

Nostalgia, the Fleeting, and the Rare in Chilean Relationships to Nature and Nonhuman Species

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Abstract

Semi-structured interviews and participant observation were used to understand how urban Chileans form relationships with nature and nonhuman species in central Chile. Most informants expressed dislike of the typical mediterranean-habitat landscape, characterizing it as dry, poor, and empty. Yet many people expressed nostalgic attachment to specific places, species, and activities that they had experienced, often as children. Most of the reminisced-about interactions were fleeting or had been lost over time. In the dominant discourse, nature in the mediterranean zone of Chile is closely associated with poverty, and it is considered to lack beauty, biodiversity, culture, and history. Appeals to personal nostalgia may break through this discourse to form private assemblages of value. Chileans also attributed social value to interactions with species who are rare or who are found “exclusively” in Chile. Appeals to nostalgia, rarity, and exclusivity help to draw these private discourses into the public realm.

Keywords

Chile – conservation – mediterranean – nature – nostalgia – rural – urban

Human relationships with nonhuman animals occur within ecological and social contexts. These contexts can strongly influence the types of relationships that people develop with nonhuman animals, and how these relationships are able to motivate attitudes and actions such as conservation awareness and conservation policy. In mediterranean habitats, history and landscape have

had strong influences on personal relationships with plant and animal species. For example, throughout the Mediterranean Basin and other mediterranean-habitat countries, the landscape has been regarded as “degraded” from a former ecological state (Vogiatszakis, Mannion, & Griffiths, 2006; Tomaselli, 1977). Mediterranean-habitat countries such as Portugal and Chile experienced poverty and exploitation under latifundia, rural social unrest, dictatorships, collectivization, and the decollectivization of farms (Murray, 2003; Wright, 1982).

In the Portuguese Alentejo region, rural nature prior to land reform was a place where the poor were obliged to behave in a way they considered unnatural, wandering and begging (Cutileiro, 1971), and otters today are still poached due to their association with exploitative land tenure (Krauss, 2005). Yet a double vision presented nature in the Alentejo as sensually delightful (Leal, 1999). Such double visions and conflicting valuations can arise as a result of different processes of knowing nature. Here I examine how individuals in the mediterranean region of central Chile move away from the public discourses around nature and landscape to create tenuous private relationships with nonhuman animals.

How individuals develop personally valued relationships to nonhuman animals is of particular interest to conservationists working in habitats with high biological value (e.g., high species endemism or biodiversity), but which the public and policymakers show little interest in conserving. This ethnographic study is part of a larger project in which researchers have the goal of understanding human relationships to nonhumans in central Chile in order to design effective environmental education and conservation programs there. The central Chilean mediterranean habitat, although rich in biodiversity on a global scale (Simonetti, 1999; Myers, Mittermeier, Mittermeier, da Fonseca, & Kent, 2000; Myers, 1990), is the least protected region of Chile. It is also the region of Chile with the highest population and greatest overdevelopment (Romero et al., 2003). Conservation goals must meet social or cultural criteria to be effective and viewed as legitimate. A key problem for conservation is thus mobilizing individual engagements with nature to form publicly shared and supported conservation values. At the same time, we can recognize that individuals with idiosyncratic values also aid conservation.

The pioneering and visionary efforts of individuals with unique relationships to certain landscapes or species have made biologically valuable contributions to conservation, from Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir to numerous individuals today who set their landholdings aside for conservation or create centers for the conservation of their favorite species. In Chile, conservation is largely dependent on individual initiative for everything from wetland bird counting to protected area creation. Thus, while this paper is intended

to indentify the basis on which a broad public valuation of nature in central Chile may develop, it also pragmatically focuses on the factors that currently motivate idiosyncratic, private engagements with nature.

I focus on the experiences of the educated classes who directly and indirectly—through positions in research, industry, and government and through purchasing power—control environmental and developmental policies in Chile. Although my primary interest was in how these people develop valued personal relationships with nonhuman animals, I found that it was impossible to discuss or understand the existing private relationships with nonhuman animals without first considering history and social class and how they affected landscapes and the assemblages of nonhuman species connected to them (Hinchliffe, 2007; Thrift, 2007).

If we consider that knowing nonhuman animals is based in bodily experience—with nonhuman and other human animals, and various inanimate objects—and if we attend to multiple lines of argument showing that bodily experience is intimately tied to its contexts in processes of mutual becoming and potentiality (Massumi, 2002; Thrift, 2007; Ingold, 2000), considering landscape and social and historical contexts in order to understand human–nonhuman relationships is theoretically justified. I therefore bring broader issues of environmental attitudes and landscape studies into this paper.

To understand how middle and upper class urban people related to nonhuman animals, in 2010 to 2011, I conducted 37 semi-structured interviews with people who had some relationship to nature or the rural landscape. These relationships included living at the periphery of the city in rural gated communities and suburbs, having a summer home in the countryside, having a profession or hobby involving activity outdoors in nature, or being a professional in a biology-related career. I began with people I had met in Chile since moving to Santiago in 2008, and used snowballing to make further contacts. I also employed participant observation, spending time with bird watchers and behavioral ecologists, and visiting nature reserves and rural areas. These activities occurred on an ad-hoc basis between August 2008 and February 2012, while I was living in Santiago, Chile.

I spent 120 hours assisting behavioral ecologists with their research in the field, and 45 hours with bird watchers on bird-watching trips. I visited three protected areas near Santiago, which were among the areas mentioned by, or important to, people I interviewed, and which represented different types of protected areas (La Campana National Park, Altos de Cantillana Nature Reserve, and El Arrayán Nature Sanctuary). I also spent a weekend at an eco-tourism hotel and organic farm near Santiago, which was featured in a newspaper article during my research (Villa Virginia, run by the Fundación Origen).

The Central Zone of Chile: The Pure and the Impure

I asked my informants to describe the typical landscape of central Chile. People described the landscape as poor, altered, and dry. The landscape has changed due to the division of *fundos* (large landholdings) into *parcelas*, construction of houses, and industrialization of agriculture. As one resident of the suburban satellite town Calera de Tango put it, the landscape consists of “mountains, sea, the mountain range, smog, the pure and the impure, water both solid and liquid.” This mixing of the pure and the impure was sometimes blamed on the owners of the land, here by another resident of Calera de Tango:

Formerly they used poplars to prevent insects and insecticides and fumigation from getting to the houses. The bosses in the countryside still are not interested in nature issues. Now they live in Lo Barnechea, Las Condes [wealthy municipalities of Santiago]. They know that their families can't live in the countryside anymore, picking the fruit they want from the fruit trees, because it's poisoned. Insecticide doesn't evaporate the way they say. They color the fruit to make it look better, even fruit for export. They bring illegal things from Perú to put in the fruit.

female, Calera de Tango

The implied process of change in the landscape and nature from pure to impure was presented as ongoing, with no clear beginning. The landscape itself has no patrimony, no history, and little politics. One person who had spent part of his youth on a relative's farm told me that all he knew was that “in the beginning, all the land belonged to the king of Spain.” A history of the countryside was primarily alluded to by people who had personally experienced loss of land due to land reform, that is, older people from the upper class. These people blamed the loss of what was, to them, an idyllic lifestyle, on the land reforms of the socialist presidents, which “destroyed” the countryside and “left it in a shitty state.” Yet, as in many colonial nations, this “shitty state” was cyclical and foreshadowed (Thrift, 2007), as suggested by this passage from a book on mediterranean ecology and management:

Typically, the Spanish settlers who followed in the wake of Diego de Almagro (1536), and Pedro de Valdivia—founder of Santiago, in 1541—failed to bring with them the agro-sylvo-pastoral systems of southern Spain and Portugal... wherever Europeans settled in the New World, Asia or Africa, they tended to leave their folklore and rural *savoir-faire* behind them. Consequently, in virtually all their colonies, European

settlers tended to farm and steward resources less intelligently than had their ancestors back in Europe . . . (Aronson et al., 1998, p. 163)

According to university-educated informants, peasants had not been to university, so they did not understand the value of conserving nature, and all they wanted to do was hunt. One conservation ecologist mused, "I don't know if maybe you have to be educated in order to appreciate the central zone." Ecologists bemoaned the low level of environmental education among the rural and urban public, which they felt contributed to inadequate conservation policies. To them, the landscape was "terribly altered" and "degraded." Their vision of the pure and the impure in the landscape included distress over the many invasive species found in Chile, such as the European rabbit, and the perceived popular view of introduced species as good and native species as worthless:

When I've been in the countryside, they say, 'oh, how pretty the quail is!' Well, kill it and eat it, the quail is introduced! 'Oh, how cute the little rabbits are!' There's nothing worse than a rabbit!

male, Santiago

The supposed ignorance of peasants, resulting in their unwillingness to despise and eradicate invasive species such as rabbits and quail, is seen as perpetuating impurity in nature.

By contrast, one elderly woman from a former landowning family spoke of the "pure heart" of the peasant, and claimed, "part of the spirit of the tenant [inquilino] is to be in the countryside," but this purity of spirit was lost among the buildings and cars when they migrated to the city for work. She believed that the peasants traditionally took good care of the countryside, but that these values too were lost with the urbanization of their popular culture.

Although archaeological evidence indicates that the indigenous Mapuche historically engaged in transhumance, set fires, and practiced some agriculture in the central zone (Armesto et al., 2009), few people mentioned indigenous peoples or connected their activities with any possible impact on the environment. Although mystical views of the indigenous connection with nature are frequently expressed with reference to the forests of southern Chile, no such connection was made for the landscapes of central Chile. There is thus no discourse enshrining sustainable or valued interactions between humans, non-domestic nonhumans, and the wider environment.

The discourse around nature and the landscape in mediterranean Chile emphasizes its lack of water and trees, the lack knowledge of natural history

and good management practices, and by conspicuous omission, native peoples. Nevertheless, contingent on the personal experiences of individuals, we find that the landscape is populated by elements occupying contested roles in these assemblages—are the peasants pure of heart or ignorant and exploitative? Are rabbits sweet, or are they destructive invasive species? These unstable assemblages of the pure and the impure enact a struggle against one another, which is represented as both constant and ahistorical.

The Concept of Emptiness

When people talk about animals in central Chile, they do not say they are rare or hard to see; they say they do not exist. The central zone landscape is viewed as empty. Moreover, it is made empty through a set of cultural practices that urban, educated classes associate with lower-class ignorance and mismanagement.

One woman described the aesthetic usually associated with small landholdings (Figure 1), an aesthetic shared both by rural and urban dwellers. “They value the idea of ‘empty,’” she told me. Emptiness in turn is associated with cleanness and flatness. She claimed that “other people” (read: *nouveau riche* people) liked to empty and clean the landscape of *matorral* in order to install their summer houses, their pools, and their gardens. The land that her family owns is hilly and covered in *matorral*. She told me how when they purchased it and presented themselves at the local communal association, a local resident commented, “And you bought that shit [huevía]?”

She told me that she originally was not keen on the purchase herself, imagining it as just “ground, dryness and heat” but that over time she had come to see the prettiness of it. It was, in fact, populated by fruit trees, her cactus gardens, and transitory birds, foxes, rabbits, and *cururos* (small burrowing mammals). It had space and relaxing silence. Thus, it seems she came to value the landscape when she realized it was not the bare desert she associated with parvenue aesthetic preferences for the natural landscape.

Another informant explained that the Chilean peasant had always seen the landscape and its natural resources as expendable, a “landscape that you use and then use up.”

A landscape was formed that is boring, but very friendly, easy to transform, and consequently it is seen as transitory and it is much less respected. You spoil it with a few livestock.

male, Santiago



FIGURE 1 *Traditional embroidery, Rocío Luco Mujica, 1980 (approximately 1 m × 1 m), depicting the family parcela. It is property of a participant in this study.*

He, by contrast, said that he could not walk through the landscape without thinking of the forests and colonial adobe houses and churches that he imagined must have been present after the Spanish conquest. The landscape can thus be valued by attributing to it a historical contextualization of which it is continually cleaned by those who work it. Through agricultural and industrial processes of building, rebuilding, burning, logging, planting, leveling, terracing, overgrazing, trashing, and otherwise transforming the landscape without preserving its historicity, farmers and industrialists remove all traces of human and nonhuman processes of dwelling (Ingold, 2000). Ingold's concept of dwelling, Thrift's (2007) understanding of performance, and Connolly's (2002) discussion of virtual motor memory emphasize in differing ways how perception, cognition, and behavior form skilled (thus meaningful) engagements with assemblages and places.

Massumi (2002) claims "[a creature's] perceptions *are* its actions—in their latent state. *Perceptions are possible actions*" (emphasis in original, p. 91). What actions are possible when perception is circumscribed to emptiness? Or attending to Massumi's distinction between the possible, which is reified in

the present by past processes, and the potential, what potential can be generated through the maintenance of emptiness? A virtual nature is evident in nostalgic, historical contextualizations of the landscape (forests, colonial adobe buildings). This virtual nature carries, as Massumi (2002) writes, “past actions and contexts . . . conserved and repeated, automatically reactivated but not accomplished; begun but not completed” (p. 30). Arguably the erasure of dwelling and thus the maintenance of emptiness constrains all meaningful relationships with nature in central Chile to the realm of the virtual and the incipient.

Yet the removal of signs of dwelling is itself a way of dwelling. Spaces are cleaned by those who manage them to erase signs of disorder and alterity (Mitchell, 1996). During birdwatching trips with photographers, I found that they framed their shots to eradicate all signs of human presence from their photographs, a virtual way of cleaning dwelling—rural people, their villages, their roads, and their litter—from a desired and managed vision of nonhuman animals in nature. Though they differ in their preferences, photographers, landowners, and peasants all manage their spaces such that nonhuman animals and humans do not overlap.

Spaces devoted to transience, such as Augé’s (1995) non-places of supermodernity, are also cleaned of here-ness and now-ness. Though not supermodern, central Chile is also characterized by transience, which is maintained through physical transformation, tidying the landscape, and erasure of the dwelling of nonhuman animals in it, as well as cleaning those animals from discourse. Cleaning not only involves removing incipient signs of dwelling, but also keeping the landscape a blank canvas, full of possibility. This cycle of erasure, exploitation, and tidying requires bodily effort and time, forming a particular engagement with nature that, like detachment (Candea, 2010), should not be mistaken for non-engagement.

Since rural dwelling, both by humans and nonhuman animals, is consequently hard for outsiders to perceive, I wondered if a trace of the processuality of dwelling may be preserved in the nostalgic simulation of rural life for tourists. In search of this, I went to a rural hotel in a former *casa patronal* (landowner’s house) that boasted its own organic farm and school for disadvantaged local children. After arriving, and realizing I was the only guest, I was belatedly informed that the kitchen was open at night by appointment only. I was told to go to a restaurant, which was closed. I walked for half an hour down a poorly lit road along a vineyard where the only other pedestrians were five barnyard geese, passing several makeshift shops that you accessed by crossing wooden bridges over the ditch between the road and people’s front gardens.

These shacks, staffed by the resident housewives, specialized in the same industrial packaged food products found in any supermarket in Santiago.¹ I realized that the sole available source of prepared food was a gas station, the ubiquitous non-places all along the Chilean highway system. I ate a hotdog there, and the teenage attendant's unconvincingly delivered "Thank you for visiting Copec" did not make me feel like I was somewhere that you visit. I then sat in my hotel room, decorated with perpetually unused antique Chilean furniture, and watched the same episode of a cable TV cop show I had seen the week before in California. The personal ties of skill, familiarity, and inhabitation connecting people to local places and the nonhuman beings in them are so hidden and private that they are not even simulated for the benefit of tourists: they are not a public part of the performance of making this landscape.

Nonhuman animal dwelling is similarly invisible to human visitors to non-human places in central Chile. One man I interviewed told me that as a boy he used to follow the runways of degus (a rodent) through the grass to see where they led, "but they didn't lead anywhere." The places that animals make in their daily lives are not recognizable as such, either because humans do not know how to recognize nonhuman animal places, or because to them a place is by definition a human place superimposed on or made out of nonhuman places. Thus the central Chilean landscape can be understood, and I would argue, is understood by many urban Chileans, as a non-place produced by the aesthetic of tidiness and the ease of altering the landscape, which combine to erase both the human and nonhuman animal legacies of interaction with the environment.

On a birdwatching trip I overheard a joke about a puma sighted in a recently developed satellite town of Santiago. A photograph of the puma had been posted on an internet forum with the description "Aspirational puma sighted in Chicureo." Thus, people make sense of the presence of a wild puma in a nouveau riche community by jokingly suggesting that he, too, is a socially insecure newcomer—certainly not a displaced person passing through his former territory.

1 Compare this to the homemade chicharón, bread, jam, vegetarian sandwiches, sushi, fruit juice, homegrown garlic; illegal fruit, vegetable, popcorn, nut, and barbecue stands; and legally sold empanadas, calzones rotos, etc. available on different days on my street in Santiago. Central Chile does not lack traditional and homemade food traditions.

Ways of Knowing Nonhuman Animals

Knowing nonhuman animals develops through sensual engagement and performance, an example of meaning developing from process (Thrift, 2007). Simply because these interactions are carefully removed from public meaning-making does not mean that they do not exist or that they lack private meanings. Interactions with nonhuman animals and their representations within local culture are guided by what Connolly (2002) calls a “virtual motor memory,” which “allows an encounter to be organized into a perception *because* it subsists below explicit awareness as a repository of cultural life from the past” (emphasis in the original, p. 26). Thus history and dwelling (Ingold, 2000) in the foreshadowed and emptied landscape influence ways of knowing nonhuman animals.

Reflecting how the public performance of natural history knowledge (or ignorance) takes on foreshadowed qualities, people told me that environmental education has to be directed at children because it is too late for adults, but also that children are the least interested in nature and are sick of hearing the environmental message. Yet this sempeternal too-lateness could be upset through the performance of social mobility, perhaps the strongest and most recognized agent of potentiality and change in contemporary Chile, drawing the realms of imagination and hope into experienced reality.

Acquisition and display of knowledge are tactics for demonstrating social upward mobility (Bourdieu, 1984). Adults I interviewed who were not professional ecologists obtained formal knowledge about nature through autodidactic efforts and were often keen to shown off this knowledge by using Latin names to refer to species, and discussing and showing me their guidebooks of Chilean plants and animals. Bird watchers emphasized the contribution that amateurs could make to science and conservation by recording their sightings on an international website called eBird (<http://ebird.org/content/chile>). Another way to position personally valued species as signs of social distinction was to talk about them in the same way that urban people in Chile discuss and recognize signs of class, wealth, and social connections. Thus people who expressed enthusiasm about nonhuman animals or the landscape emphasized their uniqueness, subtle aesthetic qualities, and exclusivity:

For me [central Chile is] a fantastic place. I always tell people, we live in one of the most exclusive places on the planet. We have species that only live here. Think of the litre, think of the quillay [trees], they aren't anywhere else. Only in Chile. It's like living in a jewel.

female, Santiago

The water courses are all very delicate, very small, very fine . . . So for me it's a very poetical situation, because they feed these majestic trees, and also it takes everything so long to develop, to grow . . . On the other hand, in the dry part . . . its these espinos, all thorns, which are bent, like this, by the cold, the heat, and are all twisted . . . the desolation of the espino . . . And the other thing that characterizes, I think, our central zone, in terms of visual language, is the rock . . . Like that, between an espino, and there you are, a rock appears: marvelous.

male, Santiago

The fleeting and the rare were also highly valued. A bird watcher told me that when staying at her summer house she always takes her binoculars to the beach hoping to see something amazing and unlikely, such as an albatross. Another nature lover explained,

The secret birds of the forests! The secret birds of the forests—I love them! It's one of the things that motivates me most to go into the countryside . . . to learn about the little-known animals.

male, Lampa

Thus the acquisition of obscure natural history knowledge, the display of a refined aesthetic sensibility, and access to fleeting and exclusive experiences serve as tactics to legitimize and make the nonhuman animal distinct as a sign of social upward mobility. These legitimized performances were usually the result of prior, informal, experiential ways of knowing.

The form of the landscape itself may influence the private nature of experiences in it. The scale of the mediterranean landscape of Chile lends itself to intimate experiences on foot. One conservationist told me, "You see the hill without forest, but when you get close to the *chaparral* [*matorral*] you see the diversity of flowers and animals, it is very beautiful when you see it from close up." It is notable that this informant, when discussing the beauty of the *matorral*, preferred to use the Mexican term *chaparral*, which refers to a similar Mexican habitat type. This suggests that discovering the intimate scale at which *matorral* is beautiful is akin to discovering an exotic and foreign place requiring its own designation to distinguish it from the landscape-scale *matorral* as seen from a car on the highway. But ruptures in ways of seeing could be developed even when in a car. One woman adapted her driving practices to experience nature intimately:

Sometimes I take the car and I go out, that is, I like to go in the small roads, the side roads—around here; it also has its charm—in the spring-time, how the tones of the trees start to change, I like—I like to go out, I mean out of Santiago. The other day I don't know, there was a storm, there was lots of wind that lifted up the leaves, those days like that I love to go out. To see nature—the leaves moving, or all the leaves on the ground, like a carpet, I love that—you see.

female, Calera de Tango

For this woman, the car, a prosthesis (Thrift, 2007) for distancing oneself (in several senses) is adapted here to the private use of observing and immersing oneself in nature.

Nature photography and birdwatching are also important ways that urban residents of Santiago engage with nature through prostheses that aid immersion in the small and hard-to-see aspects of nature. There is some crossover between nature photography and birdwatching, with birdwatchers often taking photographs and owning sophisticated cameras, and with similar behaviors used for engaging with other animals and plants. Both activities are slow; involve extensive sitting, standing, and waiting; and require patience and close observation of details in the landscape. For both activities, all species, no matter how small, common or unprepossessing, are equally interesting and worthy of attention. Rare and hard-to-see species are highly valued. There are also differences: the birdwatchers I accompanied on group trips de-emphasized the importance of binoculars and guidebooks in favor of the process of observation, while photographers were fascinated by their equipment and techniques. Photographers also practiced a radical elimination of all traces of human influence in their photographs, whereas birdwatchers did not hesitate to visit trashed ponds to watch aquatic species.

A different kind of interaction with nature is the use of the landscape as a site for adventure sports such as motocross, mountain biking, and mountain climbing. Such sports were represented to me as appropriate activities for building the self-confidence and socialization skills of disadvantaged urban children, and as the sort of things that wealthy people prefer to do in nature in Chile. Adventure sports, nature photography, and birdwatching all depend on prostheses to engage with the landscape, but the prostheses and associated practices of adventure sports primarily involve engaging with the large-scale, low-resolution features of the landscape (the terrain, the view), while the practices associated with cameras and binoculars allow people to discover,

and force them to inhabit, the small-scale features and the hidden details of nature.

Many intimacies with nature were playful and thus involved some rupture with forms of movement and travel that privilege the large-scale landscape. Men and women recounted how as children they would go exploring in the countryside alone or with friends. They described walking and riding horses, camping and having picnics, collecting blackberries, fishing, hunting rabbits and birds, “hitting things with sticks,” playing with espino seedpods, collecting insects, and catching toads and snakes. They became familiar with nature’s typical and surprising phenomena. For example, I was told about a night when thousands of tarantulas descended from the hills, carpeting everything, including the tent; about how twenty hawks circling in the sky signals a dead rabbit to be investigated, while fifty hawks signals a dead cow; about following the trails of degus through the grass to see where they lead; about a burnt espinal whose blackened ground was covered in a recent flowering of native lilies.

Interactions with nonhuman animals were typically fleeting. One resident of Calera de Tango mentioned how she tries to photograph animals who appear in the garden, and how she cannot identify the “little birds that hide.” Another woman recalled, “When we moved here [Calera de Tango], in the mornings you would wake up and through the window there you would see these white blurs—they were cranes, those small cranes. But they disappeared after a while.”

Private Experience, Personal Nostalgia, and Public Awareness

For public, social uses of nature, nature remains an empty, transient non-place. Social uses of natural places can be rather acontextual, as I saw when I visited the Arrayán Nature Sanctuary in the mountains just outside Santiago. A large number of people were visiting that day, having picnics a few meters from their cars, along a section of a small river within the sanctuary that had essentially been converted into a parking lot. I met almost no one on the hiking trails. Later, in the picnic area of the sanctuary, I walked through a big tailgating party of wealthy young people dressed as if they were at a nightclub. People familiar with another nearby protected area in a stunning mountain valley emphasized to me its value as a place to have a barbecue. Similarly, when I accompanied ecologists and their assistants to research sites in central Chile, they spent the hours when they were not actively working (ecology can involve a lot of waiting) gathered around the truck with the radio on, chatting, eating, drinking, and smoking—but rarely observing nature or exploring.

In these social situations, people create a pseudo-indoors in the outdoors. It is not clear to many urban people how to dwell in nature as a place that can have its own dwelling. The pseudo-indoors is in essence a temporary version of the lawn and swimming pool installed by new owners of second homes. Urban people's public engagements with nature both deny its influence by superimposing other contexts on it, and simultaneously acknowledge its presence (the endemic tree, the view, the availability of data) as a sign that the newly created context is one of social distinction or value.

The experiences with nonhuman animals in nature that break through the indoors in the outdoors are linked to happy memories, usually of childhood. Social opportunities to communicate these memories appeared to be limited. One man told me that he was unable to find a way to talk about his love of nature with his children. Others were inarticulate when faced with the challenge of finding words for their relationship with nature. Some people were able to discuss nature with me by situating it within the established narrative of nostalgia for loss of innocence and purity. One man, who was not speaking from personal experience, told me that for the peasant, "Leaving the countryside is like leaving heaven."

Conversely, the countryside may also be an appropriate place to situate nostalgia for an idealistic or idealized youth. Adults who had grown up on large land holdings recalled childhoods in which they claimed there was no difference between themselves and the children of the tenants, and they played together in the fields and rivers all the time. Indoors was a different matter: one woman pointed out that her friends never came inside but would leave her at the door, saying, "See you later, *patroncita* [little mistress]."

The rural landscape was a site of innocence for these people, until political events intervened (cf. Rosaldo, 1989). At one point, I stayed at a summer home in a chic "ecological" community. The owner called to ask if the bookshelf in the house had been fixed by the caretaker. He also felt the need to apologize for the books in it—they were books from a long time ago, when he was young, he said. They were mainly socialist economic histories and communist pamphlets. This sense of the countryside as a place from which the idealized comes and to where it may retire draws on the discourse of eternal conflict between the pure and the impure, but gives it a personal nostalgic history, a minor directionality. Nostalgia for an innocent childhood in nature preserves otherwise obscured and contested interactions with other humans and nonhuman animals.

The captured snakes and the communist pamphlets that constitute people's personal nostalgic assemblages are ephemeral, private, and difficult to explain. One man hesitated to tell me about his favorite place:

San Carlos de Apoquindo—here, I think, is the prettiest landscape of Chile. I mean, at the beginning of the interview I wouldn't have dared to tell you that, but with everything you've said to me, now I dare. It is the prettiest part of Chile.

male, Santiago

This reticence, an outcome of the emptying of the landscape, can complicate mobilizing private nostalgia for public uses. How do you teach dwelling or make a public performance of engagement when Massumi's (2002) perceptions that are possible actions (see above) or Connolly's (2002) virtual motor memory insist that we are in an empty, transient, non-place? As mentioned above, personal engagements with nonhuman animals developed through changes in bodily experiences—such as using prostheses, moving very slowly, or playing and exploring—that allowed interstices of place and surprises of meaning to be located. These engagements can to some extent be shared through joint experience. Some ecologists described teaching their children how to observe nature, going on walks with them, and showing them animals under rocks, in the soil, and among the hills. Ecology students also learned about nature in the mediterranean habitat during field trips. In 2009 a network of nature observers (Red de Observadores de Aves y Fauna Silvestre de Chile [ROC]) was formed, which organizes field trips and events for amateur nature lovers to watch birds and other animals. Within the past decade, an online forum for nature photographers in Chile was established, where enthusiasts share photographic as well as environmental commentaries. These familial and formal activities provide contexts in which people can learn from each other the various ways of being in nature, but they are mainly targeted at those who are already interested.

Nostalgic Fauna, Flora, and Landscapes

In his essay on imperialist nostalgia, Rosaldo (1989) shows the hypocrisy and the allure of feeling nostalgia for things one has helped to destroy. Personal nostalgia is the primary means by which urban, educated Chileans relate to nature and find value in it. Personal nostalgia preserves the personal, fleeting assemblages that individuals construct in nature during what they perceive as, or choose to represent as, innocent and pure interactions with people, fauna, and flora. Thus personal nostalgia, unlike the foreshadowing public discourse around nature, forms a virtual assemblage enacted through imaginary and remembered dwelling. As these virtual nostalgic assemblages are enacted, the experience and signs of dwelling generated from these interactions are



FIGURE 2 *Images of animals in the Exposición Juguete Nacional at the Cultural Centre Palacio La Moneda, Santiago, Chile, May 7 to July 2011. Toys are part of the collection of Juan Antonio Santis and were produced in Chile between 1915 and 1975. Top left: copper beach buckets, depicting (left to right) a lion; a pig in shorts; a bear in clothing with trees; two ducks, a monkey, a mushroom, and two trees. Lower left: a farmyard duck and a teddy bear. Right: a paper doll in the form of a squirrel. None of these animals is native to Chile.*

cleaned from the landscape, leaving only fugitive traces. Moreover, private virtual assemblages often conflict with the politically tinged discourses of history and cultural memory.

One notable exception to the general nostalgic reticence was a series of exhibitions between 2009 and 2011, one at a major art museum, of a large private collection of 20th century toys of Chilean manufacture. They were always displayed achronologically, suggesting a continuity of innocent childhood play indifferent to historical contextualization. Many of the toys represented animals, more or less anthropomorphized, none of which were native species (Figure 2). There is a clear disjunct between the real flora and fauna of people's private nostalgic assemblages, and the toy fauna of the publicly shared experience of childhood.

The real flora and fauna of nostalgia were characterized by sensual markings and affective recognitions of their distinctiveness and ability to rupture normal experience (Thrift, 2007). Many people, both men and women,

attributed charismatic, egomorphic qualities to other species (Lorimer, 2007; Milton, 2005) through anecdotes about the movements and sudden appearances of snakes (with sound effects), the long-suffering appearance of native trees, or the charming interactions between degus (a social rodent). For example, a degu was described as "... nice, it's a good person, it's like Chilean people, easy to get along with" and "... the cutest thing there is ... It stops and grooms itself with its little hands, and they are super sweet to each other, with their kids ..."

Such anthropomorphism or egomorphism effectively marks the nonhuman animal as a human-like animal and potential member of some kind of sociality (Franklin, 1999; Edelman, 2005). One woman showed me her grandson's tarantula commenting, "We could never release it in the hills, it doesn't know how to survive in the wild." These spiders and rodents are not the kind of nonhuman animals that invisibly populate the empty parts of the landscape, but rather ones that people could have a personal relationship with. These marks of differentiation help to create boundaries between virtual assemblages of purity and personal value, and the assemblages that are publically devalued, erased, and implicated in the destructive foreshadowing of central Chilean landscapes.

Thus urban, educated Chileans employ several tactics allowing them to attribute value to nonhuman animals, despite the public performance of devaluation and erasure of these engagements. Positive views of mediterranean Chile emphasize its unique endemic species, its "exclusivity," and its subtle and small-scale beauties. Its animals can be hard to see: the furtive degu running along a trail, the unidentified bird. Surprising and unusual encounters with nature can break through and upset the discourse of an empty, dry, degraded landscape, and perhaps the indoors in the outdoors as well (Thrift, 2007). Marks of liminality may be used to annex nonhumans into private assemblages of value, or virtual assemblages may be legitimately transplanted onto empty landscapes by marking the space as one of social upward mobility (e.g., an endemic sclerophyllous forest).

In a society that values presenting oneself as having access to the best, the newest, and the most exclusive, representing nature as rare and exclusive serves the latter purpose. Concentrating on the secret and the hard-to-see is distinguishable from other perceived ways of knowing and acting in nature, such as the supposed ignorance of the peasant for whom everything is a hunt-able *bicho* [creature], or the professional interest of the scientist who displays his or her education by using Latin names for all the species. Finding rare species is an opportunity for autodidactic betterment for some, while for others, experiencing the fleeting and the unique may be a form of sensitive sensual

engagement (cf. Bordieus, 1984). Social opportunities for sharing these experiences, such as the field trips organized by ROC, and online nature photography forums, act as little grains around which nostalgic assemblages can precipitate to form a broader awareness of nature and conservation.

Nonhuman animals' relationships to humans in central Chile are occluded by the discourses and related practices of the social landscape. Although knowledge about, experiences with, and positive valuations of native species are common among the middle and upper class urban residents I interviewed and observed, this rarely translated into conservation actions in the public sphere or at a policy level. I argue that it is impossible to understand and potentially overcome this disjunct without close attention to the cultural and social milieus in which nature is publicly situated. I propose that private assemblages formed around personally known flora, fauna, and landscapes have a greater likelihood of integrating into and altering the public discourse around a nature of poverty if they build on points of similarity between assemblage and discourse—in this case, the nostalgic attitude and the high valuation of exclusive, intimate, and rare things.

Personal nostalgia, no matter how many unpalatable historical ironies it may entail, can motivate individuals to act, while exclusivity, intimacy, and rarity are the currency that allow others to publicly value the nonhuman species who are privately cherished. While other mediterranean habitat countries, such as Portugal, have come to attribute high biodiversity and cultural values to nature in similar landscapes (e.g., the montado) (Pinto-Correia, Barroso, Surova, & Menezes, 2011), and to charismatic species (wild boar, Iberian lynxes), the historical process, as well as the personal performances, through which this has developed will have their own culturally situated trajectory. In central Chile, I suggest that nonhuman animals could take on publicly valued roles if they are situated in ahistorical, apolitical, nostalgic frames and presented as conveying social advantage to those who learn how to access them.

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