into a “continentalism” that renders islanders small and defenceless, a perception that a world of opportunities awaits outside the confines of the island, in which one could participate if only the sea did not present a seemingly infinite and insurmountable border. The television series’ presentation of this imaginative geography of the continent, based on preconceived ideas about cities that appear to embody everything the island lacks, cannot be translated as an absence of involvement with the land. Rather it is reflective of the angst experienced by those who have to live on a limited set of economic or living experiences, in an example of the merging of psychological and ecological spaces.

Lamentably, Daniel is not able to view his island in a way that would transcend its traditional conception as a piece of land surrounded by water. Island cultures researcher Philip Hayward, inspired among others

by political theorist Jane Bennett’s notion of vibrant matter, proposes the term “aquapelago” to refer to the integrated spaces of the marine, terrestrial, and aerial environments of groups of islands, which are key to communities’ senses of identity and belonging (“Aquapelagos”). As he states, “The air above the waters and land, the weather that occurs in it, the windblown seeds and species that are born by it and the birds that inhabit the air, sea and land are just as much part of the integrated space of the aquapelago” (Hayward, “Constitution” 2). Similarly, the series presents an image of the island that contrasts with the one that so derails Daniel; El Hierro is seen to be an assemblage of the land, the sea, and the air in all their manifestations, extending deeper even than Hayward’s conception of the terrestrial, with its exploration of the underground depths of the island, which are of paramount importance given the centrality bestowed to its chasms and volcanism. In this context, humans “are only one of a series of actants without which the aquapelago cannot be performatively constituted” (Hayward, “Constitution” 3), while islands, as Pugh sustains, are framed as “‘relational spaces’ that unsettle borders of land/sea, island/mainland, and problematize static tropes of island insularity, isolation, dependency and peripherality” (94). Despite the aforementioned sense of enclosure experienced by some characters, through the coextensive visual layering of its opening and closing sequences, the series’ emphasis on landscape-human entanglements, and a plot development that is dependent upon the island as a character, El Hierro is portrayed as an entity that is not only active but also in constant communication with the exterior and, as a relational space, possesses intra-active agency.

Indeed, agentivity is mediated and regulated by the ability of subjects to communicate with each other, a key characteristic of trans-corporeality. In *Hierro*, the porosity between human and non-human is again expressed through the fusion of images in the credits: human hair transforms into a bush, a branch extends until it becomes an arm, and the contour of a face is completed with the edges of the island’s jagged coastline. With these visual superimpositions, the series highlights the bonding among all material elements and informs about contemporary ways of understanding the intra-connection of humanity and the environment in which nothing exists independently from the rest.

With its sustained focus on space, the landscape in *Hierro* becomes the site where the human and the non-human meet both materially and metaphorically. Indeed, the landscape is so prevailing that the series has unsurprisingly been termed “un crimen con vistas ... en clave de thriller” (“a thriller with views”; Mejino). There are scenes in which the union between human and non-human elements is most compelling,

determining, as Alaimo states, “the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (2). For instance, during the tireless and despairing search for Reyes, powerful outdoor shots fuse the characters with the landscape: the colour of the clothes and hair worn by Candela and Reyes’s son Yeray (Isaac B. Dos Santos) perfectly matches the volcanic rock, blending the landscape and human characters (episode 5, 00:41:03–00:43:55). In this scene, the identification of non-human matter that is particular to El Hierro with both a continental resident and an islander alludes to an ecological empathy with those who seek justice and those who suffer injustice regardless of origin, further suggesting that ecojustice forms an integral part of the *Hierro* series.

Through its volcanic and atmospheric behaviour, the island is revealed to be an active agent who hampers Daniel’s efforts to hide the bodies and thus plays a decisive role in the plot structure. While at first Daniel benefits from the island’s cooperation, the land ultimately denies him partnership as an accomplice. Hence, El Hierro’s agency displaces Daniel’s central position as the only actor in the course of events, suggesting, therefore, the imperative for humans to recognize their interdependency with the non-human environment.

In addition to the more predictable elements that the series associates with the island’s bounded nature and its agentive quality, tension arising from the contradictory combination of the human characters’ sense of enclosure and the relational properties displayed in the portrayal of the island underlines the capacity of matter to cross beyond the material in order to affect non-material domains such as emotions or perceptions. Places transcend their own materiality. They are, as environmentalist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan observes, “centers of felt value” (4). The island is presented as a “system of meaning” (Crane and Fletcher 12), which has an immeasurable impact on the spatial awareness of the islanders, especially those who have not had the opportunity to leave the tangible limits of the archipelago in pursuit of the remote geography of the continent. From the material geography of insular space marked by rugged borders, distant urban spaces are imagined through circulating discourses about city life as hubs for information, cultural life, or job opportunities and, as represented in the poster on Daniel’s bedroom wall, entice some characters to go to the continent with a desire to strengthen human centredness by connecting more directly with human centres of power.

Moreover, Daniel’s and other *herreño* characters’ desire to migrate to continental cities, which house global corporations and centre political agendas that encourage infinite economic growth without consideration

of ecological limits and where consumption of resources creates an unbalanced metabolism, contribute to extant ecologically unsustainable urban models. In her seminal *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, environmentalist Ursula Heise states, “[I]t is not just that local places have changed through increased connectivity but also the structures of perception, cognition and social expectations associated with them” (54). To put it another way, islands are in a trans-corporeal relationship with their environment beyond the level of their aquapelagic or material relational properties. In a world in which global connectedness has become all-pervasive, islanders’ self-awareness is also dependent on their knowledge of other spaces propagated by media such as television or the Internet.

Viewed in this way, the absence of full camera shots of El Hierro plays a twofold purpose that reflects the paradoxical singularity that characterizes island living. In the eight episodes of the series, the viewer can see some characters moving to or from Tenerife. However, the island is never seen from afar, whether from the air or the sea (a shot could easily have shown Candela looking at the island from her plane seat, or El Hierro from the ship arriving from Tenerife). What is more, bird’s-eye view shots, like those characterizing the first season of the television series *True Detective* (2014) or the Spanish-produced film *La isla mínima* (2014), are absent.¹⁰ Instead, the camera is almost always positioned at eye level, a device that prevents the viewers from getting their bearings via a detached, superior outsider or a continentalist perspective and leads them to see the surroundings at an equal plane of the *herreños* themselves. In other words, the shots force a focus on the island from its own locality rather than its position vis-à-vis the Spanish mainland extending in this way a decentring of colonial power to a decentring of the human altogether.

In addition, the impossibility of the viewers to see the island as a whole underscores the reduced dimension of the space, and signals to the sea, to the island’s borders. This camera recourse has the power to evoke Daniel’s own sense of imprisonment, which will eventually trigger Fran’s murder. Obviously, living on an island does not imply a certain predisposition to crime. Such a generalization would disregard the frustrating accumulation of circumstances that concur in this individual case. However, the fact that Daniel’s resilience to these difficult circumstances is limited does call for an understanding of island living as the confluence of relational dimensions extending beyond the island itself. Undoubtedly, Daniel’s desperation is founded on both his sense of imprisonment and his awareness of other places. Although this type of awareness, which has triggered the commission

of a crime, is presented negatively in the series *Hierro*, deterritorializing local knowledge, as Heise states, “does not necessarily have to be detrimental for an environmental perspective, but on the contrary opens up new avenues into ecological consciousness” (55). *Hierro*’s diegetic presentation of the island in a trans-corporeal relationship with its environment does not stop at the island’s materiality and agency. Rather, by highlighting Daniel’s imaginative geography of the continent, the series acknowledges El Hierro’s enmeshment in a vast and complex network of discursive, technological, or media-produced relations. This conceptualization has the potential to enrich our understanding of the current environmental challenges posed by new technological and digital media.

Presenting the Canarian island of El Hierro as an assemblage of enmeshed human and non-human agentive matter, the television series counters centuries-long devaluations of the isle that were grounded in its distance from the European continent and contemporary dismissal supported by market-based value calculations. Through diegetic and extradiegetic techniques of the visual medium that decentre the human and by portraying landscape and non-human agency convergently, the series’ local perspective calls on viewers, whether from the continent or islands of Spain, to invoke an *herreño* ecoconsciousness. Ultimately, *Hierro* presents the viewer with a seemingly paradoxical combination of isolating and relational elements that together assert the trans-corporeality of matter, and in so doing, calls for a conceptualization of insularity as an entanglement of material and non-material intra-active relations that defy the notion of an island as a separate piece of land.

NOTES

- 1 Data taken in 2016 from the official web page of the Island’s government (“Geografía”).
- 2 For further information, see “Unesco Global Geopark.”
- 3 This decision is the result of the “El Hierro 100% Renewable Project,” an undertaking led by Gorona del Viento El Hierro, S.A., and including the El Hierro Island Council (65.82 per cent), the electric enterprise Endesa (23.21 per cent), the Canary Islands Institute of Technology (7.74 per cent), and the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands (3.23 per cent). Renewable energy is obtained on the island from different natural resources such as wind, sunlight, and heat from geothermal or wave energy. For more details, see “Example of Sustainability.”

- 4 While this chapter was in its final stage before publication, a second season was released in March 2021. All references in this chapter are to the first season.
- 5 All the translations from Spanish are by the authors.
- 6 The role of news, social, and other media in shaping environmental consciousness, sustaining the neoliberal status quo, or participating in ecological devastation beyond sensationalistic coverage of catastrophes is the subject of the recent field of ecomedia studies, which locates “media within a multiscale resource economy of extraction, production, distribution, consumption, representation, wastage, and repurposing” that must be acknowledged and addressed in any effort to influence ecological amelioration (Starosielski and Walker 15). Along this vein, in her chapter for this collection, Carla Almanza Gálvez shows how Galician graphic fiction on the 2002 *Prestige* oil spill, for example, critiques the news media’s significant role in buttressing fossil fuel dependence for economic expansion when short-lived reporting on environmental causalities ignores long-term effects.
- 7 Historically, both El Hierro and Fuerteventura have been utilized as places of banishment for political dissidents. The Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno, for instance, was confined for four months in Fuerteventura during Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship in 1924. Another example was that of Leandro Pérez, the first doctor in El Hierro. He came to the island as an exile in the nineteenth century (“History of El Hierro”).
- 8 Bonnie Gasior explores the colonialist roots of this mainlander standpoint in her reading for this collection of Lope de Vega’s Golden Age play about the Guanche people’s integration with the Tenerife environment and critique of the Spanish conquest. Imperialist interruptions of earthly cadences are likewise explored in this volume by John Beusterien, whose chapter discusses bird caging in the sixteenth century, in order to highlight imperialist rupture of the earth’s polyrhythms for the presumed purpose of enhancing human health.
- 9 The Coira brothers’ portrayal of El Hierro as a living entity unto itself operates in contrast to recent film adaptations by Fernando González Molina of Dolores Redondo’s homonymous crime novels *El guardián invisible* (2017), *Legado en los huesos* (2019), and *Ofrenda a la tormenta* (2020). Whereas these police dramas, known as the *Baztán Trilogy*, may be lauded for drawing critical attention to a long history of strong women, their depiction of the Baztán Valley remains human-centred and nature a mere extension of human emotions.
- 10 The similarities between the film *La isla mínima* and the first season of the television series *True Detective* are striking and point to a change in television language, which media scholar Jason Mittell has termed *complex*

TV. At first glance, and in very simple terms, complex TV involves a more novelistic or even cinematic language style, especially in serial television. For more information about the similarities between *La isla mínima* and *True Detective*, see "Review: Marshland."

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