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STONES IN MOVEMENT¹

DOSSIER WORLDS IN PERFORMANCE: 20 YEARS
NAPEDRA

ORCID
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4213-6251>

EVELYN SCHULER ZEA

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, SC, Brasil,
88040-900 – propesq@contato.ufsc.br


I

Since a long time, we should know what to say when we greet each other, when we arrive, when we leave, when we say goodbye. These expressions are among the most common in togetherness. This is how we initiate a form of treatment or how we prolong, suspend, or interrupt it. It is the way in which we address and are addressed. It happens frequently, and yet this familiar gesture often sounds a little awkward, stuttered, out of place.

Of course, one can always resort to conventional formulas to maintain the fluidity of the moment. This is possible and it is what happens, but a certain lack of conformity and disquiet persist. I remember a text by Julio Cortázar (1967) on what he calls a “serious Argentine problem,” namely, how to start a letter. How to start: either with “dear friend,” or with the formula “esteemed,” or just with the name. It may seem trivial, but perhaps there is a fissure, a gap.

When words relinquish, perhaps the possibility of glimpsing a double ground in language opens up. And, beyond the saying itself, the intent to say can

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be evoked. This is quite common when a first attempt of saying fails in some way, opening up the moment of the “intent to say”.

But is this intent to say still a way of saying? Isn't it just a second attempt of saying? This does not seem to be the case, among other reasons, because when one says “I intent to say” what follows is a way of saying, one does not actualize what one wants to say, but only the saying. In such a way that the meaning is constantly deferred, displaced, and this indicates that, after all, what was intended to be said never actually gets to be said.

If this is somewhat consistent, then the intent to say is oriented more towards a frequency of not saying, towards a kind of silence. One might think, therefore, that this leads to a linguistic impasse. But one can also see an opening for deviations, for detours. A deviation from the proper language or from the language of property or ownership. A detour outside its recursiveness.

A detour so that words can transit by ways of something different than themselves. For example, by images, by the eloquent silence of images, such as the ones I perceived when I arrived in Cuzco and walked between its stone walls (Figure 1). For the intent to say does not only happen after the saying, but also in the moment prior to the arrival. Then, when everything becomes an image, everything appears silent as an image. And even more so when, as in Cuzco, we are dealing with images of stones, images of silent stones. They do not form a language. They are twice silent, as images and as stones. Even so, there is much they intent to say, but they insist in the persistence of intending to say without saying, thus, remaining irreducible to proper language.

FIGURE 1
Image 1 of the
collection "Stones in
Movement". Source:
photography by
Alias Zea, Flickr²



They do not say anything, neither affirming nor denying, and yet they give signs. Perhaps so do the *apachetas*, the ritual agglomerations of stones that, from the last elevation from which a village can be seen, greet the traveler and mark their path (Figure 2). Everything then happens as if, among the hesitations of the common saying, the intent to say of the uncommon arises. It is the prevalence of the common and the reticence of the uncommon that make us lose sight of this double constitution of experience. But there are circumstances that function as passages, folds or entities that appear as intercessors between these registers and allow us to perceive through the mismatch – or impropriety – that what is crucial is the tension of duplicity.

2. All photographs of the figures presented in this text are available at: <<https://www.flickr.com/gp/196646080@N06/9r4gj5p96F>>. Accessed on: 21 Nov. 2022.

FIGURE 2

Image 8 of the collection "Stones in Movement".

Source: photography by Alias Zea, Flickr.



II

Such duplicity seems to be replicated – once again by the intercession of the stones – in a chapter of the novel *Los Ríos Profundos*, where the Peruvian narrator and anthropologist José María Arguedas recounts the passage of Ernesto – the young alter ego of the author – through Cuzco, accompanying his father on a long journey through the Andes (Figure 3).



FIGURE 3

Image 7 of the collection "Stones in Movement". Source:

photography by Alias Zea, Flickr.

In Cuzco, the boy's gaze always turns to a stone wall, part of an ancient fortress, which is revived and articulated by his imagination and sensibility from various angles (Figures 4 and 5).



FIGURES 4 AND 5

Images 2 and 3
of the collection
"Stones in
Movement".

Source:
photography by
Alias Zea, Flickr.

In a first impulse, Ernesto follows the line where the stones meet; a line that seems to slide between stones, advancing in paths that are often improbable. Once perceived, these lines even suggest the path of a serpent that slides between the joints. Even more so when, in fact, figures of serpents adorn the relief of the walls (Figures 6 and 7),



FIGURES 6 AND 7

Images 5 and 6
of the collection
"Stones in
Movement".

Source:
photography by
Alias Zea, Flickr.

Or, as Ernesto alludes to, these lines could be the ties that contain the toiling of the stones: The wall was static – he says – but the toils along all its lines and the surface is changeable, like that of rivers in a summer... The description adds a second motif that is increasingly dense, more charged. With the eye, but above all with the touch, one perceives that the surface of the stones is never smooth, but porous, almost scaly or with a vibrant relief. A current flows through them from one side to the other, just as the streets of Cuzco simulate the flow of rivers of stones (Figure 8).



FIGURE 8

Image 4 of the collection "Stones in Movement". Source: photography by Alias Zea, Flickr.

Furthermore: Arguedas accompanies this silent turbulence of the stones until he imagines their convergence with the turmoil of the rivers, there in the center of the current, where they reach their deepest part. This is the most fearsome, the most powerful zone, says Arguedas, who then develops the motif of "Yawar rumi," blood stone. In such a way that, through multiple slopes, this passage allows the stones to appear, once their movement is unblocked, in a deep confluence with *Los Ríos Profundos* of Arguedas (1958/2006).

The stones are silent rivers – this equation of Arguedas' poetics is, indeed, everything that one would like to achieve by other means, following that sign, that is, to show that there is movement where it is least expected, but above all to show that, if so, there is another movement that emerges from there. In such a way that, perhaps, it is the movement that needs to be awakened by the resonance of the stones, even more than the stones

for the effect of movement. So that both configure, when it is the case, a current like that of the Rimac river, the “river that speaks” through the stones.

But do the stones move? If, conventionally, stones are eminent signs of fixity and permanence, a passage from *Dioses y Hombres de Huarochirí* (Arguedas 1966) – an exceptional document of Andean mythical accounts from the early seventeenth century – shows not only the movement of the stones, but that they even transit beyond borders that are closed to other entities. The context is the ancestral reference that the dead were able to come back to life five days after their death. Thus, the deceased’s relatives awaited the end of this period by preparing the reception with food and drinks. Once, however, a man took more than five days to come back to life, and then his wife angrily scolded him for being late and threw a cob of corn at him. Because of this, the man decided to return to the world of the dead and, it is said, from then onwards the dead no longer returned as before. However, as reported in chapter 28 of the *Ritos y Tradiciones de Huarochirí* (Taylor 2008), at the end of the fifth day the soul of the dead returned in the form of a small stone brought by the woman who had washed the clothes of the deceased. This return of the stone was reason for offerings and celebration, but with the same conviction that, at the end of five more days, they expelled the stone so that it returned to the realm of the dead. Thus, when humans could no longer make this transit, small stones made this path vicariously, coexisting across the boundary. Abandoning their apparent immobility, the stones now achieved what life and death could no longer do, which is crossing the river between them.

Stories like the ones mentioned above, which show a potency of movement in the stones and, thus, incite a reactivation of movement, are not uncommon in Andean narratives. And in them, it is worth insisting that this second moment is of equal or greater significance. It seems that, even more difficult that a stone moving, is movement itself awakening from complacent continuity. For which, eventually, the impulse of movement needs to be radicalized by the contracting of the stones or the boundary between the living and the dead.

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ABSTRACT

Where does movement get its impulse from? Be it in a performance, intervention, or in discourse, where does the motivation come from? And also: how much movement is in movement? These and other questions are articulated in the essay that follows in circumstances of their apparent deprivation or impossibility: the silences of discourse, the immobility of stones, or the challenges of death.

KEYWORDS

Movement; Stones;
Intent to say; Dead;
Images.

Evelyn Schuler Zea is professor at the Departament of Antropology of the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) and researcher of the Grupo de Estudos em Oralidade e Performance (GESTO) and of INCT Brasil Plural (INCT/Cnpq) in the Research Net "Art, performance and sociabilities". E-mail: evelyn.schuler.zea@ufsc.br, evelynsz@gmail.com

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