14

ISLOTE POETICS

Notes from minor outlying islands

Urayoán Noel

In his classic *Insularismo* (1973), Antonio S. Pedreira reflects on the "rico," or rich, in Puerto Rico. Against tourist gazes that see only an "Island of Enchantment" framed through the "rhetorical exuberance" of that "rich" port, Pedreira juxtaposes "nuestra existencia agria" ("our [Puerto Ricans'] bitter existence") (1973, 98) with the botanical metaphor of the "vegetative languor" (98) of the Puerto Rican temperament.[1]

Key to Pedreira's argument is his invocation of the "pobres islotes" (poor islets) surrounding the main island of Puerto Rico, with names such as "Caja de Muertos" (Coffin Island) and Desecheo (a corruption of "Cicheo" or "Sikeo," Its Indigenous Taíno name enmeshed with the Spanish word "desecho," meaning waste or garbage). Recovering these "poor islets" as spaces of death and waste is a way for Pedreira to provide "una expresión honrada de nuestra realidad" ("an honest expression of our reality") beyond the "optimismo metafórico" ("metaphorical optimism") that metonymically renamed the island of San Juan Bautista for its rich port (98), with San Juan becoming its capital. This renaming was an act of ideological misreading that echoes in the "enchantment" that Puerto Rico markets to tourists to this day.

While remembered for its meditations on Puerto Rican islandness and/as isolation ("aislamiento" evoking "isla"), *Insularismo*'s mapping of existential geography dismisses the outlying islands, or "islotes," within the Puerto Rican archipelago in the name of a centripetal movement from the coast inward that excludes the open sea but begins to manifest itself vigorously away from the coast ("tiene fuerza centrípeta: excluye mar afuera, pero empieza a manifestarse vigorosamente costa adentro," 98). By contrast, Antonio Benítez-Rojo (1996) imagines the repeating island, whose (post?)colonial spatial logics echo across the Caribbean, through the metaphor of the tropism (1996, 4), as in plants turning toward the sun. The turning-toward hinted at in the biological metaphor of the tropism grounds, for Benítez-Rojo, the possibility of a non-mimetic archipelagic poetics of repetition, akin to Édouard Glissant's in its insistence on a rhyzomatic difference, of islands no longer

atomized but turned toward each other, far from the vegetative languor of Pedreira's cursed islandness.

Here, I focus on two short, innovative small-press poetry books whose thematic emphasis is on outlying Puerto Rican islands: Joanne Kyger's *Desecheo Notebook* (1971) and Nicole Cecilia Delgado's *Amoná* (2013). Both books, lacking page numbers and invested in experimental and gendered projects of remapping, complicate Pedreira's centripetal island and the archipelagic as variously theorized by Benítez-Rojo, Glissant, and Martínez-San Miguel. Although I follow Martínez-San Miguel in insisting on an archipelagic approach to Puerto Rican and Caribbean Studies, I want to emphasize how Pedreira's *islote*, for all its problems, can help us nuance a geopoetic approach beyond island/archipelago binaries. An *islote* is a small island, and for Pedreira a poor one, yet its marginality is a necessary corrective to discourses of cosmopolitan optimism. At the same time, Pedreira hints at the second meaning of *islote* as a crag—a broken or projecting rock that is inaccessible or inhospitable. In this sense, an *islote* is not unlike the Taíno word *Sikeo*, that "high, mountainous land" that was translated as "Cicheo" (Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés 1855, 465) by Spanish chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés (1478–1557) and eventually into the violently symbolic "Desecheo" of death and waste.

I want to recover the cragginess and smallness of the *islote* as necessary to an archipelagic poetics, in keeping with a vision of the Caribbean as defined by what José Lezama Lima (1969, 113) called the "pedregosidad" ("rockiness") of the Americas and by the *mornes* ("craggy hills") of Glissant's poetics of relation, those found "rising abruptly behind the Caribbean beaches in Martinique" (1997, 207). Beyond biotic logics, *islotes* are marked by death and waste under colonialism, paradoxically walkable spaces whose craggy heights resist easy occupation and translation. Against austerity politics and ecocolonialism as they have shaped Puerto Rico and the Caribbean over the past two decades, these *islotes* seem less like outliers and exceptions than a ground for new geopoetic imaginaries. In emphasizing the "minor and outlying" quality of these *islotes*, I echo the term "US Minor and Outlying Islands" as it has long been used to organize US empire in and beyond the Caribbean. I do so critically, and I follow Martínez-San Miguel's invaluable *Coloniality of Diasporas* (2014b) in marking at least two observations: how postcolonial approaches tend to center a narrow nationalism, and how progressive politics in Puerto Rico and across the Caribbean tend to privilege a hermetic islandness. I also suggest how poetry can recover these marginal *islotes* to underscore the limitations of conventional poetics of place in and beyond the Caribbean.

Joanne Kyger's dream notebook

In an interview with Paul Watsky, Joanne Kyger (1934–2017) recalls traveling to Desecheo in 1971, invited

> by Peter Warshall, a Harvard Primate Research student, along with three or four other students, to study the rhesus monkeys that had been left there a

> few decades earlier in order to build up a troupe of monkeys for use as laboratory animals to test the Salk vaccine.
>
> *(2013, 95)*

While Warshall and his team were seeking to understand how the monkeys "had adapted and survived on essentially a desert island, an island with no water and very little rain," Kyger was pursuing her own "course of study," armed with a copy of Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* in an effort to "[investigate] the self" (Watsky 2013, n.p.).

Kyger adds that there was only one other woman on the trip, so that *Desecheo Notebook*'s Jungian "course of study" occurs not just "near the end of the so-called psychedelic revolution" but also against the backdrop of a writing life that, as Linda Russo (2013) notes, constantly negotiated survival and group membership in the masculine/homosocial space of postwar New American Poetry countercultures. Kyger's invocation of Desecheo's role in US laboratory experiments and vaccine testing (part of a long tradition of scientific/medical colonialism in Puerto Rico) links her course of study and the group's study of the rhesus monkeys as competing yet overlapping explorations of *islote* survival.

Later in the Watsky interview, Kyger describes how a chance meeting with poet Robert Creeley in Bolinas, California, informed the dream reportage of *Desecheo Notebook*. Kyger complained to Creeley about a bout of writer's block, with Creeley replying "You can't try" and Kyger concluding: "You can't push it," later adding, "It turns out reporting dreams made up much of the content of the writing I did on the island" (96). The idea of this notebook not as a description of a trip to Desecheo, but as a reporting of dreams summoned forth by this inhospitable *islote*, allows for a valuation of Desecheo as "nonsite." With its depiction of deserted/desert-like island landscapes, its Jungian dreamscapes, and its problematizing of the page and the gendered self as defined by a plenitude in emptiness, *Desecheo Notebook* invites a reading informed by Robert Smithson's concept of nonsite, one that values the "empty" space of the *islote*, the outlying island, as an imaginary for revisionist forms of community—even as Kyger's book in other ways reproduces the colonizing Pedreiran tourist gaze mentioned earlier.

Lytle Shaw has analyzed how Bolinas—the legendary hippie-era poets' colony in Northern California where Kyger lived in the early 1970s and that is referenced throughout *Desecheo Notebook*—functions as a nonsite in the work of Kyger, Creeley, and other poets who relocated there from the bustling poetry communities of New York and San Francisco. As Shaw puts it, these poets saw in Bolinas an escape from the city and into nature but also the possibility, partly as a negation of urban life, "to resist the lure of the local and practice instead an immersion in a kind of expanded present tense" (2013, 121). Here, I want to claim the materiality and irreproducibility of Kyger's notebook (its personal allusions, coded languages, and references to her Bolinas peers, especially) as a search for an outlying island that neither turns inward (toward Puerto Rico's main island) nor outward (toward the larger Caribbean). Here, Shaw's distinction between place and site matters, especially the way in which place "falsely grounds and organizes the fluid and dispersed" (6) while site-specific poetics such as Kyger's "always coincide with other claims about discursive and historiographic sites" (259).

This distinction is evident in the poem on the back cover of *Desecheo Notebook*. While it begins by describing Desecheo as a place "off West Coast Puerto Rico / 1 1/2 miles long 1 mile wide" (1971, n.p.) it goes on to evoke its standing as "the end point of / an upheaval that happened / in the Caribbean."[2] Kyger here is, in their purest senses, neither a nature/ecopoet seeking to document and preserve a place whose value is always a priori nor a hippie/travel poet seeking out an open plural politics through a sited writing. In her writing, Desecheo reveals its dialectical status as nonsite that leads back to the "closed limits" of her "inner coordinates" (Smithson 1996, 364). In this context, the book's prefatory map is significant: It is a "Plan of the Aguada Nueva de Puerto Rico" from *A General Topography of North America and the West Indies* (1768) by Thomas Jefferys, cartographer to King George III. Published just before the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783), this map embodies a logic of empire, especially as it lumps together North America and the West Indies as colonial spaces. Desecheo's location at the northwest corner of the map echoes not only Smithson's liminal framing but also his dialectical understanding of site against the nonsite center, which in this map is the middle of the ocean, off the Mona Passage—an area historically associated with pirate activity, seismic events, and dangerous crossings.

While there is little acknowledgment of that history in Kyger's book, we can read the "upheaval" against that history. Desecheo is a mappable island (Columbus

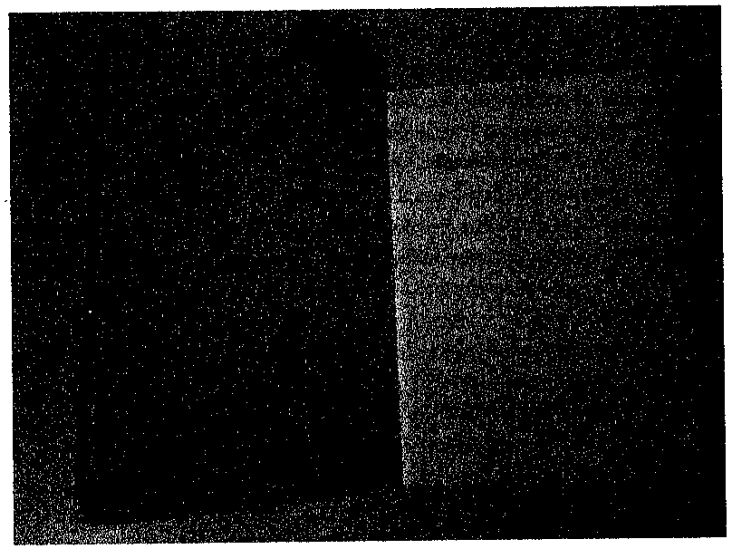

FIGURE 14.1 "Plan of the Aguada Nueva de Puerto Rico," from *A General Topography of North America and the West Indies* (1768) by Thomas Jefferys, as it appears in Kyger's *Desecheo Notebook*.

explored it in 1493), but it also lacks surface water; it appears, like nearby Mona and Monito islands, geologically distinct from the main island of Puerto Rico. Since the 1980s, Desecheo has been a US National Wildlife refuge, its nature preserved only by virtue of Puerto Rico's colonial relationship and at the expense of the access to the island itself. Of course, this nonsite approach to Desecheo does not preclude a tourist gaze, as the waters surrounding the island have gained cult status among divers and snorkelers; still, although local fishers informally take tourists to Desecheo, restaging *Desecheo Notebook* today would be an act of trespassing. The ironic force of Desecheo's nonsite is magnified when considered alongside the recent history of the island of Vieques, which over the past 20 years has become a complex metonymy of Puerto Rican decolonial and environmental politics in the neoliberal age, devastated by Hurricane María yet subject to attempted "boutiqueification" as an upscale resort island largely under US multinational control. (This is a recent history that provides the backdrop to Delgado's 2016 artist book, *subtropical dry*.)

Kyger's embrace of Desecheo as nonsite seems partly an attempt to complicate a utopian politics of site. Thus, she writes "I want to go back / I want to get back / out of this / fairy tale land." She ends this page with the oblique line "This write often," an instance of the sort Shaw theorized, in which Bolinas poets complicate place not only by meditating on their writing of place but also on the materiality of the writing, that is, on the microlevel "this"-ness (2013, 5) of writing in space and time. Kyger invokes Bolinas in ways that interrupt the closed space and time of Desecheo ("news of Bolinas"), but the speaker never makes it back to Bolinas, nor does Desecheo even become a Bolinas-esque refuge in and for an alternative (homosocial) community. Shaw notes that the problem of site in Kyger is also the problem of writing in the shadow of her superstar friends and neighbors such as Ginsberg, Creeley, and her ex-husband Gary Snyder (the latter invoked by Kyger as someone who "lives on an island in front of a black lake," perhaps a reference to Kitkitdizze, his homestead in the foothills of the California Sierra Nevada and a key reference for US nature and ecopoetry). Kyger's Desecheo contains, through Jungian memory, Snyder's island; her Desecheo embodies how the speaker's search for a new "quality of mind" (Kyger's words) in this communal escapade is undercut by her awareness of her gendered difference:

> Thursday
> the quality of mind
> like I am keeping track of
> 3 or 4 people at one time
> bathing naked
> A letter to Bobbie Creeley
> no place to sit
> all these men
> I just want a place
> for myself
> (Kyger 1971)

The overcoming of the self so prized by the era's homosocial alternative poetry communities hinges on a privilege unavailable to the speaker. Buddhism, in the poetry of Ginsberg and other traveling male poets of the era, often revealed itself in the understanding of the body as decaying matter ("desecho?"), but the speaker's body cannot be simply undone ("deshecho"), as references to sex and Tampax litter the idyllic tropics of Desecheo—a litter echoed in the craggy topographies of Kyger's lines. The book ends not in Bolinas or a reanimated Desecheo, but in an imagining of New York, juxtaposed against the italicized *wild* of Desecheo:

> Friday's nature
> can a *wild* animal
> exist anymore
> .
> wilderness
> .
> words. spirits guides.
> .
> further away
> into crammed people land
> .
> New York
> (Kyger 1971)

Against Pedreira, *Desecheo Notebook* posits a centrifugal poetics moving outward, away from the iconicity and singularity of site toward the referential field of nonsite, as Desecheo's dreamscapes are enmeshed with Bolinas and New York, privileged locales of 1960s/1970s poetic counterculture, in a semiotic/psychic/geopoetic wilderness. If the New York-Bolinas trajectory of Kyger and many of her poet peers echoes the imperial logic of westward expansion famously articulated by Frederick J. Turner (1893), Kyger's North-South iteration of the geopoetic *islote* of Desecheo can be read both as an attempt to interrupt that frontier logic and as an echo of the Beat-era imperial travel fantasy of going south to Mexico or South America, often understood as places of chemical and sexual liberation and lawlessness. Writing about *Desecheo Notebook* in the context of Kyger's travel poetry, Jonathan Skinner (2000) characterizes Kyger as a poet of "captivity" but adds that it becomes impossible to tell what in the book is "dream or reportage, or reported dream." My own interest is in opening Kyger's poetics of captivity to an *islote* poetics that might critically revise Pedreira's privileged if pessimistic gaze, even while noting the problematic aspects of Kyger's engagement with Desecheo. Like the rhesus monkey study that brought her to Desecheo, Kyger's book is an investigation of creative survival and living together, even as it hinges on the colonial violence that settled and unsettled the *islote*.

Nicole Cecilia Delgado's anomalous *islote*

Amoná (2013) by Nicole Cecilia Delgado is a poem set on the nature reserve, Mona, an outlying Puerto Rican island that shares the Mona Passage with its smaller neighbors, Monito and Desecheo. When it appeared in 2013, the book appeared to be an anomaly: first, it was a homemade edition, personally distributed to friends and colleagues; second, it was more akin to the innovative, socially engaged poetry in Puerto Rico that is still largely rooted in and around San Juan and that typically emphasizes an urban setting and/or sensibility. Delgado's work emerged in the heyday of *poesía urbana* or urban poetry in Puerto Rico—the early-to-mid-2000s, when poets such as José Raúl "Gallego" González, Guillermo Rebollo Gil, and Hermes Ayala were crossing over with daring (if largely homosocial) translocal poetics informed by the urban vernacular traditions of salsa, hip hop, and Nuyorican poetry (Noel 2011), and by contemporary breakthroughs in slam/def poetry and reggaeton. Working across the "broken Souths" that Michael Dowdy (2013) maps in the shadow of neoliberalism and globalization, these poets affirm a class- and race-conscious vision aligned with the "from below" perspective the late Juan Flores (2009) finds in so many Nuyorican/Diasporican cultural productions. While Delgado's work is largely in solidarity with these urban/vernacular poetics, her trajectory and evolution are very different.

Delgado began publishing in the early 2000s when she was a student at the University of Puerto Rico's Mayagüez campus, on the west coast of Puerto Rico, near Mona and Desecheo—and far from the urban poetics then booming in San Juan. She collaborated with reading series and publications in the area, co-founding and editing the journal *Zurde*. She moved upon graduating to New York, soon becoming associated with the poetry scene in and around the Nuyorican Poets Cafe and specifically with the young Colombian poets galvanized around the late poet and activist Ricardo León Peña Villa. Editorial Palabra Viva (Medellín/New York) published Delgado's 2004 debut, *Inventario secreto de recetas para enrolar las greñas con cilindros de colores*. It was at this time that she learned how to make small artist books under the East Harlem-based Puerto Rican poet and book artist Tanya Torres.

Although a youthful book, *Inventario* anticipates Delgado's *islote* poetics in poems such as "islas." Here, the speaker proclaims "Yo soy *de las islas*" ("I'm *from the islands*," 2004, 65, emphasis original). The italics mark an archipelagic difference, since Puerto Ricans tend to use the singular "la isla" to refer to the entire archipelago, echoing Pedreira's violent insularist logic. Since Delgado is writing *from* New York, we can also read the plural here as encompassing the islands of New York City and their diasporic histories. Two lines down, the speaker attempts to distinguish her plural islands from "el insularismo pedregoso y fatalista" ("the rocky and fatalistic insularism") of her ancestors, embodying the tensions of *islote* poetics even as they risk uncritically reinscribing Pedreira.

Delgado would later enroll in and quickly abandon graduate school in upstate New York, ironically echoing Pedreira, who briefly lived in New York while studying medicine at Columbia University. She eventually settled in Mexico, where

she was involved with feminist, Indigenous, and community-based poetry collectives and where she discovered the alternative *cartonera* publishing movement. This comprised no-frills and largely hand-to-mouth decentralized collectives publishing chapbooks with recycled cardboard covers and often featuring colorful stenciling or drawing. The *cartonera* movement began in Argentina in the early 2000s as a creative response to a (US-backed) debt and austerity crisis. Upon her return to a now debt- and austerity-ravaged Puerto Rico, Delgado and poet Xavier Valcárcel established the first *cartonera* in the Caribbean, Atarraya Cartonera (2009–2015). More recently, Delgado founded the Risograph publisher La Impresora, which she currently runs with Amanda Hernández. Conceived as an "imprenta-escuela" (part press, part school), La Impresora now also sponsors the Feria de Libros Independientes y Alternativos (FLIA), Puerto Rico's independent and alternative book fair, which Delgado founded in 2012. Through these projects, Delgado provides free youth writing and alternative publishing workshops across Puerto Rico, while publishing innovative writing from across Latin American and the Caribbean, including diasporic/Latinx communities in the United States. La Impresora has become a crucial initiative in the months since Hurricane María, working toward off-the-grid publishing and modeling independent publishing as a decolonial hemispheric practice. Delgado's work has inspired and informed recent initiatives such as Anomalous Press's 2018 "Puerto Rico en Mi Corazón," a bilingual broadside series for hurricane relief in Puerto Rico bringing together poets from the archipelago and the diaspora.

Delgado's *Amoná* (2013) is a miniature (3 x 2.3 inches) foldout book about a camping trip to Mona, whose Taíno name gives the book its title. Like *Desecheo Notebook*, *Amoná* revises masculinist poetic/political genealogies, in this case rewriting the monumental trees of the poem "Arboles" (1955) by the iconic Puerto Rican poet and nationalist, Clemente Soto Vélez, (1905–1993) that serves as a mid-point epigraph. The mid-point is key given both the foldout book format and the location of Mona: The island is at the intersection of the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea; it is also halfway between Puerto Rico's main island and Hispaniola ("Amoná" is purported to mean "what is in the middle" in Taíno). In "Arboles," as it is cited in *Amoná*, Soto Vélez celebrates "la canción" ("the song") of the trees as the transformation of "la persona universal" ("the universal person"), and Delgado reclaims Soto Vélez as part of a poetics of resistance to ecocolonialism informed by activism related to the US military occupation of the outlying island of Vieques. One of Delgado's first La Impresora publications was her 2016 artist book, *subtropical dry*. The publication documents a camping trip to Vieques in similarly eco/geopoetic terms. At the same time, it explores the limits of the page. In this case the book is blue-green and approximately 4 x 4 inches. It is largely empty, has unnumbered pages, and is covered in a case featuring a topographic map of Vieques. These spare, blue-green pages reclaim "el agua entre las islas" ("the water between islands") as their archipelagic "territorio" (2016, n.p.). When I hosted Delgado at New York University a few weeks after Hurricane María, she observed, only partly in jest, that she has become something of a "camping poet," and she connected

this and her artist book practice to her desire to think about space—including the space of writing—in new, different ways, and especially in the context of neoliberal austerity and environmental colonialism.

Much of *Amoná* is familiarly ecopoetic: meditations on plastic bottles in the ocean, drawings of trees on the book cover, the Taíno-folklorized title. Yet, Delgado understands Mona in terms of its colonial geography. She reflects on its old lighthouse (purportedly designed by Gustave Eiffel of Parisian fame) and on the tensions between the privileged exteriority of place and her own inner search. As with Kyger, the speaker's quest for silence and inner peace is confounded at every step, in this case by her fellow campers, storms, saltpeter, inner voices, and the overload of the information age. All these invasions are scored in unnumbered pages of spare poetic prose: "Imagino el papel de los periódicos, los píxels de una computadora, el diálogo de algún oráculo" ("I imagine the newspapers' paper, a computer's pixels, some oracle's dialogue," 2013, n.p.) Even as Delgado concludes by claiming Mona, recovering "la playa y la cueva que también fueron nuestra casa" ("the beach and the cave that were also our house") in an obverse of Pedreira's insularist move, her book shares in Kyger's recovery of the "wild" inner coordinates of nonsite. This is particularly clear when Delgado imagines utopia through the insightful pun "delirar en la Cueva de Lirio" ("to rave in Iris Cave," perhaps Mona's most famous cave, although Delgado's antipoetic wordplay plucks its flower).

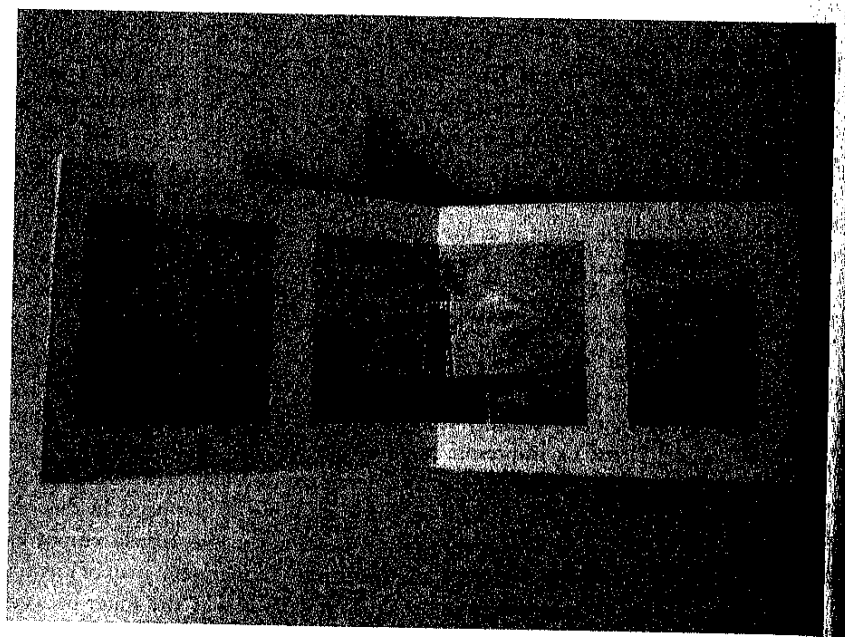

FIGURE 14.2 Foldout detail of Mona, from Delgado's *Amoná*.

Source: Photograph by Abey Charrón.

Initially, *Amoná* is framed by Soto Vélez's trees and by the phallic photographic triptych of the old lighthouse, framed by tall, thin trees against a cloudy sky (see Figure 14.2). Yet Delgado leads us away from the phallic/masculinist politics of the national/nationalist revolutionary poet into the gendered recesses of the cave/rave, and to an anti-epilogue that imagines the speaker snorkeling naked and encountering the flora and fauna of Mona (e.g., soursop, the endangered Mona ground iguana). For Soto Vélez, the semiotic power of trees has to do with their privileged spatiality, with a music that can traverse "sobre su meridiano" ("across its meridian"), akin to the Romantic loftiness of the Atalaya de los Dioses ("Watchtower of the Gods"), the avant-garde poetry group he cofounded in 1923. By contrast, Delgado's book ends modestly, with a photograph of a couple hiking through waist-high overgrowth, with no trees surrounding them. The phallic Romantic/nationalist poetics of privileged vision of the island/nation gives way to an *islote* poetics grounded in a difficult embodiment that is shaped by the accidents of Mona's landscape (dry, subterranean); this poetics paradoxically centers the irreproducible *islote* as the midpoint ("Amoná") of an archipelagic Caribbean. Like Kyger's Desecheo, Delgado's Mona is gendered but spare; it is not lush and vegetative in ways that we associate with reproduction. In asking us to imagine a more egalitarian gendered community without procreation, both poets point to a feminist ecopoetics shaped by colonial histories—one that cannot be reduced to Earth as Mother.

Geocriticism has largely focused on fiction, with Westphal's (2007) glossing of real and fictional spaces providing a framework for scholars such as Tally (2011). Even the burgeoning field of geopoetics has stressed the narrative dimensions of poetry, as in Eshun and Madge's embodied "storytelling" (2016). Inasmuch as geopoetics reflects the still largely Anglo-European, male, and heteronormative orientation of geography, it risks an instrumental recolonizing of space, foreclosing intersectional and locally rooted approaches. We see this clearly in the culturally specific "islote." Kyger and Delgado help us engender new modes of spatial critique and belonging; they experiment with notebooks or poetic prose while complicating narrative/oral geopoetics through an insistence on the materiality and visuality of writing and the book.

Both *Desecheo Notebook* and *Amoná* complicate circulation. The former remains out of print, though it is included in Kyger's 2002 selected works, *As Ever*. *Amoná* only ever circulated minimally, and it is not represented in Delgado's selected works, *Apenas un cántaro: poemas 2007–2017*. Both reimagine political space beyond urban, homosocial poetry movements. Both associate feminist poetics with a nonsite politics of the inner journey, with a processual and intertextual writing that challenges mappable space at the limits of the page, often experimenting with empty space and minimal text, so that the page embodies the desert/deserted yet sedimented space of the *islote*. Both move us away from a narrative geopoetics to one that makes meaning in and from crags—to one that creates sense in the detritus, silences, and violences of colonial logics as these fall out of fact and become undone (*des-hecho*).

Islote poems

(porous transcription of poems improvised while walking along Randalls Island on a windy day)

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wjSoRzJ3Aw

I'm back on Randalls Island across from the Bronx Kill creek fatal waterway that separated island from mainland or should I say mainland from archipelago behind me is Manhattan an island in front of me Queens part of another island a long one airplanes overhead invisible perhaps through the trees but audible a roar through rustling leaves that signals littorals Atlantic fractures fissures broken voices bloody echoes of our black Atlantic our slave Atlantic our indigenous but this is also an *islote* more than a topography a choreography bodies of empire in movement and repose *islote* which translates as islet no pilot for this eyelet no visionary poetics we're done with that we're doing our own thing our own song like ducks in the kill animales de otro estuario el más precario *islote* is lot but not a lot really especially its second meaning that craggy place uprock clamation accidents of the Americas airfare welfare who pays the fare nothing fair about it this hemisphere I say we deal with it this *islote* is not allotted it just is lottery of meaning José Emilio Pacheco in Vancouver scratch that even if they were aware that's my second Caribbean Atlantic accidents of voice we are smartphones connect us micromegaphones shouting down the voice inside trains behind me planes before me voice behind factories slide into ecocide seeing how well viewfind anthropo scene just need to think back to the *islote* scrappy craggy place where meanings end and fish die some eaten by birds pretty soon the bards will die it's about damn time que se pudran que se hundan barges and tugboats float on to the Atlantic it's this way and that way it's no way always back to the *islote* no eco location accepting echo locution la colocación del cuerpo junto al lindero la ribera lo escarpado lo liminal como el limo el desfondamiento del pensamiento emptied out dig deep into the *islote* more crag sag of voice a geology not related to any other yes archipelagos matter geopolitically think of New York Manhattan Staten Long North and South Brother former Welfare and still that way Rikers shut it down Rikers shut it down put down the phone shut down the institutions of the voice work through the crag take note how close they are Rikers Island and LaGuardia airport the privileged mobility of certain diasporas what we do in academia including academic poetry is fetishize spatialities turn them into specialties specialization is its own nation the specious kind the only one I'm trying to be less specious more inauspicious like the crag the *islote* putting the spit back into my speeches splotches of oil from refineries like that one no time for fineries time in

2. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iv4DeR9lZ74&t=207s

we are a dorsal fin in waters full of rare earth runoff endorphins made from melted smartphone parts memories of quartz in a quarry that never was dorsal fins or just el fin del tiempo ponerle fin al poema sin endosarlo this won't be one of those poems that endorses sunsets for poetic effect let images follow courses post-colonial remorses on the networking sites between our eyes our islets neuronal nations we are the only kind that ever was no fatherlands including poetry paters some of whom I admired this isn't Whitman friends I'm homosocial but not like that I'm not from one of these states no states at all never were but I'm not Pedreira's *pedregosity* is that a word? either pedregosidad like latinidad how ironic when words that are supposed to mark a condition we want to diagnose in order to decolonize and tear down patriarchy all end in -dad latinidad same dad as austeridad austerity I'm recording this to video to save it for posterity no selfie stick use my forepaw instead get it? *forepawsterity* that was really bad like the *islote* air in any case this poem ain't for pa rest in peace nor ma how's Florida? how's the cat? no pa no ma no ma no pa no mapa unmappable because it has no parents it's not apparent sin parentesco sin característica aparente disappearing and reappearing neural flash of island that's the *islote* my only sea is in my epilepsy propulsion of my convulsion toward meaning yes that's the Manhattan skyline behind me flutter of the trees low resolution but enough poems about skylines enough urban poems I wrote enough of those my sky is in the islet my skylet I got no skills that pay the bills no skillet to fry rhymes in islote eyelet I let I let I let dejo que me pase deja que todo pase let it run its course Boricua style we'll smile it would be nice to throw a party maybe it will bring the tourists back post María my mother's name and grandmother's but neither goes by that other names for austerity what if austerity is our futurity it can't be that's one reason I improvise against austerity against authority let flow become meaning happenstance rants if I'm cut off from my family who live on other islotes the little family I have let this song this improvisation be equal to the words families mutter to themselves wondering how they'll make it out or make it through what it all means islote brings me back to land something our Caribbean crews have not quite figured out what is territoriality in a small place Kincaid what does sovereignty Yarimar Bonilla mean when your diaspora is way larger than your home islands a whole bunch of islotes each one tethered to each other that's why I'm open to archipelagos Martínez San Miguel Glissant the island can't contain us even though I clarify when asked que soy Boricua de la isla Puerto Rican from the island no such thing then many islands many conquests many tongues many Caribes one is deceived if one thinks there is just one Caraïbe caravans of migrants here too trains indigenous histories here too hegemonic whiteness antiblackness aquí también executive mestizaje euphemisms ditto but something's changing I see it as clear as I see the sunset the hurricane changed us or no fuck us I can't speak for anyone else the problem with we intentions Sellars it became my song the sound that runs through my lungs becoming the sovereignty of the islote I embody new age as that might sound the nation won't save us the manicured islands won't either and I say us as in the French on won't save one we're our strength or our struggle and the way out is the shores coasts litorals littorals we walk our lit oral flow on and off the page denied a language enslaved reembodied recirculated a shouted secret every craggy place even those like Desecheo that I've never been too really off limits but I imagine through my fellow poets poetas ellas leading the way as they always have not just every crag but also statues and monuments and laws and jurisdictions that define el islote not just physical or geographic or psychic or biotic space

affective space but also conceptual space the limits of this imprecise untranslatable islet craggy place small island but for that very reason we must enter it on its own terms risk getting lost understand your own relation to the space navigate distractions imperial navigation metaphor intentional including sirens and airplanes overhead back to this Randalls Island city island island city urban archipelago that was once separate from Wards Island got filled in last century now one island two names Ward Randall what kind of name for a Boricua poem is Ward Randall but then what kind of a Boricua poet is Urayoán Noel walking along a baseball diamond kind of cuts a path toward home there is no home you're out always out you know who knew that Julia de Burgos island poet feminist decolonial poet slash nationalist that's a tricky one lived and organized in New York many parts of the Bronx often considered Latina wrote of a farewell island a welfare island across languages self-translation which as we know is the only nation que como sabemos es la única nación no se traduce se tropieza the same way the indigenous Taíno Sikeo becomes Desecheo wasteland empty space yes translation works both ways conquistadores translated Taíno to Spanish and left us with the bill killed something these words can't fill translation from above and from below Julia translated by a government spying on her and her subversive nationalist politics see Harris Feinsod not that my islote is that kind of subversion just a version but also an attempt at geopoetic inversion of the logic of islandness and its opening up to archipelagos and hemispheres all the familiar moves of Caribbean Studies and hemispheric studies what if I'm just here this islote not something to fetishize essentialize mourn or celebrate slot that becomes me slut of memory to be

Notes

1 All translations are mine.
2 There are no page numbers in either *Desecheo Notebook* or *Amoná*, so none have been provided here. The text of *Desecheo Notebook* is reproduced in its entirety (albeit in a radically compressed poem, without the page breaks and map) in Kyger's 2002 collection *As Ever: Selected Poems*.

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